

North Country Notes



The Newsletter of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society
Marquette and Alger Counties, Michigan

March 2014

Spring.... It's gotta come right?

It's been a long winter, even longer for us birders, being that this was one of the slowest birding winters I've ever seen. Other than some folks hosting flocks of Goldfinches and a few lucky country birders who have Evening Grosbeaks at their place, finches have all but deserted us this year. And it wasn't just the finches that were no-shows this winter. Ice pushed out lingering waterbirds early on, Bohemian Waxwings never arrived; Snowy Owls made a brief visit and then kept on going south, even Red-breasted Nuthatches seem to be low in numbers. Oh well... I try to console myself with the realization that it likely won't be this slow again for a decade. Looking forward- we have turned the corner. While it's hard to conceptualize right now, migration is starting up. The two UP hawk-counts, Brockway Mountain and Whitefish Point, start in just two days (March 15th). Granted it will be a slow start, but both Bald and Golden Eagles began their migrations early and reports of these birds will likely come in the next week or so. And while we still need a significant amount of ice and snow to still melt for them to arrive, I was personally excited while visiting family in southern Michigan this week to see and hear singing Red-winged Blackbirds along the Detroit River. Bit by bit, the birds will start returning to the North Woods and these quiet, cold snowy days will be but a memory. So being that the counter has basically been turned backed to zero, now is an excellent time to expand your birding universe.

Do you eBird? Surely you have seen this bumper sticker on some car at your local birding

patch by now. If you haven't heard about eBird yet, let me fill you in. Created by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, eBird is a online checklist program that through the vast number of both recreational and professional bird watchers using it has created a truly impressive database of bird distribution and abundance. Its scale is global, yet very user friendly and checklists as fundamental as what you saw at your backyard feeders are of interest for the program. As I said, eBird is very easy to use. One first needs to register into the program at www.ebird.org, and then you can get started entering in your sightings. It's pretty easy to find your location on the map; most locations are already entered in as eBird Hotspots. From there you are given a basic checklist template to enter your sightings into; there is a more advance checklist available that has subspecies, extreme rarities, etc, though if you need to add a species or two to your list that is also easy to do. Cornell recommends that one fills out the checklist completely, as the absence of species is just as important as the presence of one which is reflected by a complete checklist. There is an automated data quality filter developed by local reviewers that filter unusual sightings that may require additional documentation for inclusion into the database. One of the fun aspects of eBird is the ability to visualize data with interactive maps, graphs and bar charts; this is available with your personal dataset as well as location and temporal data based on all birder's checklist entries. Some people find eBird very handy in keeping track of their sightings, though my favorite use of it is when I am traveling and what to know what is being seen in a particular area that I'm not

familiar with or belong to the local sightings listserve. I've included a checklist of mine from earlier this winter to give you an idea of what an ebird checklist looks like. So please, take some time and look into eBird, the more people use it, the stronger it will become as a helpful tool.

And what could be a better time to start using eBird then at the beginning of spring migration. I hope to see you out in the field sometime!

Skye Haas

Checklist S16457162



Location	Marquette, Marquette County, Michigan, US (Map)
Date and Effort	Mon Jan 20, 2014 12:00 PM
	Protocol: Traveling
	Party Size: 2
	Duration: 1 hour(s), 50 minute(s)
	Distance: 10.0 mile(s)
	Observers: Skye Haas

Species	16 species total																				
	11 American Black Duck																				
	175 Mallard																				
	2 Greater Scaup females in the lower harbor off of Founder's Landing.																				
	2 Long-tailed Duck																				
	40 Common Goldeneye																				
	9 Common Merganser																				
	1 Red-breasted Merganser female in lower harbor																				
	50 Herring Gull																				
	1 Iceland Gull 2nd cycle individual seen in flight. Thin shortish bill (compared to HERG) that was 2/3rds black, with a indistinct pinkish base. Slightly smaller than most of the HERG. Both upper and under primaries were very white (the entire underwing was solid white). Upper wing coverts had some very sparse faint tannish mottling. Back was a pale colored grey color with some faint mottling, not a solid grey back. Tail seemed mostly white, perhaps some slight smudging towards terminal end.																				
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age & Sex</th> <th>Juvenile</th> <th>Immature</th> <th>Adult</th> <th>Age Unknown</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sex Unknown</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>1</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age & Sex	Juvenile	Immature	Adult	Age Unknown	Male					Female					Sex Unknown			1	
Age & Sex	Juvenile	Immature	Adult	Age Unknown																	
Male																					
Female																					
Sex Unknown			1																		

PLOVER VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Several people from Marquette have come to Grand Marais for the last 3 years and helped us watch and protect piping plover chicks on the beach. The Great Lakes piping plovers are an endangered species. Last year there were only about 65 pairs of piping plovers nesting in the entire Great Lakes. One of their most popular nesting areas is Grand Marais. When the population was down to about 16 pairs in the entire Great Lakes Grand Marais still had nesting plovers. The beach in Grand Marais has great plover habitat but the beaches attract a lot of people. In Grand Marais crows, gulls, and merlins are the major predators who threaten piping plovers. Dogs not on leashes and ATVs also threaten and destroy nests and chicks.

Plovers return to the upper peninsula beaches in late April or early May. The males usually attract mates and the females lay eggs by mid to late May and the chicks hatch sometime in June. By mid to late July we are usually out of plover season. We observe the nests twice a day to make sure both the male and female are still exchanging. We have a paid employee from US Fish and Wildlife who spends 40 hours a week on the beach. We need to spend more time when the chicks have hatched. We have daylight from very early to very late in June and July so we have about 16.5 hours per day to protect the chicks before they fledge. Last year we fledged 8 chicks out of 8 hatchlings!! Volunteers helped with this success.

Bill and I help coordinate volunteers and provide them with housing. Please contact us if you can come. You can come for one day or longer (we hope longer but understand you have other commitments). We will train you on how to keep the chicks in view, follow them along the beach, and protect them from predators. We could also use volunteers in Gulliver on Lake Michigan. This area has a several miles of beach to be scouted and protected.

Kathy Davis
906-228-4197 Marquette
906-494-2400 Grand Marais
kdavismqt@aol.com

Peninsula Point Bird Survey Prepares for Second Year

by Gary Palmer

Throughout the US only a handful of efforts are regularly undertaken to thoroughly document avian migration at a given location. Whitefish Point, in the eastern Upper Peninsula, is one of these few sites. Others include the Keweenaw Peninsula's Brockway Mountain Hawk Count, Duluth's Hawk Ridge, Cape May, New Jersey and Point Reyes, California, but few other locations currently host any sort of migration census. Now, thanks to support from the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society, Michigan Audubon Society, and the Upper

Peninsula Community Foundation, a new migration count has been established in the UP at Peninsula Point!

Located at the tip of Delta County's Stonington Peninsula, Peninsula Point is arguably the most spectacular migration hotspot in the Upper Peninsula. Each spring, thousands of birds pass through this area, many stopping for a time to replenish their fat reserves to power the next legs of their journeys. It is clearly a crucial spot for the migration of a plethora of birds from diverse taxa, with

waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds all particularly abundant at times. In fact, the area has been formally designated by the National Audubon Society as an Important Bird Area, with a total of seven IBAs found throughout the surrounding Delta County landscape. Additionally, of 23 species designated by the US Department of Interior as ‘birds of conservation concern’ for the region, 18 have been spotted at PP.

After a successful spring 2013 count season, a spring migration count will be conducted again for 2014! For at least 10 days in April and 20 days in May of 2014 a volunteer counter will conduct a census, tallying all birds observed each morning. Results from the initial season will be presented at the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative annual workshop in Tustin, MI this March, and compiled results will be prepared for publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal once more data have been collected.

Count protocols involve conducting an initial count from a centralized location to

census the more stationary species such as ducks and shorebirds which are for obvious reasons restricted to the water and shoreline. This is followed each morning by a series of point counts and a transect census through the densely wooded habitat of the interior of the peninsula, counting each bird heard or seen throughout the entire time. We are currently seeking contributions from donors and applying for numerous grants, both of which are crucial to the success of the spring 2014 census of Peninsula Point. Funds received will cover the cost of supplies and transportation for field volunteers. With the support of the birding community, we can look forward to another successful year of surveying this amazing migration hot spot!



Cape May Warbler with midge (left) and Tennessee Warbler reaching for a midge (right) at Peninsula Point in 2013. Photos by Beth Olson

Sue Holtzmann Assumes Treasurer's Position

by Ann Joyal

In November Sue Holtzmann became the newest member of the LWAS Executive Committee, and in January she agreed to take over the duties of Treasurer from Ann Joyal who held the post since 2006. Sue is a long-standing member of LWAS and brings excellent qualifications to the Treasurer's position, having served as the bookkeeper at the Marquette Food Co-op for nine years until her retirement in December 2013.

Sue first came to the UP in 1977, attending Northern Michigan University where she attained a degree in Nutrition. She was drawn here by the outdoor lifestyle, the friendliness of the people, and being by the "big lake." In addition to LWAS, she belongs to the Northern Center for Lifelong Learning, and various book clubs, hiking groups and gardening clubs. She plans to fill her retirement with "more of what she was already doing" without having to schedule it around work. We are thrilled that Sue decided to include the Executive Committee and the Treasurer's position in her after-retirement activities!

Sue's address and contact information are now on the bottom of the new membership forms and she will handle all membership dues. Ann will remain as the LWAS Secretary, and you will still receive notices from her regarding meetings and field trips.

Death by Plastic?

Laurel Hill

"The worst thing that will probably happen—in fact is already well underway—is not energy depletion, economic collapse, conventional war, or the expansion of totalitarian governments. As terrible as these catastrophes would be for us, they can be repaired in a few generations. The one process now going on that will take millions of years to correct is loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us." — E.O. Wilson

The Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) spends most of the year scattered throughout the Pacific Ocean. In breeding months massive numbers of albatross come together on mid-Pacific atolls to colonize and mate. Many of the Laysan Albatross fly thousands of miles to reach the Midway atoll, about 2000 miles away from the nearest mainland.

One would think that 2000 miles away from mainland, in the middle of the ocean, would be safe (or safer) from the effects of pollution. Unfortunately, man-made waste is never too far away, and the impacts of pollution on albatross breeding on Midway atoll may be catastrophic.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, also known as the Pacific Trash Vortex, is often misconstrued. The name, given to the accumulation of tons of man-made debris, brings to mind a bobbing island of floating garbage. In contrast to this image, the pollution is actually spread over thousands of miles and some drifts below the water's surface.

The floating debris comes into play when albatross parents leave their chicks to scour the ocean for food. Feeding primarily on cephalopods, fish, and crustaceans,



well-intentioned parents often scoop up trash floating just below the surface of the water. The adults then feed their catch, and plastic by-catch to their chicks. The adults are able to regurgitate the plastic, but the chicks are unable to.

It is thought that the ingested plastic kills the birds by physically damaging their stomachs or taking up space, causing starvation. Scientific evidence linking plastic ingestion to the deaths of these birds is



lacking. Many chicks are also killed by lead poisoning and it is difficult to separate this from the effects of plastic ingestion. Though the scientific evidence is lacking, tragic photographs make a compelling argument.

In 2009, Artist Chris Jordan began documenting the impact of pollution on the albatrosses of Midway Island. Jordan's photography has brought increased public awareness of the tragedy occurring on the atoll. In addition to his photography, Jordan and his crew are nearing the completion of a documentary scheduled for release in 2014. A trailer for the documentary Midway can be viewed at <http://www.midwayfilm.com/>.

Note on the upcoming Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative Workshop:

The Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative (MiBCI) is a coalition of agencies, NGOs, academic institutions and individuals with a common goal to better understand and conserve Michigan's birds. Every year MiBCI hosts a Bird Conservation Workshop to share information on current research, ongoing conservation projects, and increase connectedness and communication within Michigan's bird conservation-oriented community. This year the MiBCI Bird Conservation Workshop will take place from March 20-22 at the Kettunen Center in Tustin, Michigan.

UPCOMING LWAS PROGRAMS

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society meetings are held in the Community Room of Peter White Library on the 2nd Wednesday of the month. Programs begin at 7:00 p.m. and end around 8:30.

April 9, 2014: April 9, 2014 –“Acadia Birding Festival, Mt. Desert Island, Maine”

Presenters: Clyde and Debbie Hecox

Clyde and Debbie will share pictures and stories from their June 2013 visit to the “Acadia Birding Festival.” Roger Tory Peterson called Mt. Desert Island the “warbler capital of the world,” but it is also home to Boreal species such as the Black-backed woodpecker and Boreal Chickadee, as well as significant marsh and water birds include American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, and Sora. Finally, boating and kayak trips provide views of Puffins, Razorbills, and other pelagic birds. Information: 226-7110

(This program was rescheduled from January)

May 2014: There will be no program in May this year, but several opportunities for birding will be available.

FIELD TRIPS:

Sun May 25nd Peninsula Point on Lake Michigan's Stonington Peninsula

Time: all-day, but plan to arrive at dawn for the best viewing

Picnic: mid-day cookout in the picnic area – bring your own food and beverages

Driving Instructions: From US Highway 2 proceed 2.8 miles east from Rapid River; take the exit towards Stonington and travel south on County Road 513. Follow CR 513 for 17.7 miles to the tip of the peninsula, where you will find the Peninsula Point Lighthouse.

Information: Contact Beth Olson (phone: 906-360-4336 or email tolson@chartermi.net)

Peninsula Point is one of the best locations in the UP to witness spring migration, and hundreds of neo-tropical songbirds like warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, vireos, buntings and thrushes are readily found each year. Often the marshy beach can be covered in shorebirds with uncommon migrants like Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot and Piping Plover. White Pelicans are a near daily sight in May. Some of the more notable species seen in recent years include Hudsonian Godwit, Western Kingbird, Connecticut, Worm-eating and Hooded Warblers, Dickcissel, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Summer Tanager and Orchard Oriole.

North American Migration Count on Saturday, May 10

The North American Migration Count (NAMC) was started in 1992 to give bird watchers the opportunity to enjoy a day's birding during spring migration with the knowledge that the results of their findings, together with the birds counted by others, would reveal the status of bird migration on a specified date. The goals of the NAMC are to get a picture of the progress of spring migration, obtain data on the abundance and distribution of each migratory species, create more challenges and goals for birders, and (most important) have fun.

This count is organized on a county-wide basis. If you want to participate, it's as simple as birding a site and then submitting your observations to the appropriate county compiler.

Alger Co: Scott Hickman (suboscine@hotmail.com) – please contact Scott PRIOR to the count to confirm your area.

Marquette Co: Melinda Stamp (mstamp@mstamp.net) – no need to pre-register. Bird the area of your choice and then submit your results to Melinda by email.

Change in LWAS involvement with Moosewood Bird Feeders

The LWAS board has made a decision to discontinue filling and maintaining the bird feeders on Presque Isle as one of our projects. You will notice that the option to donate to the feeder fund has been removed from the membership form. We are waiting to hear from the Moosewood Nature Center as to whether they would like to take over the care of the feeders.

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form for 2013-2014

Your dues support the newsletter, program costs, & local birding activities. Donations are tax-deductible.

Name (or names) _____

Address _____

City, State and Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

(E-mail addresses are not given to other groups or commercial entities)

Membership fees (please check one)

_____ Regular (Individual and Family) Annual - \$15.00 _____ Student - \$5.00

Additional donations:

\$ _____ General Expenses and LWAS projects

\$ _____ Research Grant to fund birding research in the Upper Peninsula

How would you like to receive your quarterly newsletter? (Check one) _____ e-mail or _____ post.

Mail this form, along with your check (payable to LWAS) to:

Sue Holtzmann, 365 Mangum Rd., Marquette, MI 49855

Check the mailing label on this newsletter to see when your membership expires. Dues are paid for a one year period. If you are currently “paid – up,” consider giving this membership form to someone you know who might be interested in joining Laughing Whitefish Audubon.

c/o Beth Olson
5 Arrowhead Dr.
Marquette, MI 49855

