



North Country Notes

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

October 2013

Crisp Point Project, Upper Peninsula, Michigan

By Jeff Knoop

Late last year, The Michigan Department of Natural Resources closed on a remarkable tract of land along Lake Superior that straddles the Luce/Chippewa County line in the Upper Peninsula. This project ranked as the third highest priority by the nationally acclaimed Forest Legacy Program, part of the National Forest Service. Nearly \$4,500,000 was provided thru this program towards the acquisition. An anonymous donor provided a 25% cash match as well as an additional amount of roughly \$300,000 as a stewardship endowment to MDNR for the long term stewardship and management of the property. The Little Traverse Conservancy spent endless hours brokering the final deal though a conservation-minded seller who agreed to sell property at its fair market value.

The parcel is roughly 4,000 contiguous acres of land that contains nearly 2.5 miles of premiere Lake Superior sand beach. It also contains associated coastal dunes and intervening wet swales, a large coastal plain lake, Brown's Lake, and significant stands of northern hardwood/hemlock forest type. The forested portion of the property comprises roughly 90 percent of the Crisp Point property. In addition, the property is surrounded by lands owned by the State of Michigan (Superior State Forest), a 7,000+ acre block of land subject to a working forest conservation easement (Easement #5 Northern Great Lakes Forest Project brokered by The Nature Conservancy) and several large nature preserves owned by the

Michigan Nature Association and the Little Traverse Land Conservancy, both of which protect significant Lake Superior frontage.

Through an ecoregional planning effort, The Nature Conservancy had identified the Crisp Point property as a highly significant parcel of land in critical need of protection and management. The parcel contains both valuable habitat for the federal and state endangered piping plover and known populations of Pitcher's thistle, a federal and state threatened plant species. Upland portions of the property are dominated by well stocked stands of northern hardwood forest that have been managed for timber production on a selective rotation over the years.

Due to the juxtaposition of the project, the area's high biological significance and large, unfragmented forest community, this project was supported by The Nature Conservancy, Little Traverse Conservancy, Michigan Nature Association, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the federal Forest Legacy Program in order to preserve the many natural amenities it affords to the visiting public.

Congratulations to all in this multi-agency effort. The area is currently open to the public for recreational activities and is located adjacent to the Crisp Point Lighthouse at the northern end of Crisp Point Road.



Photo of Crisp Point shoreline

Annual Membership Meeting on November 13

By Ann Joyal

November's annual meeting combines business with pleasure, in an informal social setting. Attendees are invited to bring snacks to share, and we will show nature-oriented photographs contributed by members. The club will provide a computer, projector and a jump-drive to use to transfer pictures. We love seeing your photos of birds or nature scenes, so bring up to 15 photos on either a jump-drive or a CD. Or, bring your computer before the meeting and the photos can be transferred onto a jump-drive.

During the brief business session, there will be a vote to approve the Executive Committee. All current members would like to continue their service, but if you are interested in serving on the Executive Committee at a future time, please contact Jeff Knoop (jknoop@tnc.org).

Secondly, there will be a vote to amend the By-Laws to remove the upper limit on the number of Executive Committee members (currently a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 9). The lower limit of 7 would remain, but the upper limit can vary year-to-year to accommodate all interested members. Additionally, the quorum would be changed to "a simple majority of the current number of members of the Executive Committee." Copies of the complete amendment will be available at the meeting.

This is always a pleasant evening, so please plan to attend – and we're looking forward to your pictures. The meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m., November 13, in the Community Room of Peter White Library in Marquette.

Vagrants at Peninsula Point

By Gary Palmer

Peninsula Point has a well-deserved reputation among UP birders as one of the best-kept secrets around. In recent years this geographic

bottleneck projecting into Lake Michigan in Delta County has gained prominence thanks to a slew of notable bird records along with spectacular shows

of color each May from the more expected migrants. May 2013 provided some of the best of our admittedly-short record of birds there when just nine days apart the Point hosted second and third state records of two vagrant species!

On May 17, Jenny and Ryne Rutherford located a Brewer's Sparrow foraging amongst Juniper shrubs on the lawn. When I got the call about this bird I could tell it was time for a chase, though I had no idea just how rare it was for one to be seen in Michigan! This Sparrow's typical range begins in far western South Dakota and Nebraska, so this individual had flown a thousand miles or so in the wrong direction.

Upon arriving at Peninsula Point that day, Ryne excitedly escorted us to a clump of junipers near the base of the lighthouse, where the sparrow had most recently been spotted. After a few excruciating minutes of waiting, a flock of *Spizella* sparrows (the genus including both Brewer's and Chipping Sparrow) materialized and began hopping around in the brush. It wasn't for several hours until star birders at the scene felt comfortable putting the word out on the birding list serves, but eventually everyone present felt confident that mixed in with the dozens of Chipping Sparrows was in fact a Brewer's!

By the time the sun set I was excited, exhausted, and thankful I hadn't been the one to originally find the vagrant, as its similarities to

Chipping Sparrows are so extensive and the Brewer's so drab, even in comparison with the not-so-flashy Chipper, that I might not have given it a second look.

As if a second state record of a difficult to detect sparrow weren't enough to make a memorable migration, on May 26th another quite notable vagrant appeared. That evening Chris Vogel, a former Cape May Bird Observatory employee who has recently been doing bird work in the UP, located a Wilson's Plover. Luckily I had done a survey for the nascent Peninsula Point Bird Survey earlier in the day and would be doing another the next, so I was at my campsite just a short run up the road from the vagrant bird upon receiving word of it this time!

Normally inhabiting coastal regions throughout much of the southeastern US, this bird too was quite lost. I sprinted from my campsite toward the point, and as I approached Chris on the mudflats near the point he had to wave me to slow down in my excitement so I wouldn't flush the flock. I ended up getting great views and lousy photos for documentation as the bird sat nearly motionless near the shore for nearly half an hour. Unfortunately the shorebird flock flew away after a close pass by a Merlin, never to be seen again. A similarly-worn Wilson's Plover was discovered in Duluth the next day, and I have to suspect it was the same confused bird...



Brewer's Sparrow at Peninsula Point
Photo by Skye Haas

LWAS to Fund Research Grant Award

By Ann Joyal

Last November, the LWAS Board voted to fund an annual research grant to be awarded to an individual doing avian research in the Upper Peninsula. The process of developing the grant award involved a three-part approach: fund-raising, application design, and publicity. We began fund-raising with the hope of attaining \$500 for the grant, and we were very pleased that a total of \$1140 was contributed to the project. The initial grant will be limited to \$500, and we will continue fund-raising with goal of sustaining or growing this grant.

At the same time, a committee worked on designing a grant-application and an accompanying scoring guideline. After review by the LWAS Board in September, the application was posted on our website at <http://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/research-grant/>. The grant is open to anyone (student or independent researcher) who is doing avian research in the U.P. *If you know someone who might qualify for the grant, please pass along this information.*

The grant is being publicized through the Michigan Audubon Society, as well as the Upper Peninsula Audubon Chapters. In addition, Dr. Alec Lindsay at NMU has agreed to contact an ornithologist in the biology departments of each of Michigan's universities. As the grant becomes more well-known, it is hoped that this publicity will become less necessary.

Grant applications are currently being accepted, with an application deadline of January 15, 2014. A winning grant will be chosen by March 15, and all applicants will be notified of their status by March 31. We are looking forward to reading the proposals and funding some interesting and worthwhile avian research.

The Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society is covered under Michigan Audubon's 501(c)3 status, and all donations to the club are tax-deductible.

The Bird Lady of Bridges

By Cynthia Lynne

Last March I started a new adventure; one I had been contemplating since I retired four years ago.

I was off to volunteer at a Natural Bridges National Monument in southeastern Utah for three months. I applied on line and was surprised and overjoyed to be accepted on my first application. My plan was to drive down to Utah, stopping at the Platte River in Nebraska to see the sandhill crane migration. I stayed two nights in Kearney, Nebraska.

I was both thrilled and disappointed with the experience. I saw many, many cranes in the fields and flying overhead, but

the evening I spent in the blind at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary along the Platte river was a bust. Cranes flew overhead, but never came in for a landing in front of our blind. There are never any guarantees, but of course I was hoping for some close encounters to compensate for my freezing feet! The next day I went in search of Snow Geese. I had never seen any before (that I know of), and I heard from some fellow birders that there were some spectacular flocks in the area. I was directed to a pond right next to Interstate 80 in a small roadside park. This time I WASN'T disappointed. The pond was covered in a white expanse of

birds. They slowly rotated around the pond, squawking furiously, and at regular intervals all the birds rose up into the air, flew around a bit, then came back down to continue their rotation. I kept wondering, who decided to take to the air, and why did they all follow? It was spectacular. I tried taking some videos, but the arctic wind was blasting so hard I could not record the noise levels. I did get some great shots of thousands of birds taking to the air, and coming back down to earth. Definitely a sight not to be missed.

So on to Utah. My position would be to work in the visitor center for part of the day, and the balance of the day would be hiking into the canyons. The set of three bridges in the park are the largest concentration of natural bridges in the world, and Sipapu bridge is second only to Rainbow bridge in Arizona in height. Our hikes were 200 to 600 feet down into the canyons, and of course, what goes down must come up, at 6500 feet above sea level. I have to say, my first few weeks were agonizing at times!

One of the first things I did was to set up a bird feeder outside my window. Not knowing any of the Western birds, I figured this would be the quickest way to get a look at some of those little LBBs. My binoculars and my bird book were always by the window when I wasn't out hiking. My first lovely find were the spectacular Lark Sparrows, Western titmice, Bushtits, and a female Black-headed Grosbeak (I did see a male later on out hiking). I put up a hummer feeder and had Black-chinned and Broad-tailed hummers come in almost immediately. The Broad-tailed were easy to identify as they made a musical sound when they flew. I would sit on my front porch and let those little jewels of sound surround me. Enchanting. I also had western cotton tails, antelope ground squirrels and chipmunks come in for the spoils. After a

while, unfortunately, I had flocks of cowbirds.

I had quite an amazing experience in the canyon one day. I knew there were Peregrines nesting in the canyon, but did not know the exact locations. I also was looking for a remote Indian ruin. I found the ruin after a long hike up-canyon, and sat down to enjoy the sun and the feeling of history. Immediately a peregrine came diving out of a large hole in the rock wall, and flew around me several times, screaming in protest. After the bird had settled down, I walked around and found two perfectly matched Violet-green Swallow feathers on the ground, just outside the ruin. Probably a last meal!! On my way out of the canyon, I identified another bird I had never seen, a Townsends Solitaire. I know it caused quite a sensation in Marquette when one showed up, but here I had my very own find. What a treat for that amazing day.

My bird book was always with me, helping me to id and put a face to the songs, for the times I was out in the field. One of my favorite little sparrows was the Black-chinned. The black, white and gray contrast of his coloration is striking. I saw many Mountain Chickadees, Western Bluebirds, and Mountain Bluebirds migrating through to the higher elevations. We also had Scrub and Pinion Jays, which hang around all year. In the higher elevations were the Stellar Jays. The blues flying through the green trees, and red earth never failed to catch my eye. I also learned that there are a couple kinds of ravens! We had plenty of Common Ravens, but when I headed south to New Mexico I "discovered" the Chihauhuan Raven. It is a smaller raven, with white neck feathers.

After a couple of weeks, I was getting pretty good with the birds in the area. No one else in the visitor center was interested in birds, so I became the "bird lady". In fact, one day I sat down with a

visitor and looked at all his bird photos, and ID'd every one correctly! I was so darn proud of myself! He even wrote a glowing commentary on me for my "boss". Nice.

The end of the story was that they made me take my bird feeder down, as they were afraid the chipmunks would come into

the houses and spread hanta virus. Needless to say, I won't be volunteering there again! That was part of the joy of my morning, waking up and checking my feeders. Oh well, I did have a great time, if for a short while, being the "Bird Lady of Bridges"!

Former NMU Student David Pavlik does a "Big Year" to help endangered Hawaiian Birds

By Bruce Ventura

David Pavlik, a 2010 NMU graduate and former LWAS member, is doing a "photo big-year" in 2013. He is birding in various places, and photographing each new species that he encounters.

What makes David's journey special is that he is doing the "big year" as a fund-raiser for critically endangered birds in Hawai'i. He is asking supporters to donate money, anywhere between \$.05 and \$5.00 per species that he records. All of the donations will then be given to the American Bird Conservancy for their work in protecting birds in Hawai'i.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) is a conservation organization that works worldwide for the protection of birds and their critical habitats and flyways. It is headquartered in Virginia, but works with sister conservation organizations in Central and South America, the Pacific islands, Europe, parts of Africa, and Asia. ABC has done much work with partner agencies in Hawai'i. Hawai'i has the unfortunate title of "extinction hotspot", where 71 endemic bird species have become extinct out of 113 that existed there prior to human colonization. Of the remaining 42 species, 32 are federally listed.

As of July, David had seen and photographed nearly 500 species. He is now at 540 species, as of mid-September. He hopes to continue to add to that over the remainder of 2013. To check on David's progress and to make a donation to his cause, see www.birdingforconservation.blogspot.com. He has posted multiple blogs about various places he has been and birds he has seen, as well as photographs of some of the species.

To learn more about the American Bird Conservancy, go to www.abcbirds.org.

FIELD TRIPS:

Saturday, November 9 Peshekee Grade Field Trip (North of Michigamme)

Meet at 7:30 AM at the parking lot on the corner of Spring and Fourth Streets in Marquette. (Carpool to Michigamme)

For information: contact Beth Olson at 906-360-4366 or email tolson@chartermi.net

Trip leader: Gary Palmer

For this field trip, it would be a good idea to bring a lunch, since we may include several other birding stops in addition to the Peshekee Grade. This is a great trip for boreal species, including the Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay and possibly some species from Canada, such as White-winged or Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll and Pine Siskin. In past years there have been other surprises on this outing such as Black-backed Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeak even a Northern Cardinal. Everyone is welcome – dress warmly and bring some water and some food!

PROGRAMS:

Meetings are held in the Community Room of Peter White Library in Marquette on the 2nd Wednesday of the month, unless there is a scheduling conflict with the library. Programs begin at 7:00 p.m. and end around 8:30.

November 13, 2013 – Annual Membership Meeting

Social meeting. Bring photos of wildlife and scenery, on discs or jump-drives, to share with members (computer & projector will be provided). Snacks are welcome. Members will vote on any business matters, including the election/approval of Board members. For information, call Beth Olson at 906-360-4366.

December 2013 – No program is scheduled for December – Consider participating in a Christmas Bird Count!

Thanks to our Members and Donors

By Ann Joyal

The Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society has 77 members whose dues supported the organization last year by paying for newsletter costs, program costs (room-rental, projector rental and presenter expenses) and other miscellaneous expenses. A number of our members also chose to make extra donations to help support community-based projects such as filling the bird feeders at the Moosewood Nature Center and the Peninsula Point Bird Research Project. In addition, the club began fund-raising for a yearly grant to help support avian research in the Upper Peninsula. (Grant details are available in a separate article.) These extra activities were only possible because of the generosity of our members.

We would like to thank the following people who made extra donations to LWAS last year:
Arnold Aho, Ron Annelin, Libby Blichfeldt, Elizabeth Carpenter and family, Priscilla Burnham and Lou Chappel, Loren and Mary Clifford, Bill and Kathy Davis, Jo Foley, Ginny Foreman, Jeremy Halka, Jim Hayward, Clyde and Debby Hecox, Sue and Bob Holtzman, Mark and Joanie Hubinger, Lois Hutching, Ann Joyal, Keith Kepler, Matt and Natasha Koss, Kate Teeter and Alec Lindsay, Jeff Knoop and Cindy Lynne, Joan and Don Miller, Joanna Mitchell, Fred and Judi Mouser, Andrew Nowicki, Beth Olson, Tory and John Parlin, David and Susan Payant, Jane Ryan, Michael Ryan, Clare and Michael Sauer, Thom Skelding, Joan and Martin Steindler, John and Carol Stuht, Tina Hall and Bruce Ventura, Cathy and Steve Waller, Tony Williams, Marlene Woo-Lun, Cliff Wooten.

Receive your Newsletter by Email

Several members have requested to receive their quarterly newsletter electronically, rather than by postal mail. Please notice that the new membership forms now include a choice for receiving the newsletter by email. Or you can begin receiving your newsletters electronically immediately by sending an email to

Ann Joyal at ajoyal@nmu.edu

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.

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form for 2013-2014

Dues support the newsletter, programs, & 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

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

Additional donations:

\$ _____ General Expenses & Bird seed for feeders at Presque Isle Park

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

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

Ann Joyal, 346 W. Crescent St., Marquette, MI 49855 (ajoyal@nmu.edu or 906-226-6749)

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

