

North Country Notes

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



April 2022

WHAT HAVE WE DONE TO DESERVE ALL THESE BIRDS?

From My Perch

Jeff Towner, Chair, Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society

At the March monthly meeting of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society, we played a video of Dr. Stan Temple of the Aldo Leopold Institute entitled “What Have We Done to Deserve All These Cranes?” (If you missed it, you can watch the recording on our Facebook page.) The answer to the question entails government agencies, institutions, and volunteers who have worked over decades to bring back populations of sandhill cranes. (Whooping cranes have also increased in numbers, although they remain endangered.) The same can be said of other species of birds and of birds in general. However, the aggregate of bird numbers has declined by an estimated 30% since 1970, representing a loss of approximately three billion birds in the Western Hemisphere. Although some species, such as sandhill cranes are unquestionably doing better, we have a great deal more work to do to protect high value habitats, restore degraded habitats, and take other measures to increase bird populations.

I recently signed on to become an “ambassador” in the Audubon/MI Birds program, which is funded by the Michigan DNR and carried out by Audubon Great Lakes, headquartered in Chicago. This is a new program that trains chapters across Michigan on the MI Birds program and in advocacy for public land conservation, focusing on coastal wetlands and secretive marsh birds. I’ll be providing periodic updates on how LWAS is participating in this program, including events in which LWAS members can participate.

I would like to recognize some LWAS board members who have stepped into new roles. Cathy Waller is the new Secretary and coordinator of the annual Midwest crane count in Marquette County; Gary Palmer is the new Treasurer. Since Brian Murphy joined the board, he has upgraded and maintained our website and Facebook page, as well as handling the technical tasks connected to our monthly programs. Check out the outstanding Facebook page and webpage at: <https://laughingwhitefishaudubon.com/> for upcoming events and other information. Also, thanks go to Beth Olson who for years has put out a quality newsletter several times a year. Which brings me to the fact that our Vice-Chair position is vacant. If you would like to join our board in this position, please contact me at chielenstowner@msn.com. We also are always looking for folks to share their birding adventures, photos, and knowledge at a monthly meeting or writing an article for our newsletter. If you have an interest in any of those things, please contact any board member. Happy birding!

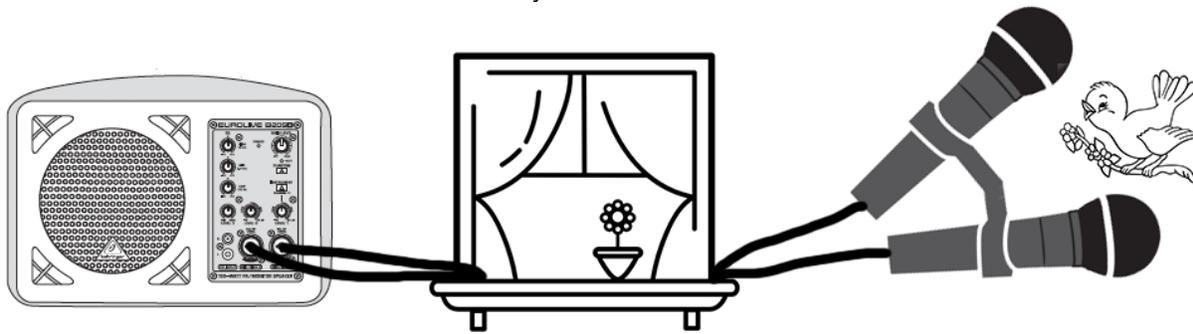


Barred Owl (left) and
Ovenbird (right). Photos
by Steve Waller



Install a Home Bird Sound System

By Steve Waller



Birders know that the easiest way to find birds, even in thick brush, is by sound. As migration blooms, many of us spend hours memorizing songs, chirps, and rattles, so that we can recognize the familiar and the unfamiliar. Once learned, bird sounds are as reliable as an old friend's voice on the phone saying, "Hi. It's me." They don't say their name, but you instantly know who it is.

For almost 40 years, our home has been wired for bird sounds. We have two microphones mounted outside, one pointed towards our feeders, the other towards good nearby habitat. Each morning, year-round, often even before the coffee pot gets turned on, the mics are turned on.



Red-eyed Vireo
Photo by Steve Waller

As we go through our morning routines, we can hear who is outside at the feeders or lurking in the bushes. Sometimes we leave the mics on all night and listen for owls. Weather doesn't interfere with our birding. It can be miserably cold or wet outside while we sit comfortably in the living room and listen for birds (or racoons, flying squirrels, pine martens, even coyotes and wolves).

We've done field bird recordings for years, even bought specialized equipment like parabolic mics and portable digital recorders (now mostly replaced by our phone and the Merlin Bird ID app), but nothing compares to knowing what is going on around the house, all day long. Many times, we've heard something unusual out of the speakers, grabbed our binocs and a camera to find Fox Sparrows, Crossbills, Cuckoos, and Black-throated Blue Warblers that we would have otherwise missed.

We always know when the first Phoebes and Hummers arrive and when they leave. Many insectivorous birds noisily hang out nearby but don't come to the seed feeders. A sudden silence can mean Shrikes, Sharpies, Owls, and even Goshawks. We almost always hear Tanagers and Orioles before we ever see them and love to hear Ravens and Pileated Woodpeckers echoing in the distance.

Unfortunately, amplifying bird sounds is only practical if you live in a quiet natural area or at least in an area sheltered from the bustle of humanity. If you are in town, the sounds you'll mostly amplify are cars, trucks, airplanes, trains, and your loud neighbors.

But if you *are* in a suitable habitat, you can set up a mic system easily and inexpensively. You will need some special audio equipment, but I'm going to suggest a low-cost, high-quality system that requires no special skills and no maintenance but will give you many years of great home bird sounds. The total system cost will be **less than \$300**. It's a wired system (one wire per microphone) so that you don't have to worry about batteries or weather conditions. When you want to listen, just flip the switch in the house – you're on!



White-throated Sparrow
Photo by Steve Waller

Microphones: Mics need to be condenser type mics like the [Behringer C-2 Studio Condenser Microphones](#) \$70. There are two mics in this package so you can place each mic in its own perfect location or connect them in stereo with the included stereo bracket. Condenser mics must be powered by “phantom power.” Phantom power will be automatically provided by the amplifier I suggest below. Condenser mics powered by phantom power are much more sensitive and very good at picking up faint bird sounds. These mics also have a directional ability (Cardioid pickup pattern). They only listen to sound from the direction you point them. That is good for avoiding noisy directions. They also have a “Low Frequency Roll Off” switch and include spongy wind screens so that the low rumble from the wind is greatly reduced.

Cables: You will need one [XLR Male to Female Microphone Cable - 25 Feet](#) \$12 each, per microphone. These mic cables carry the mic signal into your house, usually through a window frame, to the amplifier. They are reliable and don’t add noise to your mic signal. They come in various lengths. Extra lengths can be connected as needed.

Amplifier/Speaker: There are lots of options for outputting the sounds in the house. You can make it sophisticated, but here’s a simple, cheap, reliable, and effective unit.

Get something like this [BEHRINGER Studio Monitor \(B205D\)](#) \$170. It is smaller than a loaf of bread and fits easily on an end table or coffee table. This monitor can amplify both mics at the same time, so you only need one unit. It is powerful, 150-watts, with a 5.25” speaker. You don’t need a big

speaker because bird sounds are generally high frequencies that sound best on smaller speakers. Each mic has its own volume control. The amplifier can be loud, but you will *never* need full volume! It provides phantom power for the mics and even has a 3-band equalizer so that bird song frequencies can be enhanced, and more wind sound can be eliminated.

Putting it all together

Examine your mics. Put the sponge wind screens on the mics and move the low roll off switch on each mic to the bent line (low roll off) position. I usually wrap the switch with black electrical tape to keep moisture out of the switch. Then mount each mic in a dry protected place, pointed towards the most bird action. We mount our mics right under the eaves of the house, out of the rain and snow. Mics should also be protected from wind because wind will cause a loud low rumble that makes it hard to hear birds. We try to filter wind sounds out, but the best solution is to avoid wind altogether whenever possible. You may need additional wind screening.

Connect the cable(s) to the mic (add electrical tape to protect the connection). Snake the cables into the house via some convenient path to where the amplifier will be. Add some wire clips to keep the cables neatly in place. Avoid cutting or kinking the cables.

Connect the cable to the amplifier. *Do not* turn the amplifier on yet. Turn all volume knobs (one per input and one main volume knob) *all the way low*. Turn the High and Mid equalizer knobs to mid-range. Turn the Low equalizer knob to minimum (to minimize the wind sounds). Make sure the “Instrument” button is *not* pressed in. There are the only two cable receptacles in the front of the amplifier that will match the mic cable ends. Plug the mic cables in.

Now plug the amplifier in to the wall and turn on the power switch (in the back). In the front, push the phantom power button to “On”. A red indicator light says phantom power is being sent to the mics. Good.

Turn the main volume $\frac{1}{4}$ way up (that’s plenty). *SLOWLY* turn up the volume for one of the mics. You will start to hear outside sounds. If you hear a

squealing sound, your volume is too high. You don't want to blast the sounds, just hear them clearly. If you are using both mics, turn mic one volume back down and turn mic two volume up *SLOWLY* until it is properly set too. Then put mic one volume back to its correct setting.

You're done!

From now on, all you should have to do is flip the amplifier power switch on or off to turn the entire system on or off. You may want to find tune the volume or equalizer settings but once they are set, you can pretty much forget them. Sometimes you

may want to turn the whole system volume down or up just a bit. Use the main volume knob for that so that the individual mic settings stay set.

Visitors always love the bird sound system. It adds dimension to watching birds, especially in bad weather. We are so accustomed to our system that we really miss it when traveling or visiting someone else. Migration has already started. Give it a try.

Marquette Christmas Bird Count - December 18, 2021

By Melinda Stamp, Marquette CBC (MIMQ) Compiler

The Marquette Christmas Bird Count was held Saturday, December 18, 2021. It was a "wet binoculars" kind of day, with light to moderate snow showers throughout. Snow and wind made birding a challenge, but we had excellent coverage and excellent results with our group of observers, including several new participants. Our intrepid counters prevailed and managed to observe 54 species, which is excellent for our circle.

Two cooperative Snowy Owls were visible for many observers at the hospital and the Lower Harbor break wall. There were no new species found, but we did break high court records for Common Merganser and American Crow. Highlights included Northern Pintail, Redhead, Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Shrike, Fox Sparrow, Iceland Gull (two subspecies) and the much-reported, Orange-crowned Warbler continuing at Founders Landing; plus, a Gray Catbird that showed up during Count Week. In the winter visitor category, we had three glaucous gulls, a northern strike, common and hoary redpolls, pine grosbeaks, Bohemian waxwings, and (more unusual for winter) cedar waxwings.

Pine siskins were scarce, but we found a few, and our feeder counters managed a single purple finch, and one lonely house sparrow. In 1950, 300 house sparrows were reported (highest count). In the past six counts, we've found a total of 3!

Count week (12/15-12/21) species included gray catbird, lesser scaup, red crossbill and mallard/American black duck hybrid.

Teams and Areas:

Area 1, Scot Stewart, Corrine Rockow, Louise Anderson, Michael Paling

Area 2 North, Ivan Wiljanen

Area 2 South, Mary Beth Albrechtsen, Greg Albrechtsen

Area 3 West, Logan Clark, Lauren Mykanski

Area 3 East, John Kreag, Jo Kreag

Area 4, Melinda Stamp, Cathy Waller, Alisha Autio-Witala, Troy Witala

Area 5 (Lakeshore, etc.), Skye Haas, Gary Palmer

Feeder Counters:

Dave Prychitko, Cindy Deo, Donna Keskimaki, Ann Fisher, Dave Bourgeois, Pri Burnham

Species Count: 54 (plus 4 Count Week, 12/15-21) [highest species count: 56 in 2020 and 2012]

Individuals: 4929

LWAS Programs April 13, 2022

April 13, 2022 (Wed) 7:00 p.m. “*Birding Identification*”

ROOM: Due to Covid-19, the presentation will be held on ZOOM & Facebook

PRESENTER: Gary Palmer. *Gary Palmer has been a longtime member of Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society, serving on the board since 2012. He fell in love with birding over a decade ago during a spring field ornithology course at Northern Michigan University and has been utterly hooked ever since. Gary spent several seasons as a professional migration counter at sites such as Whitefish Point and Hawk Ridge and summers censusing breeding birds in Illinois and Idaho.*

Join us for a refresher on the birds returning to the north woods this spring! Gary will be presenting an overview of many of the migrants that can be found throughout the Upper Peninsula as they travel back to their breeding grounds. From Golden Eagles and Northern Goshawks to Blackburnian Warblers and Indigo Buntings, we'll take a look at the stunning diversity visible at this special time of year and tips to help identify them in the field.

THERE ARE NO PROGRAMS FROM MAY-AUGUST.

Annual Sandhill Crane Count on Saturday, April 9, 2022

Save the date for the Annual Midwest Crane Count on Saturday, April 9, 2022, 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. EST. Each year in mid-April, over 1,600 volunteers travel to their local wetlands and favorite birding locations to participate in the Crane Count. This annual survey of Sandhill and Whooping Cranes spans over 120 counties in six states of the upper Midwest.

To participate in the Crane Count, you first need to contact your County Coordinator to be assigned a site and receive additional instructions. Cathy Waller (cathy@upwallers.net) is the new Marquette County Coordinator. Jude Holloway (906kayaker@gmail.com) is the Alger County Coordinator. To see the list of coordinators in the UP: <https://savingcranes.org/education/annual-midwest-crane-count/>

Saturday, May 21: Field Trip to Peninsula Point- Spring Migration & Picnic!

Peninsula Point Lighthouse, at the tip of the Stonington Peninsula, is one of the best locations in the UP to witness spring migration. This year, LWAS will host an all-day birding event on Saturday, May 21.

Time: All day (arriving around dawn will give you the best views)

Carpooling: Please make your own arrangements for rides.

Picnic: Gather mid-day in the picnic area for lunch– 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 upbirdie@gmail.com).

Hundreds of neo-tropical songbirds like warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, vireos, buntings and thrushes are readily found each year along with shorter distance migrants like sparrows, jays, woodpeckers, chickadees and finches. On a good day, a birder can easily tally over 60 species including over 20 species of warblers. Some highlights from past field trips include Hooded Warblers, Connecticut Warblers, Yellow-throated Vireos, Rose Breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, Clay-Colored Sparrows, Great Egrets, Common Terns, and Bonaparte Gulls.

Join us for some of the spring's best birding. A bonus of this gathering is that there will be plenty of expert birders available to help with spotting and bird-identification.

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form

Dues support the newsletter, programs, & local birding activities. Donations are tax-deductible.

Your name (or gift-recipient's name): _____

Street: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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

Annual Membership fees (please check one)

Gift membership - \$15 Regular(family) membership - \$15 OR Student - \$5.00

How would you like to receive your newsletter?

E-mail or Postal service

Additional donations:

\$ _____ General Expenses for club projects

\$ _____ Research/Conservation Grant to fund birding research/conservation in the UP

FOR GIFT MEMBERSHIPS please supply your name and the recipient will be notified of your gift: DONOR
NAME: _____

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

Gary Palmer, 2522 Center St., Marquette, MI 49855 (palmerjg@gmail.com or 906-360-2556)

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

