

# North Country Notes



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

April 2022

## From My Perch

*by Jeff Towner, Chairperson, LWAS*

Here is a sampling of what the LWAS board has been up to this year. MI Birds is a public outreach and engagement program created by Audubon Great Lakes and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, which aims to increase engagement of all Michiganders with public lands that are important for birds and local communities. This year I signed on as a MI Birds Ambassador. In the U.P. we are fortunate to have large expanses of public lands open to birders, including the Hiawatha and Ottawa National Forests, national wildlife refuges, state refuges, state forests, parks and wildlife management areas, as well as county, township, and municipal lands. Watch this space for future events and activities of MI Birds.

I also recently participated in Audubon virtual “fly-in” meetings on their Save the Seabirds initiative with staff of Senator Gary Peters and Representative Debbie Dingell. A major aspect of proposed legislation would add protection to forage fish, which are vital to the well-being of so many species of aquatic birds and other aquatic animals.

This past spring and summer saw a reengagement in led bird walks, with several being led by LWAS board members Brian Murphy, Beth Olson, Gary Palmer, Matt Betts, and myself. We hope to continue and expand these programs.

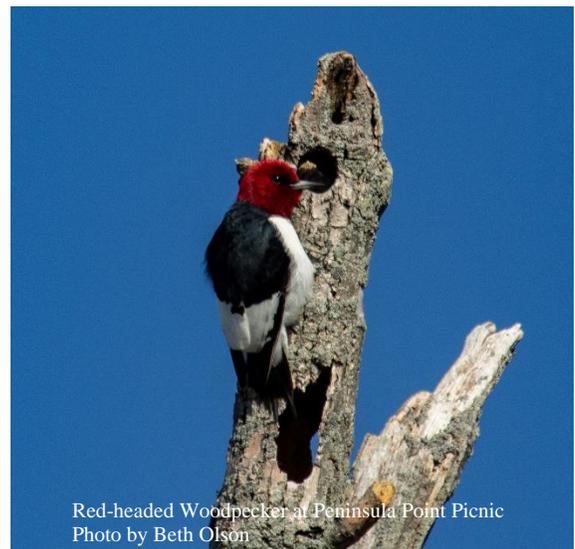
Chapter Vice-chair Matt Betts and I attended the Audubon-sponsored Coastal Symposium in Sault Ste. Marie in September. The symposium was well attended by members of many participating groups and offered a wide range of technical talks and bird walks.

We returned to in-person monthly presentations in September, October, and November at Peter White Library. For those who are comfortable, we hope you will join us for the continuation of programs in January, February, March, and April.

Speaking of presentations, we would welcome volunteers from among our members to chair a Program Committee, as well as an Outings Committee. Also, our long-time newsletter editor and publisher, Beth Olson will be taking a well-deserved break from those duties. If you have editing skills and would like to contribute to our newsletter, or any of the other roles mentioned, please contact any member of the Board.

We recently ran an on-line poll to choose a new logo for our chapter. The options included Common Loon, Spruce Grouse, Northern Goshawk, and Peregrine Falcon. The people have voted, and the Spruce Grouse won in a landslide, so that is our new logo. You can see it at the top of this page.

Finally, please join me in welcoming several new Board and Executive Committee members. Cathy Waller has been serving for some time as our secretary. Matt Betts came aboard as our new Vice-chairperson, and Hilary Rinsland recently stepped up as our new Treasurer.



Red-headed Woodpecker at Peninsula Point Picnic  
Photo by Beth Olson

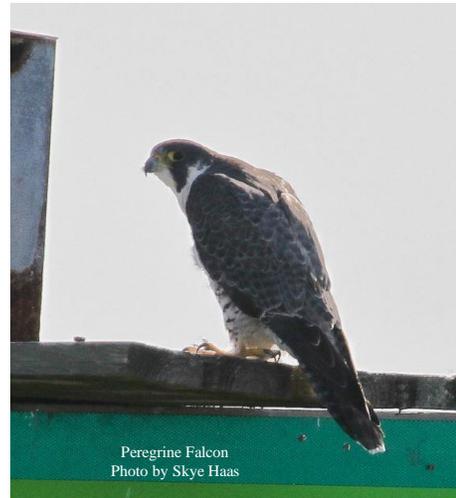
## **Peregrine Falcon nesting box coming to Ishpeming**

*By Thom Skelding and Beth Olson*

Since the banning of DDT, many bird species have made recoveries in brood success, especially eagles, and raptors. This is due to the return of eggshell thickness to normal. Because of this and the placement of nesting boxes for the falcons, Peregrine falcons have been on the rebound. Nesting boxes for the Peregrine falcons in areas that benefit both the falcons and humans have become popular. The boxes are installed in cities on tall buildings, which replicates the cliff faces of their usual nesting sites. The birds then return the favor by predated upon nuisance populations of Rock Doves (pigeons) in the cities.

Thanks to Peregrine falcon nesting boxes in Marquette the falcon population is increasing. In the hopes of expanding their range, Thom Skelding of the LWAS board as well as the Cliffs Shaft Mine Museum board, came up with the idea of placing a nesting box on the Cliffs shaft in Ishpeming. The

shaft would be an ideal structure to appeal to the birds for nesting and there is an ample supply of Rock Doves in the area. Thom has been working with LWAS and the Cliffs Museum board to arrange the details. He also contacted the folks in Houghton, who have successfully set up and maintained Peregrine Falcon nesting boxes, to get the specifications of building a nesting box. He then contacted the Ishpeming High School woodshop teacher to request them to build the box. The woodshop students will soon be building the nest box to be placed on the top of the C-shaft at the Cliff Shaft Mine Museum. C-shaft is 176 feet high, and the box will be placed with a southern exposure. Hopefully, the box will be installed before the spring migration. All funding will be paid for by the local Audubon chapter, Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society.



### **LWAS Avian Research and/or Conservation Grant Application Period Open**

In 2014 the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society instituted an Avian Research Grant of \$500, available to individuals or non-profit organizations for birding research done in the Upper Peninsula. The grant has funded research on the Seney National Wildlife Refuge, Yellow Dog Plains, Peninsula Point (Stonington Peninsula) and

recently on the Keweenaw Peninsula. In 2016 the group expanded the grant to include conservation projects that will improve birding habitat or populations. Again, the work should take place in the Upper Peninsula.

Rachel Weisbeck was our 2021 grant recipient. She used the grant monies to help fund her study of “Impact of bloodborne pathogens on reproductive outcomes in white-throated sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*).” Rachel monitored a population of white-throated sparrows in Marquette County over the course of two breeding seasons (2020 and 2021). She worked with a small crew of undergraduate field assistants to determine breeding pairs, map territories, locate nests, and take small blood samples from both adult birds and nestlings in this population. Rachel then used these blood samples to determine the presence of blood-borne diseases (such as avian malaria and West Nile virus) among individuals and analyzed whether adult birds that were infected with these diseases had different reproductive outcomes than birds that were uninfected.

We would like to encourage applications for this year’s grant. All applications must be received by January 31, 2023, and the guidelines are posted on the Laughing Whitefish Audubon web page under the tab marked “Grant” <https://laughingwhitefishaudubon.com/research-conservation-grant/>.

The application process is quite simple. If you know of an individual or an organization that might be able to use this grant, please have them check out the information on the webpage – or contact an LWAS board member. THANKS!!

## **The Next Annual Sandhill Crane Count—Saturday, April 15, 2023!**

*by Cathy Waller*

Beginning in 1976 as the Columbia County Crane Survey, the Annual Midwest Crane Count has grown over four decades to include portions of seven states in the upper Midwest, including Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The crane count data is used to study Sandhill Crane population trends and new areas where cranes are colonizing. The survey also is a powerful tool for creating awareness about cranes and their wetland habitats. Wisconsin had the largest number of Sandhill Cranes recorded at 13, 019, followed by Michigan with 822 cranes in 2022.

After several years of nonparticipation, Marquette County once again had a coordinator and had 26 counters covering 22 sites and recorded 14 cranes that were seen or heard during the two-hour block on April 9<sup>th</sup>. Alger

County had 27 counters covering 21 sites and recorded 39 cranes that were seen or heard during that official count time.

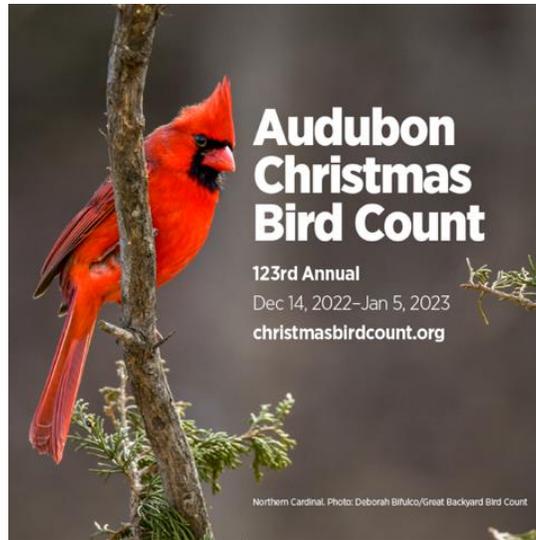
The weather was cloudy, some wind in a few areas, 27-32 degrees, and snow-covered with a significant snow fall the previous day. Everyone who participated had a fabulous morning even though most were unable to see or hear cranes. Some of the highlights were watching an otter preening, observing a fox hunting, and woodcocks performing.

Save the date for next year’s Midwest Crane Count! It will be on Saturday, April 15, 2023, 6:30 to 8:30 AM. EST. To participate in the Crane Count, you first need to contact your County Coordinator to be assigned a site and receive additional instructions.



Sandhill Cranes  
Photo by Steve Waller

Cathy Waller (cathy@upwallers.net) is the Marquette County Coordinator and 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/>



## **Christmas Bird Count Dates**

*by Cathy Waller*

Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) take place this year from December 14, 2022, through January 5, 2023. Participation is free! Audubon is following the Centers for Disease Control guidance on outdoor activities, which advises that there is very little risk of transmission outdoors. However, due to the continuing COVID-19 outbreak, compilers will be exercising caution for the 123rd Christmas Bird Count and be running a COVID-19 socially distanced CBC.

### **Saturday, December 17, 2022 (Saturday) - Marquette**

The compiler is Melinda Stamp at [mstamp@mstamp.net](mailto:mstamp@mstamp.net) or 906-869-2489.

*Meet outdoors at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot at Mattson Lower Harbor Park in Marquette. This meeting is optional, but please make sure to contact Melinda prior to the count if you are not planning to be there. **All participants must contact compiler in advance for planning purposes.** Feeder counters are especially encouraged to participate. Information about the count will be distributed on the UPBirders.org email list. To subscribe, send a message to [birdnet-subscribe@upbirders.org](mailto:birdnet-subscribe@upbirders.org) and you will receive a confirmation reply.*

### **Sunday, December 18, 2022-AuTrain Count**

The compiler is Scott Hickman at [suboscine@gmail.com](mailto:suboscine@gmail.com) or 906-892-8603.

*We will not be meeting at the start of this count at a central location. Each group will be meeting independently to census its preassigned section of the circle according to its own schedule. All communication for this count is done via email, so please contact the compiler by email at least two weeks before the count if you intend to participate. Potential participants should also know that most of the count circle is not accessible by car and is typically snow-covered on the day of the count.*

### **Tuesday, January 3, 2023- Gwinn Count**

The compiler is Brian Johnson [baidaj@yahoo.com](mailto:baidaj@yahoo.com) at or 616-600-5300.

*Contact Brian for meeting place and time. Date could change based on participants' availability.*

## LWAS Programs January– April, 2023

*(January through March programs may be switched to ZOOM instead of in-person if weather is bad)*

**DATE: January 11, 2023 (Wed) 7PM “My Accidental Big Year of 2022”**

**LOCATION:** Peter White Library, George Shiras Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

**PRESENTER: Skye Haas, LWAS board member**

*Skye, an avid birder and naturalist, hails from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where he often works as a contract biologist for organizations like Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, The Nature Conservancy, and other non-profit research groups. His specialty, however, is in conducting waterbird migration counts, most recently at the Point Pinos Seawatch in Monterey, California. Skye was formerly the waterbird counter at the Avalon Seawatch at the Cape May Bird Observatory (New Jersey), where in 2014 he was the lead counter of the team that set the all-time single season record of over one million, twenty-six thousand migrating waterbirds! Skye has a degree in conservation biology from Northern Michigan University and is a returning member of the Michigan Bird Records Committee.*

**DATE: February 8, 2023 (Wed) 7 PM**

**LOCATION:** Peter White Library, George Shiras Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

**PRESENTER: TBD**

**DATE: March 8, 2023 (Wed) 7 PM “What You Need to Know About Electric Cars”**

**LOCATION:** Peter White Library, George Shiras Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

**PRESENTER: Steve Waller, naturalist and retired NMU teacher**

*Steve Waller is a retired technical and environmental educator and writes for local publications. He has taught wind and solar energy classes at Northern Michigan University. For over twenty years his “Reading the Woods” class for the DNR’s BOW program has introduced the public to the workings and intricacies of the U.P. forests. Steve also has the highest [iNaturalist.com](https://www.inaturalist.com) species count for Marquette County, 1,026 species, found, photographed and identified entirely on his family’s 80 acre forest parcel called the Waller Research Area.*

Are you charged up about 100% electric vehicles (EVs)? Are they practical and safe? Myths, rumors, and concerns abound. People are understandably cautious about new technology, but the time for EVs has come. This program compares twelve popular EVs to each other, to three popular gasoline vehicles, and compares life with EVs to the ICE age (age of internal combustion engines). We will clarify the advantages, disadvantages, purchase prices, electricity (fuel) cost, range, charging, safety, and practicality of owning an EV. Join us and decide if an EV is the right vehicle for you. A Tesla model Y will be available on site for you to inspect after the program.

**April 12, 2023 (Wed) 7 PM “Spring Tune-Up”**

**LOCATION:** Peter White Library, George Shiras Room, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

**PRESENTER: TBD**

Join us for a refresher on the birds returning to the north woods this spring!

**THERE ARE NO PROGRAMS FROM MAY-AUGUST.**

## **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:**  
Hilary Rinsland 133 E. Buffalo Rd., Negaunee Township, MI 49866

c/o Matt Betts  
133 E. Buffalo Rd.  
Negaunee Township, MI 49866

