

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

*THE CRITICAL SPECIES ISSUE:* Kirtland's Warbler: On the Brink of Recovery? ■ A Tale of Two Peninsulas ■ Big Woods, Little Bird ■ Birding in the Name of Science ■ Nature Photography Now



# Jack Pine Warbler

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Cover Photo ■ Grasshopper Sparrow  
Photographer: Frode Jacobsen

This Grasshopper Sparrow was photographed on May 22, 2008 next to the Visitor Center at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in Dorchester County, MD. Grasshopper Sparrow is the most common species of sparrow nesting in natural grasslands and hay fields on the Delmarva Peninsula. The photograph was shot with my Canon Rebel XT camera and 100-400mm 4.0-5.6 IS zoom lens.

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## MICHIGAN AUDUBON CONNECTS BIRDS AND PEOPLE FOR THE BENEFIT OF BOTH ...

... through conservation, education, and research efforts in the state of Michigan. Formed and incorporated in 1904, it is Michigan's oldest conservation organization. Michigan Audubon supports bird surveys throughout the state, publishes survey data, provides educational opportunities, and preserves nearly 5,000 acres of land within 19 sanctuaries as habitat for birds and other wildlife. The 41 chapters of Michigan Audubon focus on local conservation issues and provide educational programs within their communities. Contributions to Michigan Audubon are tax-deductible.





# Executive Director's Letter



FOUR YEARS AGO, program coordinator Wendy Tatar and conservation director Tom Funke had the vision to create Cerulean Warbler Weekend, and so Michigan Audubon established a one-of-a-kind bird watching event featuring North America's fastest-declining songbird. In 2009, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources added the Cerulean Warbler to its list of threatened species. The other bird featured during Cerulean Warbler Weekend—Henslow's Sparrow—was added to the state's list of Endangered Species at the same time. Today, Cerulean Warbler Weekend is a unique event that connects these imperiled birds with people at a time when most bird watchers have gotten their spring migration fix and hung up their binoculars in exchange for graduation parties and summer barbecues.

Michigan Audubon graduated from the first "Ceru-lebration" in June 2008, to a program line-up that spans the entire year. The program schedule includes open house events at our bird sanctuaries and multi-day bird watching extravaganzas, such as the Tawas Point Birding Festival and CraneFest. The board and staff are committed to improving and growing these education programs.

As I write this message and while this issue is being prepared for publication, our board of directors is engaged in a six-week campaign to re-connect with our life members. Life membership is a statement of commitment to the organization, and each communication begins with "thank you." At the same time, we are looking to our life members for continued leadership in supporting our education and outreach programs. The program offerings have expanded, but we are still lacking a set of basic teaching resources—from binoculars to field guides—that will help us share

the joys of watching birds with younger generations. For \$25,000 we can invest in a traveling classroom that includes 25 pairs of new binoculars, six spotting scopes with tripods, and a library of field guides, plus travel costs for one year.

We're reaching out to all members for support in this area.

If you can help Michigan Audubon provide learning opportunities for new birders, please consider joining the board and our life members in this endeavor. Go to [www.michiganaudubon.org](http://www.michiganaudubon.org) and find the "donate" link in the upper right-hand corner of the page. Give what you can—every dollar is helpful—and please designate your gift for "education."

While you're online, consider registering for Cerulean Warbler Weekend—a recreational bird watching event that has plenty of crossover with bird conservation. The weekend takes place in Barry County not far from the charming historic town of Hastings. Participants will have the opportunity to check off close to 100 species of birds, plus learn butterfly identification and nature photography skills. Tom and Wendy have assembled a top-notch program once again, and I'm confident you will walk away with the feeling that Michigan Audubon is the state's leader in bird-related education and conservation programs.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan E. Lutz".

Jonathan E. Lutz, executive director



Tours to see the endangered Henslow's Sparrow will be offered during Cerulean Warbler Weekend.  
© Bryan Holliday.



# *Kirtland's Warbler: On the Brink of Recovery?*

BY CHRIS MENSING

A close-up photograph of a female Kirtland's Warbler perched on a jack pine branch. The bird has a greyish-brown head and back with dark streaks, and a bright yellow underbelly with dark spots. It is looking to the left. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting a natural habitat.

**K**IRTLAND'S WARBLER has long attracted the attention of bird lovers worldwide because of its rarity and its loud, clear, and distinctive song. Yet only a few decades ago, this species hovered on the brink of extinction. Fortunately, successful conservation efforts have shifted the future of Kirtland's Warbler from extinction to recovery.



The Kirtland's Warbler story begins with its specific nesting requirements. It requires large stands of young, dense jack pine, most commonly found in the northern lower peninsula of Michigan. These habitat conditions were historically created by frequent wildfires. The Kirtland's Warbler was so dependent on wildfires and the resulting jack pine habitat that the warbler is sometimes referred to as the Jack Pine Warbler or the Bird of Fire. Unfortunately, by the middle of the 20th century, forest fire suppression dramatically reduced the amount of nesting habitat.

In addition to limited nesting habitat, the expansion of Brown-headed Cowbirds into northern Michigan has also negatively impacted the Kirtland's Warbler. Brown-headed Cowbirds are nest parasites: they lay their eggs in Kirtland's Warblers' nests, which reduces the bird's reproductive success. At one time, nearly 70% of all Kirtland's Warbler nests were parasitized, and fewer than one Kirtland's Warbler chick would fledge.

Responding to those threats, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and many others (including Michigan Audubon, of course), have been working to ensure that Kirtland's Warbler will be around for future generations. More than 200,000 acres of jack pine forest are managed across the northern lower peninsula of Michigan and the eastern Upper Peninsula. These areas are managed on a 50-year rotation, simultaneously providing adequate nesting habitat for the Kirtland's Warbler in addition to a valuable timber product. Each year, the USFS and MDNR harvest approximately 4,000 acres of mature jack pine forest and generate new, young jack pine stands. In addition, the USFWS conducts annual cowbird trapping to protect Kirtland's Warblers from Brown-headed Cowbird parasitization.

These actions have resulted in increased amounts of suitable habitat, reduced nest parasitism rates, and significant growth of the Kirtland's Warbler population. The 2010 Kirtland's Warbler census counted 1,773 singing males, the third highest on record.

This is a dramatic increase from 1987, when only 167 singing males were counted. The recovery programs have been so successful, that the bird has expanded its range across the U.P. and into Canada and Wisconsin.

While the intensive habitat management is generally referred to as Kirtland's Warbler management, it may be more appropriate to call it jack pine ecosystem management. In an attempt to mimic some of the characteristics created by wildfire, land managers keep a number of areas open and unplanted, leave larger strips of mature trees, and manage larger contiguous blocks of habitat. Many other species benefit from this ecosystem approach to jack pine management. Songbirds such as Clay-colored Sparrows, Nashville Warblers, Eastern Bluebird, and Upland Sandpipers thrive in the jack pine ecosystem. Game species such as turkey, white-tailed deer, black bear, and Ruffed Grouse also utilize the jack pine.

Understanding what Kirtland's Warblers need on their breeding grounds is only part of the picture. Little is known about the warbler's wintering grounds in the Bahamas. Researchers have recently been studying the bird's distribution, behavior, and diet to determine what factors, if any, may pose a threat to its wintering grounds.

With the warbler's population at record highs and habitat management programs well-established, the USFWS is beginning discussions to determine if the species can be removed from the Threatened and Endangered Species List. This would be the first time a conservation-reliant species of this magnitude is delisted. The primary hurdle to be addressed is the dependency of Kirtland's Warbler on habitat management and cowbird control. As a conservation-reliant species, Kirtland's Warbler will always require some level of management. In the absence of the Endangered Species Act, it is unclear how current management programs would continue. To address these issues, the USFWS, USFS, and

MDNR are developing a Memorandum of Understanding, that would commit these agencies to provide the management necessary for Kirtland's Warbler in perpetuity.



Clearcuts are used to regenerate jack pine stands. Some trees are left to mimic the effects of a wildfire. © Chris Mensing.

Unfortunately, funding these management programs is always a struggle. Annual appropriations both on federal and state levels are never guaranteed, making it hard to commit long-term resources. To offset that uncertainty, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has been working to develop a Kirtland's Warbler friends group and endowment. This endowment would facilitate management of the species by offsetting any shortfalls in funding. Furthermore, a conservation plan is being formulated by the USFWS, USFS, and MDNR to help guide future management of the warbler, incorporating everything we have learned over the last 50 years.

It remains unclear if Kirtland's Warbler will ever be delisted, but it is remarkable that the discussion is even possible. Kirtland's Warbler is one of the true successes of the Endangered Species Act and provides hope for the recovery of other conservation-reliant species.

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Chris Mensing is a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's East Lansing field office. He has been working on the Kirtland's Warbler recovery project for the last 11 years, and may be contacted at [chris\\_mensing@fws.gov](mailto:chris_mensing@fws.gov).

# A Tale of Two Peninsulas: Birding the Garden and Stonington Peninsulas

BY SKYE HAAS AND JOE KAPLAN

**I**n the far reaches of northern Lake Michigan in Delta County, two peninsulas jut into the waters of Green Bay. The Garden and Stonington Peninsulas are biologically rich areas, with the waters of Green Bay considered by many to be the most ecologically productive systems in the Great Lakes. Inland, dense cedar forest and extensive old farm and pastureland make excellent habitat for breeding birds, and the miles of wooded shoreline, sandy beaches, and many coastal marshes along both peninsulas make for a literal funnel migration.



**TOP:** Getting a good look at a Canada Warbler can be challenging, as it is fond of skulking in thick, brushy tangles. This Canada Warbler was photographed at Peninsula Point on May 22, 2010.

**BOTTOM:** In upper Green Bay, it's possible to see over twenty species of shorebirds in a day during peak migration. This breeding plumaged Short-billed Dowitcher was photographed at Peninsula Point on May 19, 2009. © Skye Haas.

County Road 513 is a classic birding "highway." On days of good migration, flocks of sparrows line the road, often by the hundreds. Overhead, flocks of Blue Jay, blackbirds, and robins can be conspicuous as they follow the coastline. Traveling south to the Village of Stonington, forest yields to scattered farms and here the attentive observer may be rewarded with open country species, including Sedge Wren, Bobolink, Brewer's Blackbird, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. Notable finds along this stretch include surprises like Mountain Bluebird, Loggerhead Shrike,

Western Kingbird, and Summer Tanager. Not as rare but still notable are Hudsonian Godwit, Long-eared Owl, Dickcissel, and Western Meadowlark. Be on the lookout for western fox snakes: all too often these magnificent reptiles are subject to road-kill.

Finally, the road ends at the Peninsula Point Lighthouse. Reminiscent of the internationally known Point Pelee, geography, habitat, and food resources combine to create an excellent stop-over site for migrating birds and butterflies. However, with its one-lane dirt road and lack of infrastructure (and crowds), this charming and isolated place is the Pelee from the 1950s you often read about.

Peninsula Point is Ellis Island for spring migration in the North Woods, and often the first Eastern Phoebe, Winter Wren, or Myrtle Warbler can be found here, often days if not weeks before being reported elsewhere in the U.P. March and April can bring waterfowl staging offshore, primarily aythya, Long-tailed Ducks, and Goldeneye and Red-breasted Mergansers, all recorded annually by the thousands.

If the waterfowl, shorebirds, and sparrows aren't enough of a marvel, the return of neotropical migrants makes May a dream here. A good day in mid-month sees flycatchers, vireos, 15-20 species of warblers and all the Indigo Buntings, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Baltimore Orioles, and Scarlet Tanagers one could ever want, feeding on an abundance of midges that fuel these migrants' next leg northwards. Orchard Orioles are annual here, and southern overshoots like Blue-winged Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Carolina Wren have been recorded.

Spring is barely a memory when the first southbound birds begin returning in late July, with numbers of warblers and flycatchers building steadily through August and peaking in early September. Shorebirds abound at this time of year, with flocks of yellowlegs, "peeps," sandpipers, and dowitchers. Other waterbirds include impressive numbers of Horned Grebes, Bonaparte's Gulls, and Common Terns, along with notable rarities such as Eared Grebe, Franklin's Gull, and Black-legged Kittiwake. Diurnal migrants like Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Rusty Blackbirds, and various finch species can be seen in epic numbers in October. Also in abundance are Winter Wrens and Brown Creepers that fill the Point's thick cedar stands. In a reverse of spring, migrants linger late into the year here: November sightings of Black-throated Blue, Chestnut-sided and Yellow-throated Warblers have made the record books in recent years.

The Garden Peninsula is the lesser well-known of these two migration flyways due to its relative isolation and more limited public access. Fayette State Park on the east side of the Garden can become a river of migrants, with hundreds of warblers and sparrows streaming up or down the peninsula. The entrance to





Always a treat to see, this male Bay-breasted Warbler was photographed on May 22, 2010 at Peninsula Point, in the act of migrating to the boreal forest after spending a tropical winter in northern South America. © 2010 Skye Haas.

the park supports a colony of Field Sparrows, an uncommon U.P. breeder. Winter birding can be more rewarding here than on the Stonington, perhaps due to the more expansive and diverse open country. Sharp-tailed Grouse, Rough-legged Hawks, and Snow Buntings are frequently found; a few Great Gray Owls were located during the last invasion in 2005. Particularly thrilling was a white-morph Gyrfalcon that spent consecutive seasons near the Village of Garden. Bohemian Waxwings can be found in the fruit trees that line County Road 183 south to the small fishing town of Fairport. Good opportunities for waterbirds and gulls can be found, as water often stays ice-free, in contrast to Green Bay. American White Pelicans are a common sight beginning in May and through the summer. Autumn sees a significant hawk migration through the area, though there have been few systematic attempts to quantify the raptor migration on the Garden. Large numbers of Sandhill Cranes are recorded in both spring and fall. Numerous offshore islands (Poverty, Summer, St. Martin's) create a broken bridge to Wisconsin's Door Peninsula and though undoubtedly important for migrants, it is probably better known to radar ornithologists (see side bar).

Finally, anyone birding either of these peninsulas should stop by Indian Point. This extensive coastal plain tucked between the Stonington and the Garden can be productive during shorebird season. Large flocks of Black-bellied Plovers, American Golden Plovers, Baird's and Buff-breasted Sandpipers are annual, with Red Knots and both species of Godwits also found repeatedly. When birding here between May and July, please be mindful of nesting Piping Plovers and give them a wide berth.

Both these pleasant peninsulas are just a delight to birders, and the adventurous can still make significant contributions to our knowledge of this under-birded region. Hopefully, with more attention, the significance of bird migration here will be thoroughly documented, appreciated, and most importantly protected for future generations.

A student at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Skye Christopher G. Haas is the author of the U.P. Rare Bird Report, which is distributed via listserve and can be found at UPBirders.org. He has run birding tours for Michigan Audubon, conducts field surveys for the Nature Conservancy, is a former counter at the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, and most recently is a coordinator of the Keweenaw Raptor Survey. Biologist Joe Kaplan is the director of Common Coast Research and Conservation and a U.P. resident. He is a former director of the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory where he was instrumental in establishing an extension of the Seney National Wildlife Refuge at the Point. Joe is assisting a new Michigan Audubon project in northwestern Michigan: the Chain of Lakes LOON NETWORK, an effort to more closely monitor the region's Common Loon population.

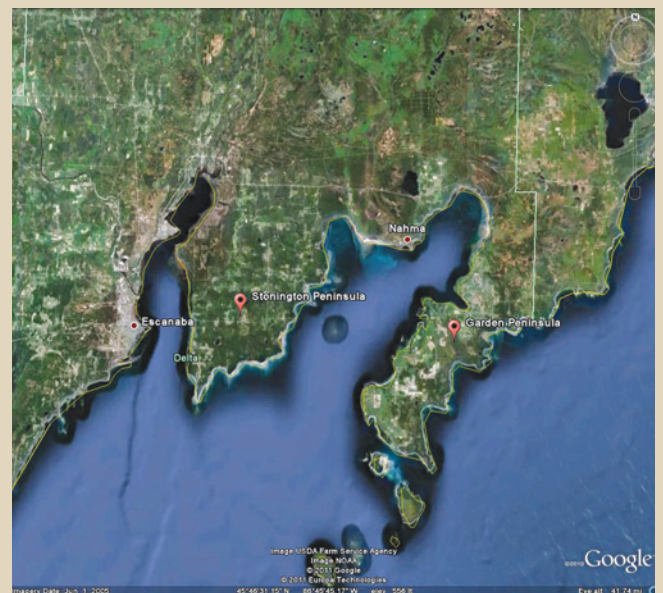
## Weather Technology Aids in Understanding Migration

Millions of North American songbirds fly across the western hemisphere during their annual spring and fall migrations. The Great Lakes present a formidable challenge to birds navigating these huge inland seas, and as a result many are found concentrated along the shoreline, especially during inclement weather. Migrants such as warblers, tanagers, and thrushes flying over the Great Lakes at night gain altitude at dawn to orient themselves to the nearest prominent land mass. Much of our understanding about this nocturnal phenomenon comes from studying NEXRAD radar images that track masses of birds much like they track storm events.

The weather radar station in Gaylord, MI regularly records large numbers of migrants crossing northern Lake Michigan. In fact, "shadows" created by birds over open water mimic the shape of the islands and peninsulas where they take refuge during the day. The Garden Peninsula features prominently in this spectacle, funneling birds from Wisconsin's Door Peninsula, Lake Michigan's offshore islands, and the northern lower peninsula.

Unfortunately, industrial wind farms proposed for the Garden Peninsula and offshore waters may soon threaten this flyway. The impact of tall turbines (some reaching over 500 feet into the sky) on migrants is unknown, though millions of songbirds are killed annually by striking similar tall structures such as communication towers and skyscrapers.

Sadly, while plans for wind farms go forward, the regulatory framework for assessing their impacts on wildlife remains in its infancy. Without proper implementation, the danger to Michigan's migratory birds posed by industrial wind may eclipse its promise as a source of green energy.



Google Earth image of Stonington and Garden Peninsulas.

# Websitings

## Birding in the Name of Science

BY MICHELLE BARBER



he Department of Natural Resources certainly knows its bird facts, but the Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a “world leader in the study, appreciation, and conservation of birds” (1).

A visit to a few of Cornell’s websites devoted to birds can teach you a lot about your favorite winged creatures.

Do you enjoy a more scientific approach to birding? Cornell Lab of Ornithology appreciates citizen scientists and would like your help. Project Feederwatch is an opportunity for birders to keep tabs on the birds in their yards (2). The objective is to provide some sort of habitat in your yard—a feeder, plants, water—and track the birds that make an appearance. This is a winter activity, so you may be pleasantly surprised that the bird population in your yard might increase as a result of what you provide. The data from this study is presented in scientific journals and it’s important that birds in your area be represented in the data. The \$15 participation fee provides you with your research kit (instructions, a bird identification guide, and much more) and covers staff support, web design, data analysis, and the final report. Project Feederwatch is funded almost entirely by participation fees, so enroll today to get involved in this research opportunity.

If Project Feederwatch sounds interesting, you might also enjoy Cornell’s NestWatch (3). It’s a continuous research project that, again, involves citizen scientists. In collaboration with Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, Cornell Lab of Ornithology tracks the nesting and reproductive success of North American breeding birds. The NestWatch program teaches citizen scientists about bird breeding, engaging them in collecting and submitting nest records. You can record nest locations, habitat, species, and number of eggs, young, or fledglings and submit your data to help this research.

If you are interested in contributing to scientific research but do not feel you have the time to participate in Project Feederwatch or NestWatch, you might be interested in eBird (4). It is an online, real-time checklist, revolutionizing the way birders can track and report the species they observe. Because of its accessibility (it’s easily available to anyone with an internet connection), eBird is rapidly growing, and more and more birds are being recorded. In January 2010, more than 1.5 million birds were reported by participants across North America, and the number is expected to continue to rise. The eBird program can be used by recreational birders, so take a few minutes after your birding sessions to help science by documenting the birds you have seen. While you are on the site documenting your own birding data, don’t forget to take a look at the data provided by other birders, available in maps, charts, and graphs.

Does all this scientific talk turn you off? Are you into birding for nothing more than the thrill of seeing a bird you’ve never seen before? If that is the case, Cornell’s “All About Birds” site is a great place for you to visit (5). This domain is dedicated to birders, with bird identification guides, birding tips, and suggestions on how to get involved with conservation efforts. The site includes a search engine to find a specific bird, but also offers options to browse the database by name and shape or taxonomy. The birding tips offered—such as how to attract birds to your yard or tips for building birding skills—are practical and helpful.

Whether you like to watch the birds at your feeder as you sip your morning coffee or spend most of your Saturdays out in the field searching for a new species to check off your list, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a website for you.

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Michelle Barber graduated from Michigan State University in December 2010 with a major in professional writing. You may contact her at [barberm7@msu.edu](mailto:barberm7@msu.edu).

## Visit these sites:

- (1) [www.birds.cornell.edu/](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/)
- (2) [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw)
- (3) [www.nestwatch.org/](http://www.nestwatch.org/)
- (4) <http://ebird.org/>
- (5) [www.allaboutbirds.org/](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/)



By monitoring bird nests like this one, you can participate in NestWatch.  
© 2010 Jonathan Morgan.

TheCornellLab  of Ornithology

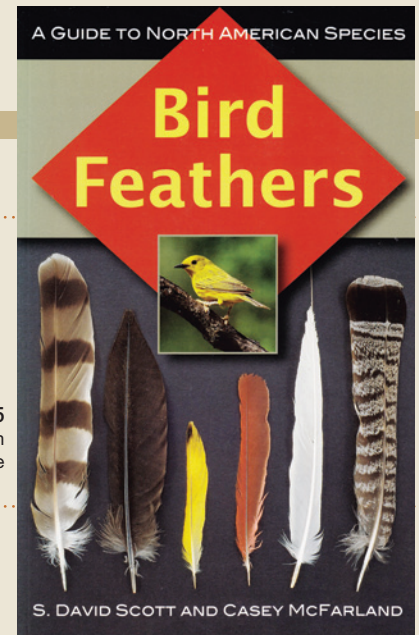


# Book Review

## *Bird Feathers: A Guide to North American Species*

BY S. DAVID SCOTT AND CASEY MCFARLAND  
(STACKPOLE BOOKS, 2010, 358 PP.)

REVIEWED BY JONATHAN WUEPPER



\$34.95

Available at the Michigan  
Audubon Bookstore

**T**his is a book that's long overdue. *Bird Feathers* may be the first book to show, through excellent color photographs, the feathers of each family of bird species in North America. It's an excellent book for any birder's naturalist library.

A good discussion of the laws covering the possession of feathers is contained in the book's introduction, presenting the history of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the laws that preceded it, and recommendations for what to do when you find feathers. This part is an essential section to read, as you do not want to be found in possession of bird feathers if you do not have a permit from the federal or state governments to have them.

The book is arranged in two parts. In the first section, the authors provide an overview of how birds and their feathers have evolved. The authors then devote time to avian physiology, discussing how a wing works and the differences between the wings of flightless birds and of those that can fly. In the last chapter of this section, the authors discuss the six types of feathers: contour, semiplume, filoplume, bristle, down, and flight. Flight feathers are covered in great detail, and these pages are color-coded so they can be found easily when out in the field. The dynamics of flight, molts, plumage, and parts of a single feather are discussed in an easily understandable way, making this a great book for even a beginning birder.

The second part of the book is divided into species accounts of birds regularly found in North America. With exceptional color plates and range maps, this is an essential guide for the beginning birder as well as the seasoned naturalist who wants to be able to identify the feathers found while exploring the great outdoors. The authors even include recommendations about other books and websites to get additional feather information.

*Bird Feathers* is a good technical guide; it's also accessible to the general public. It's sized to be carried easily into the field. I would recommend putting it at the top of your wish list.

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# Big Woods, Little Bird

BY WENDY TATAR

**T**HOSE OF YOU who know the natural history of Cerulean Warbler realize why the words in my title apply to this species. Why is it that the Cerulean Warbler, a bird smaller than a Black-capped Chickadee, needs to have large, unbroken expanses of mature hardwood forest in which to nest? This is a question that we are often asked at Michigan Audubon, and it is one to which we may never know the answer. Scientists are attempting to find out as much information as possible about this species on both its breeding and wintering grounds, to help answer this and many other questions about our little blue-feathered friend. But they may not have much time left.

According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "All About Birds" website, the Cerulean Warbler is one of the species of highest concern in the eastern United States because of a small total population size and significant declines throughout its range. The species is under consideration for listing under the Endangered Species Act. It is already listed on the Audubon Watchlist. That is why it was so incredibly exciting to watch a female as she constructed her nest high above our heads within the Barry State Game Area last year during Michigan Audubon's signature event, Cerulean Warbler Weekend (CWW).

The female bird does all the work in making her nest. She uses tree bark fibers, grass stems, and hair, binding it all together with spider webs. The one our tour group watched in 2010 was busy flying back and forth nonstop from the nest to her material supply. This was a rare treat, one that doesn't come along very often.

CWW provides the opportunity to see other rare species besides Cerulean Warbler. The event headquarters at Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary is the nesting site of Henslow's Sparrow. In addition to the Cerulean, four species of empid flycatchers can also be found in the state game areas (Acadian, Alder, Willow,



and Least). Not far from Otis along the Thornapple River, Red-headed Woodpeckers make their home in the dead trees that stand in the floodplains. Tours to see all of these species are planned for this year's CWW.

Along with birding trips, the weekend will have workshops on photography and butterflies, kayak trips on Glass Creek, and a banquet with keynote speaker Alicia King, who is communications coordinator and urban bird treaty coordinator for the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Program, prior to holding this position Alicia was the director of bird conservation alliance for the American Bird Conservancy. She has studied and researched Cerulean Warblers in both their summer and winter habitats and will share her knowledge about Cerulean Warblers and other neotropical songbirds.

Exploring the fields and forests of Barry County provides great birding and wildlife viewing opportunities, and this is what makes CWW so special. Whether you get to see a female Cerulean Warbler building her nest, or a Common Yellowthroat greets you as you exit your vehicle in the Otis parking lot, I hope that this event will come to hold a special place in your heart as it does in mine.

---

Wendy Tatar ([wendy@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:wendy@michiganaudubon.org)) is the program coordinator for Michigan Audubon.





Cerulean Warblers, like this male, need large tracts of unbroken mature forests in which to nest. © Frode Jacobsen.

## CERULEAN WARBLER WEEKEND

June 3–5, 2011

### Event Information and Registration

[www.ceruleanwarbler.org](http://www.ceruleanwarbler.org)

### Location

Michigan Audubon Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary  
3560 Havens Road, Hastings, Michigan

### Sanctuary Amenities

parking, maintained trails, canoe/kayak launch, canoe rental, cabin rental, seasonal restrooms, on-site sanctuary manager, picnic tables



## We Welcome New Michigan Audubon Members

We thank you—our newest members as well as our renewing members—for your support of Michigan Audubon's bird conservation efforts.

Sarah Abood  
Daniel & Mary Arnold  
Gayle & Del Bachert  
Connie Bird  
David Boon  
Patricia Brandon  
Robert Bruggema  
Jacki Brus  
Walter G. Budweil  
Jim Campau  
Melisse Carr  
Geri Caruso  
Paul Chad  
George Copp  
Erma Criner  
Sharon Crockett  
William Deming  
Alaine Depner  
Judy Dluzen  
Chris Dunkel  
Karen Dyer  
Mark Elliott  
John Faccio  
Nathan Fowler  
Janet V. Frankman  
Frederica Frost  
Nancy Govan  
Kathleen Hansen

Lawrence Hanson  
Douglas Hardman  
Vic & Carmen Janson  
Jerome S. Jourdan  
Althea Korytkowski  
Mickey Kress  
Susan Laidlaw  
Dave LaPorte  
Donette Lind  
Rodney McGilvra  
Patricia Mills  
Larry Minch  
Anna Norris  
Glenn Palmgren  
Daniel Patterson  
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Please remember to check your expiration date and renew early. If you share your *Jack Pine Warbler* with friends, family, and neighbors, please encourage them to use the enclosed remittance envelope to join you in your support of Michigan Audubon. Members moving or changing to a seasonal residence should contact the office by phone, post, or e-mail so that we can update your address in our database.

# Feathered Lens

## Nature Photography Now: Shooting with the Equipment You Already Own

BY JOSH HAAS

**W**ith all the amazing nature photographs hitting the Web these days, many aspiring photographers assume the images are captured only with the most advanced gear that money can buy. While a photographer's tools are without a doubt getting more advanced by the minute, the photographer is still the most critical component in creating a masterpiece. What does this mean? It means that great images can be captured even if you're on a budget or using older equipment. The most important things to know when taking pictures are the limits of the lighting and your camera. I encourage budding photographers to spend more time working with any camera they can get their hands on and to learn about proper exposure.

Older point-and-shoot cameras are capable of capturing amazing images. Digital cameras with fewer than 5 megapixels will still create great photographs, even if the images just can't be blown up into large wall-hangers. Likewise, film cameras—now mostly tossed aside in favor of digital—will yield photographs with rich colors and the possibility of enlarging photographs easily without losing important details. Chances are you have either a film or digital point-and-shoot camera at your disposal. If not, your local thrift store probably has a decent selection of cameras at bargain prices. Take advantage of the opportunity, get some film, and be creative; know the limits of your older camera and don't waste film on birds that are far away. Patience is a must when using film: waiting for the right moment will save you money in both film and processing. Study exposure techniques so fewer of your photographs find their way to the trash can. Your local library probably has some resources to get you started.

All bird photographers, from seasoned veterans to those just starting, typically complain about the same thing: there's never enough focal length. One solution, of course, is to invest in longer lenses. In the spirit of budget photography, though, I suggest researching the bird species you're seeking and find places where your desired subjects are likely to be closer to your lens. If you are a seasoned birder just getting into bird photography, you will probably realize that most "very close" birds are actually too far for a frame-filling photograph. If you are shooting with a point-and-shoot camera, wildlife needs to be closer yet.

Point-and-shoot cameras are designed to take photos of people, but they do well with landscapes, too. Images of a large scene with birds appearing smaller in the frame can be striking and present a great story. Composing a shot with some room in the photograph around a bird can be more creative than a shot composed of only the bird. I suggest limiting the use of a digital zoom and using only your camera's optical zoom. Cropping



Photographer Josh Haas uses morning sunlight to capture mist on the spiderwebs in this photo. Using this angle creates a silhouette of the Belted Kingfisher.

your images digitally will greatly diminish the quality of the image; using only the physical zoom of your camera, which may be your only option if using film, will ensure that you're getting the highest-quality image possible.

Two of the simplest non-technical tips I can offer are these: always be aware of the sun's location, and look for stability when shooting in low light. Regardless of the quality of your camera, if you want to see rich details on a bird's face, make sure the sun is behind you, properly lighting the bird's features. Where light is limited—under the dense forest canopy, for instance—use a boardwalk rail as camera rest or lean against a tree to steady your camera.

Always remember that taking photographs should be fun. Never let your frustrations take over and ruin what can still be a great day of birding. Keep your approach to nature photography simple and don't forget to make time for enjoying the birds without worrying about capturing the perfect image. Be respectful of fellow birders and photographers, and let your creative juices flow.

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Josh Haas ([www.glancesatnature.com](http://www.glancesatnature.com)) specializes in bird and nature photography, trips, and workshops. His work may be seen at numerous art shows throughout Michigan as well as online.





## Young Birders



This displaying male Spruce Grouse was photographed by Harold Eyster during the author's trip to the U.P.

### A Spring Obsession

BY ALISON VILAG

My parents aren't really birders. To this day, I'm still not sure why they thought I'd find birding more desirable than ballet. Or swimming.

Or anything more conventional than a hobby that regularly includes spending hours at landfills, scoping colossal sewage treatment plants, or observing your exposed extremities turn a shade astonishingly similar to a male Pine Grosbeak.

One spring, having received some divine inspiration, my parents took me to the Upper Peninsula on my first birding trip—and although I've been really lucky to travel in the name of birding throughout Latin and North America since then (I can't lie: Andean Cock-of-the-rocks and Rhinoceros Auklets are, well, pretty crazy)—that first excursion cemented the U.P. at the top of my favorite places to bird. It's remote. It's beautiful. It has seasons: frozen, thawing and wet, buggy and wet, and cold and wet, all of which make it unappealing to the faint-of-heart. And it has great birding. From snowshoeing through a flock of Boreal Chickadees at Peshekee Grade, to being serenaded by Common Loons and Whip-poor-wills at a secluded campsite, to being pinned in the icy glare of a Northern Hawk-Owl, birding there provides experiences hard to come by in the lower peninsula. And it also holds Spruce Grouse.

I strongly believe that there are few people who wouldn't jump at the opportunity to take in the intricate mottling, glowing, scarlet combs, and coppery tail tips of a displaying male. So I always jump at the chance to share my passion for them with anyone who happens to be within reach. Last November, I trekked with my dad and two of my friends (Harold Eyster and Neil

Gilbert, also intense young birders from southern Michigan) to the Upper Peninsula for a weekend of pasty consumption, midnight euchre in WPBO's parking lot—and of course—Spruce Grouse.

Actually, Spruce Grouse might have been the target of the trip. You see, even though Neil has birded in Michigan for most of his life, he had yet to connect with a Spruce Grouse. So Harold and I were determined to fix this unacceptable deprivation. We saw a lot of great birds that weekend—Michigan's first Anna's Hummingbird, a Short-eared Owl, some Red Crossbill.

The best moment, though? Without a doubt, walking along a remote two-track our last morning, listening to Red-breasted Nuthatches one moment, and the next realizing we were surrounded by displaying Spruce Grouse. Captivated, we watched the grouse dancing oblivious of us only a few feet away on a thick mat of lichen and bracken ferns. It was like listening to a haunting melody, like savoring a wedge of dark Toblerone, like smelling a cedar swamp in the morning mist. I can't explain my insatiable infatuation with Spruce Grouse, but anyone who has had the privilege of watching them understands exactly what I mean. I'm grateful that my parents had the foresight to take me to the U.P. eight years ago, because by doing so, they sparked a lifelong passion.

Alison Vilag of Berrien County has had an arguably unhealthy obsession with birds for the past eleven years. She is especially fixated on lake watching and bigbying (see [www.sparroworks.ca/bigby.html](http://www.sparroworks.ca/bigby.html)), and also enjoys distance running and cycling. She is a high school senior, plans to study biology at Grand Valley State University this fall, and can be reached at [owler6@gmail.com](mailto:owler6@gmail.com).

## Calendar

### May

#### Weekends

**International Migratory Bird Day Festival**  
Copper Harbor

12–15 **Tawas Point Birding Festival**  
East Tawas and Oscoda

15 **Kirtland's Warbler tours begin**  
Grayling

21 **Kirtland's Warbler Festival**  
Roscommon

### June

1–5 **Leelanau Peninsula 2011 BirdFest**  
Lake Leelanau

3–5 **Cerulean Warbler Weekend**  
Barry County

### July

4 **Last day for Kirtland's Warbler tours**  
Grayling

# Announcements

Male Kirtland's Warbler can be seen on guided tours leaving from Grayling © William Norton.



## Events

### Head to Grayling for Kirtland's Warbler Tours

Spring brings the Kirtland's Warbler back to Michigan, providing the opportunity to see them without spending much money. Michigan Audubon will again provide a tour guide for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to lead free tours beginning at the Grayling Ramada Inn. Tours are scheduled daily at 7:00 and 11:00 AM beginning May 15. The last day for tours will be July 4. Reservations are required only for groups of more than five individuals.

### Specialty Tours in the Eastern Upper Peninsula

Michigan Audubon will again offer one-day specialty tours to search for the elusive Connecticut Warbler. They'll be offered on the first three Saturdays in June (4, 11, and 18). Led by U.P. birding expert Skye Haas, the guided tours will target other species, such as Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Golden-winged Warbler, and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.

Tours will begin at 6 AM and conclude at approximately 6 PM. Each tour is limited to 12 participants. The cost is \$60 for Michigan Audubon members and \$75 for non-members. Reserve your tour spot online at [www.michiganaudubon.org](http://www.michiganaudubon.org) or by contacting Wendy Tatar at 517-886-9144.

### Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Festival: Art, Family, and Tours

The 19th annual Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Festival will be held on Saturday May 21 on the campus of Kirtland Community College in Roscommon. Participants can purchase a \$6 festival button to ride the bus to view the endangered Kirtland's Warbler and listen to presentations of a variety of nature-related topics. All other activities are free. Families can enjoy nature walks, horse-drawn nature tours, a kids' activity tent, fishing pond, arts-and-craft show, kids' rock hunt, and much more. Michigan Audubon's bookstore will be set up. Visit the event website (<http://warbler.kirtland.edu>) for more information or to purchase an event button.

## News

### New Auto Trail Expands Bird Watching near Saginaw Bay

According to a press release from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, a 7.5-mile auto trail through Saginaw County's Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge will open in May, in time for visitors to view thousands of birds as they stop to refuel at the refuge.

The \$2 million project, funded by the service and the Federal Highway Administration, is part of a 2001 comprehensive federal conservation plan requiring all national wildlife refuges to develop programs to preserve their ecological values and maintain their wilderness characteristics. Ed DeVries, assistant manager of the refuge, indicates that an exact opening date has not been set yet: "Everything will depend on a pair of eagles which built a nest just 50 feet off the road. It all depends whether they start nesting early or late—it's critical that we do not disturb them," DeVries said.

The gravel trail, which was completed in November, will be the second of its kind in the state, after one in the Upper Peninsula's Seney National Wildlife Refuge.

Along the trail are two new observation decks with spotting scopes to assist visitors in viewing more birds, DeVries said. The refuge has also constructed a parking area to accommodate the anticipated larger amount of traffic and a new fishing and canoe access site along the Spaulding Drain.

Approximately 50,000 visitors are attracted to the 9,500+ acre refuge each year, but with the auto trail, officials project that number will increase by 60 percent. To find out more about the refuge check out [www.fws.gov/midwest/Shiawassee](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Shiawassee).



The Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most northerly nesting sites of Prothonotary Warbler. © Robert Epstein.



Caspian Tern. © Kevin Karlson.



## Events

### Unique Birding Tours Highlight Leelanau Peninsula BirdFest

The Leelanau Peninsula Chamber of Commerce announces the First Annual Leelanau Peninsula BirdFest, to be held Wednesday June 1 through Sunday June 5. This unique festival offers a wide variety of distinctly different field trips, including a Sunday morning sail aboard Inland Seas' schooner to see nesting gulls, cormorants, and Caspian terns on Gull Island. Also slated are a bus trip to the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy's prairie installation near Arcadia Dunes to see nesting upland birds such as Northern Harrier, and pontoon boat trips down the Leelanau Conservancy's Cedar River Preserve. You can learn to bird by ear with Tom Ford along the TART Trail, spend an afternoon with nesting endangered Great Lakes Piping Plovers, and choose from two separate field trips to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore to look at breeding birds. Visits to Leelanau State Park, Veronica Valley, Saving Birds Thru Habitat, Leelanau Conservancy's Lighthouse West, Suttons Bay wetlands, and two protected private properties round out field trip offerings.

Headquarters for the event will be Fountain Point Resort. There are planned bird hikes on the heavily wooded lakeshore property every morning, wine and cheese mixers in the afternoon, and keynote speaker presentations in the evenings. Keynote speakers will be Dave Barrons, MDOT wildlife biologist Dick Wolinski, and well-known bird conservationist and author Paul Baicich from Maryland.

Registration for the full event, excluding three of the trips, is \$75. You can also register for single events. For more information, or to register, go to the Leelanau Peninsula Chamber of Commerce website ([www.leelanauchamber.com](http://www.leelanauchamber.com)).

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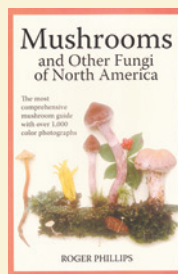
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## Bird Coloration

by Geoffrey E. Hill for National Geographic  
**\$27.50 (hardcover)**

This is possibly the first book to explain in great detail why birds have the colors they do. The book contains over 200 color photographs, many helping to explain avian coloration.

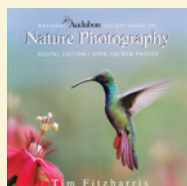


## Mushrooms and Other Fungi of North America

by Roger Phillips

**\$29.95**

Just released in 2010, this field guide includes not only the mushrooms you find on the forest floor, but also the fungi you see growing on trees, and the slimy stuff on dead logs. Color photographs show each species in great detail.

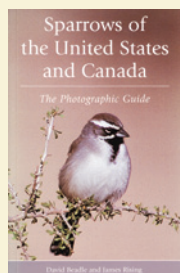


## National Audubon Society Guide to Nature Photography: Digital Edition

by Tim Fitzharris

**\$24.95**

Great for the beginner or for those wanting to take their photography to the expert level, this book covers both landscape and wildlife photography. It includes step-by-step instructions, before-and-after comparisons, and hundreds of examples to help you take professional-caliber photographs. It also includes tips on digital processing and use of programs such as Photoshop.



## Sparrows of the United States and Canada: The Photographic Guide

by David Beadle and James Rising

**\$29.95**

If you want to improve your sparrow identification skills, this is the book for you. Over 350 photographs help you identify all 64 taxa of emberizine sparrow found in the United States or Canada.



## Blue Sky Bluebird

by Rick Chrustowski

**\$16.95 (hardcover)**

Children will learn the entire natural history of Eastern Bluebird in this beautifully illustrated storybook. Included in the back is information about the mountain and western species. Sure to delight children ages 4-8.

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