An Uncommon Place: Birding Lake Erie Metropark

Still Soaring: The Keweenaw Raptor Survey’s 2011 Spring Season

Activities Abound at CraneFest

Contents

Features

2 An Uncommon Place: Birding Lake Erie Metropark

4 Still Soaring: The Keweenaw Raptor Survey’s 2011 Spring Season

8 Activities Abound at CraneFest

Columns

6 Websittings

7 Book Review

10 Feathered Lens

Departments

1 Executive Director’s Letter

11 Young Birders

12 Announcements

Cover Photo: Screech-Owl

Photographer: Dave Haas

This Eastern Screech-Owl image was captured at an Outdoor Discovery Center photo-shoot in Holland, Michigan. The photo was taken May 21, 2005, with a Nikon E8800, 1/60th sec, f5.8, ISO 50. Adobe Photoshop CS was used to perform post-processing of the image. The goal of the post-processing was to put all the focus on the owl’s eyes and bring out the richness and detail of the tree. After isolating the tree from the Owl, different levels of sharpening, mid-tone color corrections, and saturation were applied for the end result.

Printed on recycled paper made from 100% post-consumer waste.
I’VE ALWAYS CONSIDERED
the out-of-doors to be my “big screen.”
The best entertainment, I find, is in nature—
from the microhabitat in the foliage of
a pitcher plant to a sprawling shallow
wetland featuring Michigan’s largest
staging population of Greater Sandhill
Cranes. Michigan birders have even more
to look forward to this season, though, as
birding hits the other big screen. This fall,
bird watching is going to Hollywood.

Steve Martin, along with comedy co-stars
Jack Black and Owen Wilson, will re-create
Mark Obmascik’s story about three birders
competing to spot the rarest birds in North
America. The film is based on Obmascik’s
book, The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature,
and a Fowl Obsession, and is due in theaters
in October. We featured a review of the
book in the first Jack Pine Warbler issue
of 2011. There’s no doubt that the film will
bring even greater attention to the sport
of bird watching; with any luck, The Big
Year will provide some direct benefits
to bird conservation.

Star birdwatcher Caleb Putnam will
entertain Michigan Audubon’s top
supporters on Friday October 7 during
a “Birders’ Soirée.” Caleb will present a
brand new presentation titled “Chasing
Rare Birds in Michigan—Stories and
More!” One lucky audience member will
walk away with a pair of 10x42 Vortex
“Fury” binoculars, courtesy of Eagle
Optics. A fundraising auction will also take
place, featuring prizes like autographed
books, fine art, subscriptions to birding
magazines, and gift certificates to top
birding destinations statewide. We are
eagerly anticipating this CraneFest kick-off
event, which will take place at the Convis
Township Hall in Bellevue, Michigan,
starting at 6:30 pm. Registration is now
open online; visit www.cranefest.org.

As the popularity of bird watching
continues to grow, we are working hard
to continue cultivating interest in birds
among young people. This month’s Young
Birders’ column was written by a member
of the Grand Rapids Audubon Club
and participant in that chapter’s Junior
Audubon program. Travis Mangione is
in his second year of birding and we’re
proud to feature his writing for this issue.
If you know a young birder who would
like to contribute to future issues of Jack
Pine Warbler, please contact our program
coordinator, Wendy Tatar (wendy@
michiganaudubon.org).

Michigan Audubon programs will continue
through the fall and winter months. If you
haven’t participated in a program at one
of our 19 bird sanctuaries, visit the event
calendar at www.michiganaudubon.org.
Most programs are free, and members
receive discounts on paid programs.
Programs for 2012 will be listed very soon
and include drop-in cross country ski
sessions, winter bird watching, and
beginning bird watching classes.

I hope you agree that the entertainment
nature has to offer is just as good (or much
better!) than what we find indoors. This fall,
everyone at Michigan Audubon hopes you
find a bit of both—whether it’s at CraneFest
or in a movie theater. Either way, find a way
to enjoy birds this fall, and don’t forget to
share your experiences with others.

Best regards,

Jonathan E. Lutz, executive director
BIRD WATCHING at Lake Erie Metropark can be an uncommon experience. If, by uncommon, the meaning is taken to mean “rare,” then it is sufficient to say that the place has seen more than its share of rare bird sightings. If “out of the ordinary” is the implication, then this location also fits the birder’s bill (pun intended). Both denotations can be used to define the park.

Lake Erie Metropark, only 20 miles south of Detroit, is one of thirteen parks in the five-county Huron-Clinton Metropark system. It contains a 1,600-acre mix of hawthorn thickets, fields, woodlots, and over 500 acres of rich Great Lakes coastal marsh. Well-placed trails and parkway roads allow easy access to potential birding sites, and the park itself is just two miles east of I-75. The park is located along three miles of shoreline at the mouth of the Detroit River where it enters Lake Erie, and it lies at the intersection of two major flyways. Add the federal green space to the immediate north (Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge) and the vast state lands to the immediate south (Pointe Mouillee State Game Area) and you have the gem within an emerald necklace. The Important Bird Area (IBA) listing by the Audubon Society is recognition of that fact and confirmation of the 323 species (and counting) on the regional bird list.
In this era of listservs and texting, the early word gets the rare bird. Lake Erie Metropark is a frequent destination for those early-word birders. Flamingoes have yet to make an appearance, but the suggestion that it could happen is not that far off. According to veteran birder Walt Pawloski, who has spent the better part of three decades eyeing these shores, “you never know what you’ll find there.”

Included in the park's long list of unusual records are a Lesser Frigatebird from the Caribbean, Gannets and a Brown Pelican from the Atlantic coast, Glossy and White-faced Ibises from the Gulf States, and a White-tailed Eagle from Siberia. “The winds can bring in all sorts of unusual birds and you go there to find them,” Pawloski advised. He himself spied a rare Gray Flycatcher there a few years ago. Can a real flamingo, born on a hefty south wind, be far behind?

Lake Erie Metropark is perhaps best known for its fall hawk-watching opportunity. It is one of the premier hawk-watching sites east of the Mississippi. From late August until the bitter end of November, the location offers a constant stream of migrant raptors on their southward journey from the Canadian Shield. Over 16 species of “hawks”—falcons, eagles, harriers, buteos, accipiters, vultures, and the like—funnel over the Detroit River mouth in order to avoid crossing the open waters of Lake Erie.

Add dense black rafts of coot, chestnut-headed Canvasbacks and Redheads, black and white scapas (Greater and Lesser), hairy crowned Common Mergansers, somber-colored Ruddy Ducks, and hundreds of swirling gulls to the above scene, and you have a river of life in the dead of winter.

Oddly enough, the winter season provides one of the richest of birding seasons along the Erie shore. Although one must definitely “gird their loins” with long undies to do so, braving the cutting January or February winds will reward the frigid fowler. Tundra Swans, around 1,200 individuals last season, come down from the high north to feed on the vast water celery beds found in the shallow river waters. Dozens of Bald Eagles habitually gather here to feed on fish and ducks once the ice begins to form in mid-winter. Last year, I saw eight eagles (five dark juveniles and three mature) in one spotting scope view. I won’t even mention that there were 52 separate birds seen on the ice on that particular morning—oops, I just did.

Long-eared Owls are another regular feature of the Lake Erie Metropark winterscape. More than a dozen of these slender owls will roost within the cover of the hawthorn thickets. The park staff is usually able to locate these roosts early in the season and will point them out to curious visitors wishing to view them from the trial system.

Oddly enough, the weakest birding season in the park is the springtime. Nevertheless, hitting the park at certain times in early May will yield some pretty impressive warbler days along with some migrant waterfowl (including more than a few loons). It is worth mentioning that many of the ibis sightings are in the spring as well.

By the time summer rolls around, this uncommon place settles down into a pleasant birding routine. Caspian and Common Terns can be seen rocketing down to retrieve fish in the river and nearly every expected form of swallow can be recorded. Walking the boardwalks and marsh trails will serve up a decent order of marsh birds, such as long-billed Marsh Wrens, and numerous fortilias of Wood Duck females with their attending string of ducklings. Semi-regular sightings of Soras and an occasional Least Bittern allow the birder to begin charging up for the renewed excitement of the coming fall season.

I asked Walt Pawloski to sum up a visitor’s view of the bird situation at Lake Erie Metropark with a favorite time of year, but he was uncharacteristically at a loss for words. “I don’t really have a favorite season,” he says, “I like them all.” After all, the place is uncommonly great.

Gerald Wykes is the supervising interpreter of the Lake Erie Marshlands Museum & Nature Center located in Lake Erie Metropark and home of Hawkfest. He has been with the Metroparks for 30 years—first serving as exhibit preparator/naturalist at Oakwood Nature Center and later transferring to the Lake Erie Museum in 1994. He and his wife are empty nesters residing in Monroe. Gerald maintains a blog called “Naturespeak” through the Monroe Evening News and he is a freelance author, artist, and story-teller (most of which are true). He can be reached at gerry.wykes@metroparks.com.
The Keweenaw Raptor Survey (KRS) concluded its second successful season at Brockway Mountain on June 15, with a surprising 90 raptors tallied that day, most of them first-summer Broad-winged Hawks that will not breed this year. In all, 13,992 individual eastbound raptors were recorded this season, surpassing last year's total of just under 10,000. The count was run for three months beginning on March 15 with an impressive 584.5 hours of counting. The lion’s share of the count was run by our hired human telescope, Arthur W. Green from New York State. Arthur had previously been a counter at Chestnut Ridge Hawk Count in New York and thoroughly enjoyed his time escaping the hustle and bustle of the East Coast in favor of the timeless feel of the north Keweenaw coastline. Hardly a bird escaped Arthur’s roving eyes, and he was well received as an ambassador of the birds among the local community of Copper Harbor.

The season was very slow to start this year; only 171 raptors were counted during March—just over 500 birds fewer than the previous March. Prevalent north winds were to blame and tragically continued over most of April with only six days even cracking the 100-bird mark. Still, a number of interesting observations were had during the first six weeks of the count; 16 Northern Goshawks and 21 Golden Eagles were recorded, and Bohemian Waxwings and Snow Buntings were common visitors to the count site. Canada Geese were the only species to pass by in large numbers with amazing high counts of just under 5,000 geese on two different dates in April. Even on a slow day, getting a chance to see the aerial acrobatics of a Golden Eagle evading a pair of local nesting ravens was worth the trip to Brockway.

By the end of April, pretty much all the players had arrived, but the numbers were still low. Excitement was building, however, as Arthur recorded the first ever Black Vulture for the KRS project on April 26. Much to the delight of those visitors present, the Black Vulture made an appearance on two additional dates, again on April 29, and a final time on May 2.

Finally, the door blew open on May 5 with 2,500 raptors counted—just under a fifth of the entire season’s total in one day! Broad-winged Hawks, as expected, were the most prevalent species with 1,613 individuals tallied. Twelve other species of raptors were counted, including 614 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 104 Red-tailed Hawks, along with lesser numbers of Rough-legged Hawks, American Kestrels, and Peregrine Falcons. Two Swainson’s Hawks, a species desired by many Michigan birders, were seen sailing by the mountain that day by a lucky few. Raptors were not the only birds migrating that day, and we recorded our season-high day total of 123 Common Loons ripping past the overlook.

Numbers of Broad-winged Hawks remained good for the rest of May, and Swainson’s Hawks were seen on two additional dates. By May 31, KRS had crossed the ten-thousand-bird mark, something we were unable to do last year. American White Pelicans were also observed on several dates in May, and when birders were not scanning for hawks, there were always plenty of sparrows to pick through, coming into the seed that Arthur kept scattered on the ground for them. Some of the more notable songbirds that dropped in at the count shack included a Northern Mockingbird, Eastern Towhee, and a Western Meadowlark.

However, some of the most exciting action this month was below the mountain in the village of Copper Harbor. Steeped in birding lore, many exciting birds have been found in Copper Harbor. This year was no exception, with a snazzy Scissor-tailed Flycatcher spending several days in mid-May at the local sewage lagoon. Few spots in the Keweenaw Peninsula can boast such an incongruent mix of glorious scenery and, well... inglorious odors. Still, the birding is fantastic here, and on several days in late May, we saw epic numbers of migrant warblers, vireos, and sparrows, most right in front of our faces as they stocked up on the plentiful midges hatching from the reclamation ponds.
The month of June saw a continuation of the Broad-winged Hawk flight right up to the end of the count, with over 1,700 raptors tallied. This is in stark contrast to last year, when the count abruptly died and only 300 birds were recorded over two weeks. This serves as another example of the dynamic fluidity of migration each year.

We have barely begun to wrap up the finishing touches of this season’s count, and I am already brimming with curiosity to see how next spring will unfold. Most assuredly, it will be exhilarating to watch, and I highly recommend making time to make the trek northward to witness this amazing migration for yourself.

Skye Christopher G. Haas is an avid birder and student at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Michigan. He is the author of the UP Rare Bird Report, which is distributed via listserv and can be found at UPBirders.org. Skye has run birding tours for Michigan Audubon, conducts field surveys for the Nature Conservancy, is a former counter at the Whitefish Point Observatory, and most recently is a coordinator of the Keweenaw Raptor Survey.

Double-Crested Cormorant Management Decision Announced

THE WILDLIFE SERVICES PROGRAM of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS), the Department of the Interior’s U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service have released a final environmental assessment (EA) on Double-crested Cormorant damage management for Michigan. This EA replaces the one completed in 2004 and revised in 2006. The EA was prepared with consultation with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and numerous Native American tribes.

According to a press release from the federal agencies, “The management alternative uses an integrated wildlife damage management approach to reduce cormorant damage to property, aquaculture, and natural resources, as well as cormorant-related risks to public safety. Physical exclusion, habitat modification, or harassment would be used, when appropriate, to reduce damage. In other situations, birds may be humanely removed by shooting, egg oiling/destruction, nest destruction, or euthanasia following live capture.” The new EA increases the maximum number of cormorants that may be lethally removed statewide from the current limit of 10,500 to 15,500 birds per year. It requires that 5,000 breeding pairs of cormorants be allowed to remain in the state.


Double-crested Cormorant numbers have rebounded dramatically since the days when they were on National Audubon’s Blue List (1972–81). The current conservation status of the bird is “least concern.” According to the Cornell Lab, “Accumulated fecal matter below nests can kill the nest trees. When this happens, the cormorants may move to a new area or they may simply shift to nesting on the ground.” Total vegetation destruction on some small islands has occurred.

Because the bird eats small, schooling fish, it is blamed for devastation at fish farms and declines in sport fishing species on the Great Lakes. According to the Birds of North America website, “Cormorants feed opportunistically on fishes that are readily available and often congregate where these fishes are most easily caught. In natural environments, fish species of direct interest to recreational or commercial fishermen rarely make up a large part of the cormorants’ diet. Exceptions may occur, especially after fish-stocking releases or at aquaculture facilities, but even here, the magnitude of the economic impact is difficult to establish unambiguously.”

During the 1950s, cormorants disappeared from Michigan thanks to DDT, and it wasn’t until 1977 that they began to nest here again. Since those first eight nests in ’77, they have had an amazing resurgence with over 2,000 nests in 1998, a growth of 38% per year in those 11 years (The Breeding Bird Atlas, 1991). In 2004, there were 5,500 nests in the Les Cheneaux Islands in northern Lake Huron alone. Management efforts in this island area started in 2004 and seem to be working. The number of nests in 2009 was down to 500, and perch populations were rebounding, according to a 2009 report by the Michigan DNR.

So what are the current population numbers for the cormorant in Michigan? According to the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service website, “the current continental population of double-crested cormorants is 2 million birds, with nearly 70 percent of this number in the interior population centered in the Great Lakes and the prairie region of central Canada.”
ith this issue, we’d like to offer readers a variety of fall-season resources to assist with making the most of your time outdoors. In keeping with the year-long theme of “budget birding,” Michigan Audubon wishes to remind all members and readers of this magazine that quality bird watching and nature appreciation can always be found close to home. For making longer trips, there are a number of useful mobile phone applications and websites available to help with finding the best price of gas in your area. Gas Buddy (1) is an excellent website and mobile application that provides gas price updates for most gas stations and includes station locations and trends.

When time or the gas prices threaten to put a damper on your fall birding, look for a county park, a land conservancy property, or public lake access sites near where you live. The Michigan Association of County Parks website (2) allows its visitors to search for parks within 25 miles of their local zip code. Your nearest land conservancy can be found by visiting the website of the Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Conservation Policy (3). Not only is this site an excellent resource for finding nature preserves with trails open to birdwatchers, but it also provides excellent insight into the importance of protecting habitat throughout Michigan. Finally, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website (4) provides a listing of public access sites on Michigan’s lakes and rivers—excellent places to spot fall waterfowl, raptors, and passerines.

If weather or work schedules prevent you from getting outdoors entirely, keep in mind that studying your field guides and online resources can improve your next bird watching trip. With Sandhill Crane migration soon to be in full swing, we recommend boosting your overall crane knowledge and appreciation by visiting the website of the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, Wisconsin (5). Here, you can learn more about efforts to save the endangered Whooping Crane (there’s one that visits the Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary each year) and even become a member of the organization.

Of course, our fall migration season could not be so accommodating for birds and bird watchers without an abundance of high-quality wetlands. The Michigan chapter of Ducks Unlimited is instrumental in protecting our state’s wetlands, and we encourage you learn more about their efforts by visiting their website (6) as well. In 2010 at Big Marsh Lake, Michigan Audubon and the Kiwanis Club of Battle Creek, together with Ducks Unlimited, installed a first-of-its-kind water control structure, which will protect the staging grounds for Sandhill Cranes for decades to come. The project was highlighted in the September/October 2010 issue of the Jack Pine Warbler magazine.

When you do make it out on the birding trail, be sure to take in some of the other harbingers of fall. If you’re after magnificent fall color, stay tuned to the color reports in your local newspaper. Fall color reports submitted by Michigan Audubon volunteers and staff can be found on the website of the West Michigan Tourist Association (7).

Marcus E. Wilson is a volunteer for Michigan Audubon. He enjoys fall birding and resides in East Lansing, Michigan. You may contact him at riversweep@gmail.com.
The plates are accompanied by captions, a much-abbreviated text, and small maps. The small text is justified by the author/photographer to allow more space for the extensive galley of shots. There is a website to access for additional species information, which, in my exploration, did not contain that much more material. This site, however, will provide viewing of the plates (www.CrossleyBirds.com). The book must be viewed with the idea that it is an identification guide first and foremost, but the size and weight is not something I want to tote around in the field.

The photographic content is immense and demonstrates hours of field and technical work to compile the plates. Identification markers are given in the text for the profile shots.

The author admits the shortfall of the guide is not giving field markers for the other poses of the birds. One example would be his birds-in-flight shots. Personally, I could do without the background layout as I found it distracts my focus from the birds.

The photographic format far exceeds The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds of 1977, but my guess is that this book will be a hard sell for experienced birders. With that said, however, I believe the advent of digital photography and electronic technology will greatly alter the field guides of the future.

Ed Merz is a retired executive minister and chair of the earth stewardship standing committee. Prior to retirement, he worked as a research specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and for the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. Ed currently serves as the vice president of the Capital Area Audubon Society and as a volunteer at the Michigan Audubon office.
Activities Abound at CraneFest

BY WENDY TATAR

If you’ve never attended CraneFest during the past seventeen years, I’m here to tell you that you’ve missed quite a bit. Obviously from the name, the fly-in of the migrating Sandhill Cranes is the main attraction of the event, but there is so much more to CraneFest.

The complete title of the event is the Sandhill Crane and Art Festival. The art show portion of the festival is small compared to many art shows, but we select around 30 of the best artists to be a part of the show every year. Some of the favorites are here year after year, but others will be new to the event in 2011. Some of the favorite photographers returning this year are Roy Van Loo Jr., David Murray, Josh & Dave Haas (Glances at Nature), and Dan Wolin (Redtail Photography), and they will be joined by newcomer Ageless Memories Photography. Another returning favorite, Bear Tracks Studio, will bring the drawings, woodworking, and mixed media work of Marie Rust, Lori Taylor, and Lisa Ramlow. In the pottery category, in addition to returning favorites Louise Slager and Kizmit Clayworks, we have new artists: Black Cat Pottery and Pots by Rita. Woodworkers/carvers Michael Van Houzen and Joseph McAllister will be at the event, as will Jerry Haley with his rustic hiking staffs and benches. Pressed flower favorite Randy Wilcox will be accompanied this year by Flower Sisters. Other new artists will have gourd art, metal art, artistic bird houses, and beautiful watercolor bird Christmas ornaments. You won’t want to forget your wallet when you attend!

Another artistic aspect of the event is the display of wooden cranes that greet visitors as they enter. For the past five years of CraneFest, students of Audrey Haddock, a teacher at Bellevue High School and Junior High, have painted wooden crane cutouts, which are positioned along the entrance to the event. Approximately 20 cranes will greet you, some looking like cranes and others looking like pirates, clowns, other animals, or even superheroes. The art enlivens the woods and is a fun way to start your visit to the event. This year, visitors will be able to vote for their favorite wooden crane, and the young artist will receive a membership in Michigan Audubon and a prize.

Other activities at the event include guided nature hikes through the beautiful Kiwanis Youth Area, where CraneFest is held. Live birds of prey are on exhibit by the Hawking Club of Michigan, and the Earthbound Environmental Awareness Organization of Olivet College always brings a menagerie of live reptiles and other creatures for visitors to see. Children can participate in a handful of activities hosted by the many environmental nonprofit organizations, such as Binder Park Zoo, Kingman Museum, and the Bluebird Society of Michigan. Life-size cutouts of all 15 crane species, created by local artist Joanna Learner, will be on display so you can learn more about the cranes of the world.

A special photography workshop instructed by Josh Haas will take place during the event for a limited number of participants. An intermediate photography class will take place on Sunday. Participants will have the opportunity to practice their newly acquired skills when the cranes

CRANE VIEWING at the KIWANIS YOUTH AREA

The Battle Creek Kiwanis Club has graciously agreed again to let Michigan Audubon hold crane viewing during weekend evenings at their Kiwanis Youth Area property. We hold the crane viewing and CraneFest at the Kiwanis property, as it is the only locale that provides a view overlooking Big Marsh Lake, the roosting area for the Sandhill Cranes. Dates for crane viewing have changed slightly from past years to provide the opportunity to see more cranes as they gather for their fall migration.

The first weekend for the evening viewing sessions will occur after CraneFest, on October 15 & 16. Plan on attending at least once, with sessions beginning October 15 through November 13 on Saturdays and Sundays, 4:00–7:00 PM.
begin to fly in. Registration for this special class is a must and can be done on the event website, cranefest.org.

There is so much to do and see at the event. And, oh yes, we do have Sandhill Cranes—lots of them. Some of the cranes spend the day feeding in the marshy edges of Big Marsh Lake, but the majority of the cranes spend the day in nearby corn fields fattening up for the long migration south (they’re headed to Georgia and Florida for the winter). Each afternoon, starting around 4:00 PM, the cranes will begin returning from the fields to roost in Big Marsh Lake for the night. It can be quite a spectacular sight when large groups of them all start flying in at once. And the sound is quite spectacular too!

So make it a point to attend CraneFest this year. You’ll have a great time, see many things, and possibly learn something new. What a great way to spend an autumn weekend in Michigan.

Wendy Tatar is the program coordinator for Michigan Audubon.

Sandhill Cranes have been the focus for CraneFest for 17 years. Michigan’s largest bird watching event draws nearly 5,000 people to Calhoun County each year. © 2010 Josh Haas.

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.

Paul M. Brown
Terry Heisler
Angie Hurd
Tim Tesar
Robert & Marcia Brown
Peter Kronk
Stan Lilley
Alec Lindsay
Conrad Rattay
Amy Shaw
Lorrie Vit
Union Township
Library
The Warren Family
Harry Werth

Please remember to check your magazine’s 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.

The Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary is home to Michigan’s largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes each fall. Cranes wow onlookers with dramatic over-flights before landing in Big Marsh Lake. © 2010 Dave Haas.
The pure awe and inspiration of birds of prey is something that will get the blood pumping in just about everyone. The power and wonder behind these amazing creatures, the accuracy with which they hunt, and the in-charge demeanor they portray makes for wonderful viewing and even better images. Have you ever had issues getting a natural looking image of a raptor in a cage? Have you ever wondered if there are places or ways to photograph captive raptors outside the cage? For part two of our “Nature Up Close” series, we’re going to look at better ways of photographing captive raptors.

When photographing a caged raptor, the most important first step is to use a large aperture (small f-stop number) and shoot from as close to the cage wall as safely possible. This will throw the front fencing blurry enough that it will appear invisible in the image, making the overall scene look more natural. Also make sure to position yourself in such a way that the back fence is blocked in some way by vegetation, making it blend in to the natural surroundings. In some cases, this won’t be possible. If it’s not, know your limits and do the best with what you have. While these birds are in cages, it’s important to realize that they all have injuries (some aren’t even visible). Spend more time on birds that have less noticeable injuries, which will make more natural photographs. At the same time, remember they were all wild birds at one time, which means you can still get wild looking poses from the birds. All it takes is a little time and patience.

Taking it to the next level, keep your eyes on nearby nature centers that have captive birds. Some will feature programs with the raptors out of the cage. From time to time, I will lead photo workshops at the Kalamazoo Nature Center where we’ll feature a couple of their raptors in the same fashion. Being a bird handler with a photographic background has its perks! I use the natural environment to place birds in such a way that will yield good imagery for participants. Taking it a step further, the Outdoor Discovery Center in Holland, Michigan has raptor photo shoots each year where they take their birds away from cages and pose them in natural environments, allowing for extremely good photographs. Their program even features local falconers with a more diverse array of birds, allowing the photographer to go home with images of many species that are sometimes harder to find. Also look for events where the Michigan Hawking Club will be featured. They usually have birds on the glove for large periods of time and allow visitors to get photographs. In situations such as these, work on getting shots that don’t show the equipment on the birds, and again, strive for different and interesting poses from the birds. When these raptors get in front of new people, though they can handle it and have been trained to do so, they will still be on edge. Don’t go crazy with your camera at first. Take some time to allow the birds to settle and become more comfortable. Your shots will be exponentially better. Use the rule of thirds and composition to place the birds outside of center, enjoy the rare time to be so close, and have fun!

To read more about Josh, visit www.glancesatnature.com. He specializes in bird and nature photography, trips, and workshops. His work can be seen at numerous art shows throughout Michigan as well as online.
My name is Travis Mangione and I am a member of Grand Rapids Junior Audubon. I have been birding for two years. One day, friends of mine invited me to go with them to the Tawas Point Birding Festival. With high expectations, a month later, we began our three-hour road trip to Tawas.

We arrived in East Tawas on Thursday at six o’clock in the evening. Without even taking the time to unpack, we started birding. That first night, we saw and heard many birds, including a Cliff Swallow, an American Pipit, a Northern Harrier, and an Eastern Whip-poor-will, which were all new birds for me. I couldn’t wait for the next morning to see how many more we could find.

On the morning of May 13th, we went on the Kirtland’s Warbler tour. Some of the birds we saw were Kirtland’s Warbler, a Common Nighthawk, a Red-headed Woodpecker, and a Trumpeter Swan. The last bird of note that we saw was a Long-tailed Duck, swimming alone on a large lake, showing its beautiful plumage to our group of excited birders. Later that day, we went to a coffee place, and while the others were getting something to drink, I went out to bird. I was surprised to see a Purple Martin fly by me. Then we went to the East Tawas harbor docks and saw Double-crested Cormorants, a Common Loon, Common Terns, Black Terns, and some Common Mergansers. Afterward, I saw an Eastern Meadowlark. That night, we saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Red-headed Woodpecker fly up into the sky, and a Common Nighthawk flew by four feet away from where we were. The first day was very exciting. I couldn’t wait for the next day.

The next day, May 14, we went on the Oscoda Parks tour. We saw about 35 bird species, 14 of which were warblers. The rarest of the warblers I saw was the Golden-winged Warbler, whose numbers are declining. All the warblers we saw were within a short time, making the sighting that much more awesome. That night, we went on the Tuttle Marsh tour, in the pouring rain. We saw an American Bittern and many Rusty Blackbirds. We heard Sora and Virginia Rails. Although those were great sightings, we could have seen a lot more if the weather had been better. Considering the weather, we still saw many impressive birds.

On the last day of the event, I went on the Tawas Point tip tour, and saw a Clay-colored Sparrow, a Field Sparrow, an Orange-crowned Warbler, a Swainson’s Thrush, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. The weather continued to be against us. We didn’t end up seeing as many birds as we hoped, but we still felt it was a profitable tour. On my way home, the last birds I saw were Bonaparte’s Gulls and a Bald Eagle.

The Tawas Point Birding Festival is a great time and place to bird, and I will surely go again if I can. Overall, I saw and heard about 101 bird species. About 35 were new birds for me. Even though the weather was rainy and windy most of the time we were there, we saw so many wonderful birds; I anticipate going again next year. I would like to thank Susan Laidlaw and Will Graham for taking me along with them to this spectacular event.

Travis Mangione lives in Belmont in northeast Kent County. He has been a member of the Grand Rapids Junior Audubon Club, along with his brother Isaac, since 2010.

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Tawas Point Roadtrip
BY TRAVIS MANGIONE

September
10 Migration Celebration 9:00 AM-3:00 PM Lake Bluff Bird Sanctuary, Manistee
17 Fall Migration Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, Paradise
17 & 18 Hawk Fest Lake Erie Metropark, Brownstown
17 & 18 Heritage Harvest Fest Seven Ponds Nature Center, Dryden

October
8 & 9 CraneFest Noon-7:00 PM Kiwanis Youth Area, Bellevue
9 Washtenaw Audubon Society Big Sit 5:00 AM-4:00 PM Independence Lake County Park, Webster
15 Haehnle Sanctuary Open House 10:00 AM-2:00 PM Haehnle Sanctuary, Jackson
Sanctuary Open House

An open house will be held at Michigan Audubon’s 963-acre Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary located near Jackson on Saturday October 15. With the assistance from members of the Jackson Audubon Society, tours of the sanctuary will be taken from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM. Mud Lake marsh, located in the sanctuary, hosts the second largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes in Michigan and for the past several years has also been the favorite roosting site of a Whooping Crane.

The Haehnle Sanctuary is located on Seymour Road approximately six miles northeast of Jackson. For more information on the sanctuary or to download a map to get you there, visit http://www.haehnlesanctuary.org. To find more information about the open house, visit the event calendar page of Michigan Audubon’s website (michiganaudubon.org) or call Wendy Tatar at 517-886-9144.

Volunteers Needed

Michigan Audubon will host an open house at the Lansing office on Tuesday September 20 from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM and 6:00–7:30 PM. The objective of the open house is volunteer recruitment. During the open house, guests will get a chance to meet current volunteers, learn more about Michigan’s bird sanctuaries, enjoy a snack or two, and find out why becoming a Michigan Audubon volunteer is one of the most rewarding things you can do.

The volunteer program is a vital part of Michigan Audubon. Our organization benefits from trained volunteers who donate their time and energy assisting with birding festivals and the bookstore, editing newsletters, and stewarding bird habitat across Michigan (to name just a few things).

Check the Michigan Audubon event calendar on the website (www.michiganaudubon.org) or call Wendy Tatar at 517-886-9144 for more information about the open house.

News

Life Member Receives Award

Michigan Audubon life member and Grand Rapids Audubon Club (GRAC) member Steve Minard was recognized at the GRAC annual meeting with the presentation of the 2011 Charlotte A. Runnells Volunteer Environmentalist Award. The award is given by the GRAC conservation committee “not more than once every two years, to one whose initiative and dedication as a volunteer environmentalist defends our environmental health and natural treasures.” The conservation committee chose Steve for the way in which he connects people with a sense of wonder for birds.

According to a GRAC press release, “In leading over two hundred birding field trips and walks over the past twenty years, always taking time to make sure new birders are seeing and hearing what he sees and hears, Steve Minard graciously and generously shares his birding skills and knowledge, as well as his great love of birds and birding, with others.” In addition to leading field trips, Steve has served GRAC as president (1987–89), treasurer (1990–91), conservation committee chairman, the GRAC representative to Michigan Audubon, Christmas bird count section leader (1981—present), field trip coordinator (2001–present), and the North American migration count coordinator (1999–present).

Congratulations, Steve, on this prestigious award!

New Baker Resident Manager Announced

Michigan Audubon is very pleased to announce that Jolene Flynn has accepted the position of Resident Manager at the Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary. Jolene and her partner, Cam Myers, are very excited to be taking on the oversight and maintenance of the 1,000-acre sanctuary. Both Jolene and Cam are avid outdoor enthusiasts and natives of the Marshall area.

Jolene was raised on a farm and currently works for Bosserd Family Farms. The business has two greenhouses and extensive fields of fresh flowers, fruits, and vegetables, as well as cattle. Jolene says she is “a product of that good old 4-H scene” and loves to do many types of crafts on top of her outdoor activities.

Jolene has a son, Forrest, and a daughter, Allison, who are both grown and on their own. Cam has a 13-year old daughter, Audrey, who is the light of his life. Jolene and Cam bring with them to the Baker house their other children, Bear, an Alaskan malamute, and Willow, a very large mixed breed dog.

Michigan Audubon is very excited to have Jolene on board. She and Wendy are currently working on a full schedule of programs to showcase the Baker Sanctuary during 2012. Watch for an announcement of those programs in the next issue of the Jack Pine Warbler.
Many Thanks

Michigan Audubon would like to thank all the volunteers, partners, and sponsors that helped make the Cerulean Warbler Weekend such a great success. This event continues to grow and attract participants from all over North America. Without the assistance of the following folks, it would be impossible for Michigan Audubon to put on great birding events like this.

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Mark Bishop
Greg Bodker
Eldon Dodd
Tom Funke
Donna Keller
Dick Leonard
Sue Merrill
Greg Nelson
Caleb Putnam

VOLUNTEERS
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Terry Hewlett
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Net News

Michigan Projects Receive Federal Funds

Michigan’s U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow and Carl Levin have announced that three Michigan projects have won funding to support bird conservation from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, a funding project of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The federal support is for projects designed to protect, restore, and enhance Great Lakes wetlands and wildlife habitat.

The Nature Conservancy received $150,000 for a project designed to protect 41 acres of land on Lake Huron’s shoreline, which hosts mixed northern hardwoods, conifer swamp, wooded dunes, and open sand dunes. According to the senators, the property is an important habitat for several species of birds, including Blue-winged Teal, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Canada Warbler.

Ducks Unlimited received $208,000 for a project to enhance 344 acres of existing wetland habitat at the Maple River State Game Area (MRSA) in central Michigan, which will help improve habitat for important species of birds and help stop the spread of invasive plants. The project will remove some outdated water control infrastructure and install a new pump and water control structure. MRSA is an important stopover point for many species of waterfowl on their migration north.

The third project funded is with the Southwestern Michigan Land Conservancy, which received $250,000 to protect 120 acres of habitat along Lake Michigan and the Black River (South Haven area). The funds will be used to protect the property and conduct an ecological restoration of the land by removal of invasive species and work to restore the stream banks.

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How to Grow a School Garden: A Complete Guide for Parents and Teachers
by Arden Bucklin-Sporer and Rachel Kathleen Pringle
$24.95 (flexibound)
This is a complete school garden handbook. It includes strategies for planning, funding, and building the garden, plus lesson plans for the classrooms. Garden projects are geared for grades K–8.

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By e-mail: Wendy@MichiganAudubon.org.