

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

*THE WINTER ISSUE:* A Tale of Two Grosbeaks ■ Climate Change: The Risks for Michigan Birds ■  
MSU Student Research: Migratory Birds at Burke Lake Banding Station ■ Michigan Audubon: 2014 Birding Tours



# Jack Pine Warbler

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Cover Photo ■ Pine Grosbeak

Photographer: Roger Eriksson | r.eriksson50@gmail.com

In March of 2008, a small group of Pine Grosbeaks stayed around the many crabapple trees at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Tawas City, Michigan. The birds seemed oblivious to the people going in and out of the hospital. Roger was able to take this photo of the male Pine Grosbeak from less than 12 feet. The camera was a Canon EOS-1D Mark III, with a shutter speed of 1/100 sec, f10, AV mode, compensation +1/3, ISO 800, and the lens was a Canon EF300mm f/4L IS USM +1.4x, focal length 420mm.

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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



## MICHIGAN IS THE PLACE

Last fall I found myself on the roof of the Delta College Planetarium in Bay City, standing alongside Elsa Thompson and her son, Bill Thompson III—the folks behind *BirdWatcher's Digest* (BWD). The cold air blowing in from Saginaw Bay didn't stop us from picking out a Peregrine Falcon on a distant rooftop. We exchanged grins and agreed, "This is the place." The next Midwest Birding Symposium will be held September 20 – 22, 2015, in Bay City, Michigan. We will be spending the next 12 months preparing for the first symposium to be held in Michigan in 20 years.

It is going to be a busy year in 2014. In addition to planning the symposium with our partners at BWD and the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, we'll be offering a full slate of guided birding tours, including trips to Minnesota's Sax-Zim Bog, the blooming desert of southeast Arizona, and bird-rich central and south Florida. Our Signature Event series returns and this year will mark the 20th Anniversary of Michigan's largest birdwatching event—the Sandhill Crane & Art Festival, "CraneFest."

Sandhill Cranes will be the focus of a conservation advocacy campaign in 2014. All year long we will be sharing information about cranes with our members, partners, and state and federal agencies. We've just concluded a two-year study of the economic impact of Sandhill Crane tourism in Michigan and will be issuing a final report June 1. The Sandhill Crane is a conservation success story for Michigan: where the species once numbered only 17 pairs of birds, more than 18,000 Sandhill Cranes were counted by volunteers during the annual Fall Sandhill Crane Survey.

I am proud to report that ornithology is alive and well in our state. Michigan State University's Burke Lake Banding Station is just a stone's throw from our state office in Bath (just outside of Lansing). The work of Dr. Jen Owen and her students is featured on page 8 of this issue. The bird-focused work of students and professionals from across Michigan will be showcased during the annual Michigan Bird Conservation



Sandhill Cranes are a conservation success story in Michigan, for that and many other reasons, they will be the focus species for advocacy in 2014 at Michigan Audubon. © Dawn Huczek

Workshop, March 20-22, at the Kettunen Center in Tustin ([www.mibci.org](http://www.mibci.org)). The workshop is intended for anyone interested in birds—casual birders, grassroots leaders, biologists, students, wildlife professionals—and I encourage Michigan Audubon members to attend.

I hope you continue to enjoy your *Jack Pine Warbler*. A controversial split occurred 20 years ago that resulted in the JPW becoming the member magazine you're reading today, while peer-reviewed articles and bird count data continued to be published under a different name—*Michigan Birds and Natural History*. If you want to learn more about MBNH, back issues are located under the Publications tab at [www.michiganaudubon.org](http://www.michiganaudubon.org). As for your 2014 member magazine, we will once again feature the work of professional writer, Howard Meyerson, and we add a new contributor, freelance writer Kirby Adams. If you have an article or photograph you would like to see published in the JPW, please send your work to [Mallory@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:Mallory@michiganaudubon.org).

We begin 2014 one staff member short. Stewardship Activities Coordinator, Brianna Krauss, left the organization in December to pursue a new career path. Bri's excellent volunteer coordination and habitat stewardship skills will be sorely missed. At the board level, we welcome the leadership of incoming President, Dr. Alec Lindsay, who has served as vice president for the past two years. Dr. Lindsay is an associate professor of biology at Northern Michigan University in Marquette.

Audubon activity is flourishing throughout Michigan (check out this issue's feature on the chapter in Iron County!). Even as the winter winds continue to blow, Michigan is still the place for great birding.

Best regards,

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

Jonathan E. Lutz, executive director



# A Tale of Two Grosbeaks

BY KIRBY ADAMS

Calling Michigan the Grosbeak Capital of the United States would be a bit specious, and likely to raise the ire of a few New England and Mountain West states. Still, if you're looking for Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, you could do a lot worse than the mitten and the Upper Peninsula.

Ask a hundred Midwestern birders where they found their lifer Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*), and you'll hear Hartwick Pines State Park more than any other answer. Those same birders likely snagged their Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*) on a winter day somewhere in the U.P. So Michigan is definitely a haven for grosbeaks, but what, exactly, is a grosbeak?

Grosbeak is a word that doesn't mean anything scientifically. It's simply derived from a French word meaning "big, fat beak." You could call pelicans and puffins grosbeaks and be technically correct. In Michigan we have common summer residents like the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) and, in recent years, regular appearances by the typically southern Blue Grosbeak (*Passerina caerulea*). Both of those are cardinals, members of the same family as our fat-beaked Northern Cardinal.

Among our collection of migrants and winter residents, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks are popular sights. These two grosbeaks are finches of the family Fringillidae, more closely related to siskins, crossbills, and redpolls. For our purposes, and with no disrespect to the cardinals, we're going to consider these the "true grosbeaks," although only the Evening Grosbeak truly deserves that title, as the Pine Grosbeak is actually more of a bullfinch, with its closest relatives flitting around in the Himalayas. I told you—"grosbeak" is misleading and confusing.

Pine Grosbeaks are as much a part of Michigan winter as snow and hot pasties. They begin trickling into the U.P. in October, with the most robust numbers occurring in mid to late winter. By April they've vanished to the sub-arctic again. A few will make it down to the Lower Peninsula, particularly in irruption years.



Pine Grosbeaks are known for being tame and more approachable than most birds during the winter months. This makes the bird fun to photograph. Here a female Pine Grosbeak poses for a great winter shot. © 2011 Skye Haas

Pine Grosbeaks tend not to irrupt as frequently or as predictably as other finches, but there's still evidence that their southward movement in winter is directly tied to the availability of buds and fruits in the north. A perusal of the winter's finch forecast will tell you if an irruption year (2012–13) or a normal year (2013–14) can be expected. Yes, there's such a thing as a winter finch forecast, diligently published every fall by Ontario birder Ron Pittaway, who takes cone and berry crops into account to make his predictions.

A birder looking for Pine Grosbeaks should find some stands of berries or popular backyard feeders north of the Mackinaw Bridge. Most sightings are reported from spots along the Lake Superior shore, with the Sault Ste. Marie area, Whitefish Point, and the Keweenaw Peninsula being the hotspots. Those

are also the most heavily winter-birded spots in the Upper Peninsula, so it's likely the clusters of grosbeak sightings are an artifact of birder behavior as much as or more than bird behavior.

As a resident of Michigan, I have no good excuse for my lifer Pine Grosbeak being a summer female at the northern tip of the island of Newfoundland. I was a new birder and hadn't spent any time exploring the U.P. in winter. My first





Evening Grosbeaks are often observed at feeders in Michigan during the winter months. The seed of choice is sunflower. © 2007 Roger Eriksson

Evening Grosbeak, however, was done the proper Michigan way: with a stop at the Hartwick Pines visitor center. Crawford County is the southern terminus of Evening Grosbeak breeding range in Michigan, with the feeders at Hartwick Pines being a reliable site to spot them for many summers. The forests along the AuSable River are good habitats, as well as the river's south branch through the Mason Tract. You can search for Evening Grosbeaks while enjoying some of the Great Lakes region's best fly fishing and paddling. Nearby Wakely Lake has been another good site in recent years.

Evening Grosbeak migratory movement follows a much more predictable pattern than Pine Grosbeak movement. Data from the citizen science projects Project Feeder Watch and the Christmas Bird Count, show a definite biannual cycle in Evening Grosbeak irruption, moving to more southerly wintering grounds.

Citizen counts and observations from astute birders also reveal an alarming decline in overall numbers of the bird.

The period of 2001–2006 showed a 27% decrease in average flock size and a 50% reduction in sites reporting presence of the species at all, compared with the 1989–1994 period, according to Project Feeder-Watch. Reasons for the decline aren't clear, partly because of the species' odd historical distribution. Evening Grosbeaks were very rare in the east until the mid-nineteenth century, when they began an expansion from the Mountain West.

For another hundred years they were still not common east of the Mississippi until a population explosion in the mid-century. Three decades after that, the eastern population began to plummet. With no clear indication why they showed up in the first place, it's difficult to say why they're leaving or perishing now.

Continued climate change and habitat loss will undoubtedly impact all of our northern finches. While the Evening Grosbeak has always struck me as a tropical-looking bird, it is most certainly a species tied to the health of conifer forests, which are both highly susceptible to a warming climate and threatened by massive tar sands projects in Canada.

Michigan may now provide protected wintering grounds for Pine Grosbeaks and year-round habitat for Evening Grosbeaks, but forces and threats beyond the state borders will ultimately write the fate of our biggest and most striking winter finches.

Kirby Adams didn't take up birding until his 30s, but he's making up for lost time. He writes the birding column for the online travel blog, National Parks Traveler. Kirby and his wife, Sarah, live in Lansing on breaks between birding trips. You can contact him at [kirby.adams@gmail.com](mailto:kirby.adams@gmail.com).

## Calendar

### January

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 17-18 | <b>Stewardship Network Conference</b><br>Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center,<br>East Lansing |
| 18-19 | <b>Michigan Audubon UP Birding Trip</b><br>Sault Ste. Marie                                 |

### February

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 8-9   | <b>WPBO's Winter Birding II Field Trip</b><br>Sault Ste. Marie |
| 14-17 | <b>Great Backyard Bird Count</b>                               |
| 15-16 | <b>Michigan Audubon UP Birding Trip</b><br>Sault Ste. Marie    |

### March

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1     | <b>Quiet Waters Symposium</b><br>East Lansing        |
| 2-3   | <b>Wildflower Assoc. of MI Conf.</b><br>East Lansing |
| 20-23 | <b>MiBCI Workshop</b><br>Tustin                      |
| 29    | <b>Spring Bluebird Festival</b><br>Traverse City     |

# Climate Change

## *The Risks for Michigan Birds*

BY HOWARD MEYERSON

**W**hile global climate change reports often focus on iconic creatures such as polar bears and penguins, species that would be in jeopardy if the polar ice cap melts, Michigan and Great Lakes scientists are looking to understand what else might get in trouble. Will Michigan moose thrive 40 years from now when average temperatures are expected to be five degrees warmer? What about the Boreal Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and Common Loon?

David Yarnold, National Audubon president and CEO, declared in an *Audubon Magazine* column last October that “climate change is the greatest threat to birds and biodiversity since humans have been on the planet.” He followed that by writing, “Scientists say we stand to lose one-quarter to one-third of all species on earth. And birds will be hit hard.”

That sweeping statement may raise doubt for some and give others reason for pause, but wildlife researchers say the evidence bears it out. “He is probably accurate with the caveat that there is still a lot of uncertainty,” says Chris Hoving, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources adaptation specialist, formerly the agency endangered species coordinator. “That one-third to one-quarter figure comes from a paper in the *Journal of Science*. It’s [based on] a simple model that looked at how much [home] ranges would change and how much biodiversity we would lose (due to climate shifts), but it is as good as we know. It could be more or it could be less.”

Data from citizen science projects like Audubon Christmas Bird Counts and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology’s Project FeederWatch, along with projects like the *Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas*, have provided scientists with snapshots of the species that are moving northwards where winters are becoming less harsh and nesting seasons are growing longer.

“We already see evidence that birds are moving in Michigan and are adapting to the one degree Fahrenheit change we’ve had in the last 100 years,” Hoving said, pointing to the Least Bittern and Northern Cardinal as two examples. “We anticipate by mid-century, 2050, we will be looking at a three- to five-degree change and that the rate of change between now and then will be ten times as fast as the last 100 years.”

Scientists across North America are largely in agreement

about the predicted changes, and that the effects of climate-change driven drought, flooding, and habitat loss may be devastating for some birds. A 2010 State of the Birds Report, developed for the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, a collaboration of state, federal and Canadian wildlife agencies and scientific and conservation organizations across North America, concludes: “Some birds will adapt and succeed, others will struggle and decline, and some will disappear.”

Ben Zuckerberg, an assistant professor in the Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin, said the “poleward shift” has already been documented in North America and Europe. Many birds are either moving north or into higher elevations.

Zuckerberg has spent several years studying bird movement in response to climate change. He is embarking on a two-year research



Spruce Grouse tend to be more skittish in the winter months due to the lack of camouflage. Males display a red comb that covers the eyes. © 2011 Skye Haas



collaboration with the Northeast Climate Science Center, hosted by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The study will look at grassland bird species in the eastern half of the U.S. “We are trying to determine what species are most vulnerable and exposed to future climate change,” Zuckerberg said. “Some areas are getting cooler. Some areas are getting warmer. We want to understand how sensitive species are to extreme drought and extreme precipitation.”

Extreme rain events and flooding are predicted to occur with greater frequency. They can be devastating to ground-nesting birds. The rate of climate change is also predicted to be fastest in flat areas like the upper Midwest. Zuckerberg’s concern is that conditions will change faster than birds can adapt. “We are concerned that birds will increasingly find themselves in a climate space that is foreign to them in the future,” Zuckerberg said. “Many of the birds are adapted for variability in climate, but that adaptation is being pressed. We don’t know what’s ahead in the next 50 years for grassland bird species. It will be a mixed bag of results, but the elephant in the room will be habitat loss.”

Scientists agree that soils are expected to dry with the warmer temperatures. The upper Midwest is expected to face more droughts in the future. Grasslands may wither as a result, causing insect populations to decline. Birds would find less protein available to feed young nestlings.

Researchers also worry about a timing problem called: “Phenotypic Mismatch,” a fancy name for saying, “You missed dinner.” Migratory birds that winter in the tropics decide when to fly north based on day length, Zuckerberg said. Historically they have arrived in Michigan when food was on the table. But milder winters are causing insects to come out earlier and earlier, though migratory birds continue to arrive at the same time. Over time, he worries, the gap may get larger and result in less food being available.

“In extreme situations you could have nest failure,” Zuckerberg said. “Studies in Europe of two species, the Great Tit and Pied Flycatcher, found population reductions of 80 to 90 percent in areas where the mismatch was particularly severe.”

In Michigan, this becomes a concern for migratory grassland species such as Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Dickcissel, all of which are susceptible to mismatch. Of less concern is the Savannah Sparrow and Henslow’s Sparrow, which migrate only to the southern regions of the U.S.

Dr. Alec Lindsay, incoming Michigan Audubon Society president and a professor of biology at Northern Michigan University, notes that the predicted warming trends could have an impact on boreal habitat in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and the birds that rely on it. The Spruce Grouse, Three-toed Woodpecker, and Boreal Chickadee are three examples. All breed in northern Michigan, which is the southern end of their range.



This photograph of a Boreal Chickadee was taken in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, which is the bird’s southernmost year-round range. © 2013 Beth Olson.

“Those populations have moved north in the last 40 years,” Lindsay said. “They depend on boreal habitat. Spruce Grouse feed on needles in the winter, on jack pine and spruce. Those trees are projected to slowly disappear. If we start losing boreal forest that includes spruces, we will lose those species too.”

Hoving notes that whitetail deer may push north as temperatures warm, altering the landscape substantially with their browsing, in turn destroying habitat for birds that need a protective understory, which would no longer exist. The problem would be exacerbated in areas where the Great Lakes limit deer’s migratory movement north.

Michigan wildlife officials have been attempting to assess just what species will be vulnerable in the future. Hoving co-authored a report in 2013 called “Changing Climate, Changing Wildlife: A Vulnerability Assessment of 400 Species of Greatest Conservation Need.” It looked at birds, plants, mammals, reptiles, insects, and amphibians and found 61 percent of non-game species were vulnerable to climate change, as were 17 percent of game species.

Moose and American Martins were found to be vulnerable, along with Ruffed Grouse and snowshoe hare. Grouse would likely adapt on a global or regional scale, but the popular game bird could decline or disappear in Michigan because warmer temperatures are bad for aspen, which grouse need to thrive.

Non-game birds such as the Peregrine Falcon and Least Bittern were found to be “moderately vulnerable,” as is the Cerulean Warbler, for a variety of reasons. But other species



such as Le Conte's Sparrow, Northern Flicker, and Olive-sided Flycatcher are predicted to increase in numbers, according to the report. Those species are "habitat generalists," Hoving said. They are expected to adapt. The report also found Prairie Warbler and Kirtland's Warbler populations would remain stable in a warming climate.

Only the Common Loon was listed as "highly vulnerable." The threat is flooding and extreme rain events that could jeopardize nesting on low islands. Residential and other development on northern lakes is also expected to increase as temperatures warm, creating more disturbances.

Hoving warns that the assessment provides an incomplete picture when it comes to migratory birds. Its focus is only on the time that birds reside in Michigan. They may also be vulnerable along their migration path and on their wintering grounds.

Scientists at the National Audubon Society are also working on new methods for accurately determining the species most at risk from climate change. The organization will release a new report in spring of 2014 that discusses a new predictive model based on the bird and climate data collected from 48 continental states, Alaska and the Canadian provinces.

"The research goes beyond the 2010 State of the Birds report," said



The Least Bittern is one of the most difficult North American marsh birds to spot. The bittern faces possible population decline due to climate changes. © Steve Byland / 23RF

David Ringer, the director of messaging for National Audubon. "It puts stronger parameters on what scientists have been saying for a long time and will help resource managers and agencies. We will have more specific information about which birds will be affected and where, rather than the broader strokes in the 2010 State of the Birds Report."

Howard Meyerson (howardmeyerson@gmail.com) has been writing about birds, nature, the environment, and outdoor recreation for 30 years. He

## Special Thanks

Another successful CraneFest occurred in October of 2013, thanks in part to the wonderful weather we had and largely to our sponsors, volunteers, partners, vendors, and everyone else involved that make hosting the event possible. Michigan Audubon would like to thank the following organizations, businesses, and individuals that donated funds and/or assistance to the 2013 Birder's Soiree and CraneFest:

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The Medalist Golf Club

Participating artists, vendors, and non-profit organizations

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Michigan Audubon's good friend and CraneFest supporter, Jim Brandon. As owner of Nottawa Gas and Nottawa Wild Bird Supply, Jim went all out with his participation in CraneFest. Although Jim wasn't feeling well this year he still put in three days of work to help make CraneFest successful. Jim passed away on October 29 at the age of 66. He will be greatly missed. We send our condolences to his family and friends.

# Michigan Audubon 2014 Birding Tours

BY WENDY TATAR

**L**ast year Michigan Audubon launched a series of birding tours to destinations across the state. With support from Bill Sweetman of Bsweet Tours, we were even able to offer a tour to southeast Arizona. This was a new experience for our current staff and we are excited to say that our tours proved popular, so much so that tours to new destinations are being planned and tours that were extremely popular will be held again in 2014. The following are some of the tours being offered during 2014. You can find fees, trip details, tour ratings, and registrations by going to [michiganaudubon.org/education/field\\_trips\\_travel.html](http://michiganaudubon.org/education/field_trips_travel.html).

## In-state Tours

### ONE-DAY TOURS

**Allegan and Barry Counties, two dates in May.** Target species include Prothonotary, Cerulean, and Hooded Warblers along with Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows, and Alder and Acadian Flycatchers.

**Eastern Upper Peninsula, several dates available in late May–early June, led by Skye Haas.** The target species on this tour include Connecticut and Mourning Warbler, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Spruce Grouse.

**Sleeping Bear Birding Trail, Manistee to Empire, June 6, led by Brian Allen.** Travel along the beautiful Lake Michigan shoreline from Manistee to Empire with stops at migratory bird breeding habitats. Target species will be Prairie and Black-throated Blue Warbler, Sedge Wren, Least Bittern, Black Tern, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Olive-sided Flycatcher.

**Lake Michigan Pelagic Cruise, two full-day trips in September, led by Caleb Putnam.** Our first pelagic trip was a huge success, although positive identification of a jaeger was not possible. Participants did see Forester's and Common Tern and had very good looks at a juvenile Red-necked Phalarope. The 2013 cruise only lasted half-a-day and this year we will be doubling that to stay out on the water for an eight-hour day in hopes of getting a positive identification of a jaeger and other sea birds.

### WEEKEND TOURS

**Winter Birding in the Eastern U.P., February 15 & 16, led by Skye Haas.** This birding tour begins in Sault Ste. Marie and progresses through Chippewa and Mackinaw Counties. Last year, tour participants had an owling good time seeing a Northern Hawk Owl, a Great Grey, and four Snowy Owls. Also spotted were Hoary Redpoll and Pine Grosbeak in Dunbar Forest, dancing Sharp-tailed Grouse on their lek, and a Lapland Longspur in amongst a flock of Snow Buntings. Other species that will be targeted are Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, and Evening Grosbeak.

**Shiawassee & Saginaw Bay, August 23 & 24, led by Caleb Putnam.** Possibly the best location for fall shorebird migration in the Lower Peninsula, Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge will be the highlight of this weekend tour. The arctic breeding shorebirds will be on their southward migration and a variety of species could be seen. The tour makes stops along the Saginaw Bay Birding Trail on its way to the final destination of Tawas Point State Park.

## Out-of-state Tours

**Sax-Zim Bog and Northern Minnesota, January 31–February 2:** Heading north in winter to the frozen bogs of Minnesota with Skye Haas will be quite an adventure. The tour will be based in Duluth and includes full days of birding both Friday and Saturday, with a half-day on Sunday. Target species will be Great Gray and Boreal Owls, American Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Northern Goshawk, Boreal Chickadee, and Black-billed Magpie.

**Central and South Florida, April 8–15.** Find Florida specialties and many north-bound migrants with Bill of Bsweet Tours. Time will be spent at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Everglades National Park, Corkscrew Swamp Audubon Sanctuary, among other destinations, and also includes a day trip to the Dry Tortugas.

**Southeastern Arizona, July 31–August 7.** Highly popular in 2013, this tour led by Bill occurs just after the rainy season when the desert will be in bloom and temperatures are more moderate. During last year's tour, 161 species were tallied including a Five-striped Sparrow, Elegant Trogon, Acorn and Gila Woodpecker, and twelve species of hummingbirds. Yes, that does say twelve!

We look forward to bringing you these tours and anticipate that additional in-state tours will be added to the schedule later in the year. If you would like to suggest a destination for a tour, please let us know. Additionally, Michigan Audubon is always searching for those special birders that can guide tours. If you are interested in becoming a trip leader, contact Wendy Tatar at [wendy@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:wendy@michiganaudubon.org).

Wendy Tatar is Michigan Audubon's program coordinator and can be reached at [wendy@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:wendy@michiganaudubon.org) or 517-641-4277.



This Red-necked Phalarope was a rare find on last year's Lake Michigan Pelagic Tour. Luckily Zak, a tour participant, was able to snap a photo. © 2013 Zak Pohlen



# MSU Students Research Migratory Birds at Burke Lake Banding Station

BY JEN OWEN, ZAK POHLEN, AND YUSHI OGUCHI

**G**raduate and undergraduate students in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University have been involved in an ongoing research project investigating the health of migratory birds at the Rose Lake State Wildlife Research Area in Bath, MI. The project, funded by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Avian Health and Disease Program, aims to compare the health and physiology of land-bird migrants that stop over in either exotic or native-dominated habitats during fall migration. Fruits are an important food source for land-birds during fall migration, including for those birds that are primarily insectivores at other times of their annual cycle. However, the nutrient content of fruits varies in lipid, protein, and carbohydrate content. For example, exotic species such as those within the genus *Lonicera* (bush honeysuckles) are relatively low in lipid and proteins and high in carbohydrates, whereas some of the native species have higher lipid content (e.g., spicebush and dogwood).

Yushi Oguchi, a master's student working with Dr. Jen Owen, is researching three species of migrants, including Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*), Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), and Magnolia Warbler (*Setophaga magnolia*), and one species of resident bird, Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*). With equal netting effort in exotic and native habitats, he has been investigating the bird's energetic and immunological conditions through blood parameters in relation to habitat use. In addition, Yushi has been looking at bird movement and occupancy time of

habitat types by tracking Catbirds and Swainson's Thrushes via radio telemetry.

Zak Pohlen, an MSU senior and the bander working with Yushi, is conducting an independent research project using the 2013 banding data to look at mass gain, recapture rates, and stopover length in relation to habitat use. Preliminary results from the 2012 and 2013 seasons show a trend toward greater mass gain in birds that are captured and subsequently recaptured in native habitats versus individuals that are captured and recaptured in exotic habitats. We also found that birds initially captured in native habitats are less likely to switch to invasive habitats during migratory stopover, compared to birds captured in exotic habitats.

The research is being conducted at the Burke Lake Banding Station that Dr. Owen and her students began operating in 2010. The primary research focus of Dr. Owen's program is to investigate the health and disease ecology of migratory birds. Other research being conducted at the site, in collaboration with Dr. Jean Tsao and her students, is examining birds for and collecting ticks. We are particularly interested in documenting the presence of *Ixodes scapularis*, one of the species known to transmit the bacterium *Borrelia burgdorferi*, the causative agent of Lyme disease. In addition to research, the Burke Lake Banding Station now offers education and outreach opportunities for the public.

For more information about visiting our site, please visit [www.fw.msu.edu/~bula/](http://www.fw.msu.edu/~bula/) or follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/BULAbandingstation](http://www.facebook.com/BULAbandingstation)).

Dr. Jen Owen is an assistant professor in the Departments of Fisheries and Wildlife and Large Animal Clinical Sciences at Michigan State University. Zak Pohlen, a senior in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University, has been working with birds around the world for the last several years, including as the bird bander at the Burke Lake Banding Station. Yushi Oguchi, a master's student in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, grew up in Nagano, Japan and has been in the states for the last seven years, conducting research on the ecoimmunology of migratory birds. All of us can be reached at [burkelakebanding@gmail.com](mailto:burkelakebanding@gmail.com).



This Brown Thrasher was banded last summer at the Burke Lake Banding Station. © 2013 Callie Gesmundo.



Zak Pohlen holds a Northern Flicker banded at the station last year. Here Zak points out that this is a Yellow-shafted Flicker and the red nape displayed makes it a female. © 2013 David Williams.



# Book Review

## *The Warbler Guide*

BY TOM STEPHENSON AND SCOTT WHITTLE  
REVIEWED BY ZAK POHLEN

**N**obody can deny the beautiful diversity among new world warblers. However, identifying this diversity leaves some birders scratching their heads. The quantity and quality of information in Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle's *The Warbler Guide* is unsurpassed when it comes to warbler identification. It is one of the best resources available for a single group of birds, and explaining this book in all its brilliance would be beyond the scope of this review. But I will try.

For experienced and novice birders alike, the preface to the species accounts provides a great foundation for what to expect throughout the rest of the guide. The importance of this section is reflected in its size, compared to the rest of the book. You will already be a quarter of the way through by the time you hit your first species account. This warbler identification journey begins at "what to notice on a warbler" and ends at the more challenging topics of "aging and sexing," "how to listen to warbler songs," and "learning chip and flight calls." Nobody said the path to ultimate warbler identification glory was easy, but *The Warbler Guide* can give you the tools to get there.

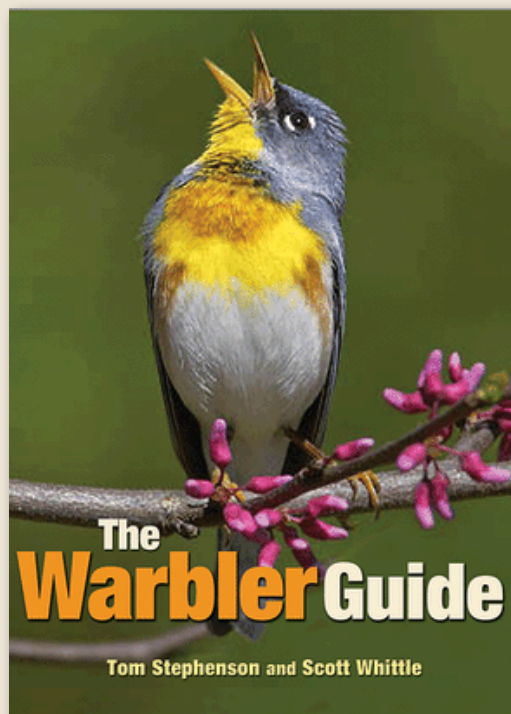
As you expect with most identification guides, the majority of the book comes in the information-rich species accounts—and let me reiterate rich. Unlike other field guides, this one doesn't show one typical image of a species. It gives you the information in a six-page account for every warbler in North America and twice that for birds with extreme plumage variation. Gone are the days of struggling to make the bird you saw fit the image

in your guide. With over 25 photos per species, even more in some cases, the variation in intraspecies plumage characteristics is finally shown. Those extreme muted dingy-gray fall warblers (which we love) need to be identified too.

Each species account contains a wide assortment of pictures, including side views, back views, under views, and any other view you can imagine. Most photos are accompanied by identification descriptions. Although there are no arrows or lines pointing at the photographs, a basic knowledge of bird topography makes these descriptions helpful. Included in each account is a section devoted to distinguishing species that may look superficially similar at some angles. Wrapping up these information-packed accounts is an informative section on aging and sexing spring and fall warblers, along with detailed range maps distinguishing appropriate subspecies.

After you have picked your way through the species accounts and feel there is nothing more to know about new world warblers, the authors tack on a few more things in the back: a handful of reported hybrids, a short quiz, some pages on warblers in flight, a taxonomy section, and some fairly comprehensive pages on habitat and behavior all add to the usefulness of this book.

Although there are some slight generalizations and oversights in the sections regarding molt and topography, this is still the best and most current book dealing with warbler identification. The authors have also provided access through their website to the book's



**\$29.95 (flexi cover)**

This book can be ordered through the Michigan Audubon bookstore, and thereby helps raise funds for education programs.

quick finders and a song and call companion.

With numerous bird guides available, *The Warbler Guide* takes the cake when dealing with new world warblers. The quantity, quality, and organization of information coupled with the excellent photography make this book a must-have for any birdwatcher. If warblers did not impress you already, then this book is sure to change your mind.

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Zak Pohlen is a contract biologist and active birder. His recent work studying birds has taken him to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Maine, and currently Michigan, as well as across the border to central China and Costa Rica.

# Chapter Spotlight

## Lee LeBlanc Audubon Society

BY MALLORY KING

**I**n 1990, the Lee LeBlanc Audubon Society (LLAS) was established in Iron Mountain, Michigan. Since its birth over 24 years ago the society has seen an abundance of changes both in membership and in bird species.

The society was named after a famous local wildlife artist, Lee LeBlanc. LeBlanc was born in Powers, MI, just 30 minutes from Iron Mountain; he was well known for his work as a wildlife artist for Walt Disney and the administrator of special effects in the photographic department for MGM Studios. After 25 years in the motion picture industry, love brought him back to Michigan where he lived out the rest of his life, exactly where he started. His devotion to wildlife and his involvement in the community are why the LLAS paid tribute to his name and kept it as a living legacy.

The LLAS now has 33 members and meets May through October. Iron County is a unique area in Michigan. "It's the cold spot of the UP. We don't get a lot of snow," said Dale Safford, LLAS treasurer. The lack of snow allows birders and wildlife observers great looks at the animals that call Iron County home.

"We have a neat birding area," Safford said. During the winter months the area gets a good number of boreal species such as Gray Jays, Boreal Chickadees, Hoary and Common Redpolls, and Evening Grosbeaks. Of course the society also gets its fair share of Snowy Owls, Northern Hawk Owls, Great Gray Owls, and feeder birds such as finches, nuthatches, and crossbills. "Our birders are folksy, welcoming, and charming! We don't have a lot of list chasers," explained Beth Tiller, former president of LLAS.

The society has downsized since 1990 and focuses on just a few activities each year. The annual potluck seems to be the favorite activity for members and is the program both Safford and Tiller enjoy the most. The show-and-tell style potluck brings members together to share in their unique experiences for the year, and it's not just limited to birds. "People bring in bones, rocks, seeds, pictures, and an array of stories," Tiller said.

Lee LeBlanc Audubon Society also participates in the annual Christmas Bird Count, and in May takes a trip to the Bewabic State Park for migrating warblers. In the past, Beth Tiller would lead the migration tours. "She gives the most incredible programs," states Dave Morton, LLAS president. One morning on the May migration tour, the group saw 23 warbler species within just a few hours. Common warbler species include Nashville, Northern Parula, Yellow, Cape May, Magnolia, and Black-throated Blue.

If you are ever in the Iron Mountain area, make it a point to stop and do some birding—you will not be disappointed.

Mallory King is Michigan Audubon's marketing and communications coordinator.



Bohemian Waxwing (top), Cape May Warbler (middle), and Gray Jay (bottom) are often observed in Michigan's U.P. © Beth Tiller

### Contact information

Dave Morton, president

### Meeting Information:

The Lee LeBlanc Audubon Society meets on the second Monday, May thru October.

**When:** May 12, 2014

**Time:** 7 PM

**Location:** Iron County Museum, Caspian, MI



# Want a Real Birding Challenge?

## *Try Finding No Birds*

BY RICHARD A. WOLINSKI

**W**hat kind of madness is this? Why would anyone spend time trying to find no birds, when the goal of birding is to find birds? I guess I fell into this quite by accident. Actually, it may well be that I think too much about birds and the habitats that support them. Over the years I have conducted thousands of ten-minute point counts during all times of the year, and it occurred to me how rare it was that I found myself not having recorded at least one species during a count.

A few years ago I started to see if I could find places where the chance of seeing no birds during a ten-minute count period was easiest. It has proven to be far more difficult than I thought. There have been a number of times when I have found a single bird of a species within seconds of the end of the count period. Often, a single Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, or Cedar Waxwing winging its way overhead is enough to ruin the entire count.

I have made this endeavor a little easier as I do not include birds that cannot be identified by voice or by plumage to species, placing in essence a constraint on distance. In other words, those little specks a half mile away are not included even if I think they are blackbirds or ducks. Eliminating those birds not identified to species means I have more opportunities to have a No Birds Observed (NBO) count. After all, I am really trying to find specific habitats that offer no identifiable species at the time I am conducting the count.

To qualify as a valid count, it must be conducted under good conditions. Basically this means that weather conditions have to be good enough to see and hear birds with no significant impairment. No high winds, fog, rain, or snow that hinder visibility. I know this seems harsh, but I want to see no birds under the same conditions I normally see birds.



Even in the dead of winter it's almost impossible to perform a ten-minute point count without seeing at least one bird. Go ahead, give it a try! © Mallory King / Michigan

One of the outcomes of attempting NBO counts is that I have also paid more attention to where I do find birds, particularly during the winter season. Since I do most of my birding in southeast Michigan, my perspective is biased geographically, so bear with me. This does mean, though, that there are many opportunities elsewhere in the state to try this type of count. Pine plantations, oak-hickory woods, and plowed agricultural fields with no hedgerows in winter seem to be the best places to see no birds. Winter is superior to spring, summer, and fall, though late summer in agricultural lands is a good second bet.

So, if you find yourself out in the middle of the thumb, surrounded by agricultural fields without a bird in sight, you might want to give this a try. After all, you aren't seeing anything anyway.

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Richard A. Wolinski is the wildlife ecologist for the Michigan Department of Transportation and can be reached at [wolinskir@michigan.gov](mailto:wolinskir@michigan.gov).

## Welcome New Members!

We thank you—our newest members as well as our renewing members—for your support of Michigan Audubon's bird conservation efforts. Please remember to check your magazine's expiration date and renew early. Members moving or changing to a seasonal residence should contact the office by e-mail, post, or phone so that we can update your address in our database.

The Arctica and Abbey Foundation  
Rich Ashcroft  
David Austen  
Carrie Bailey  
Peter Callow  
Edward Carlson  
James Carney  
Linda Dodge  
John Donahue  
Marge Duncan  
Charles Dwan  
Ecochic Landscape Design  
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Doris Fitch  
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Alan Grove  
Matty and Benjamin Hack  
Keith Hartine  
Lain Hatting  
Steve Hatting  
Linda Havens  
Larry and Noel Hayward  
Elaine C Hazel  
Robert and Brenda Jones  
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# Announcements

## Birding the Eastern Upper Peninsula in February

It may not be too late to register to attend the February Soo Area Birding Tours offered by Michigan Audubon and the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO). If you are anxious to check the Gray Jay off your list or would be thrilled to watch a Sharp-tailed Grouse dance on the lek, then sign up for one of these caravan excursions of the eastern Upper Peninsula. Tours are based in Sault Ste. Marie and over the course of the weekend the tour will visit many locations in Chippewa and Mackinaw Counties, including Dunbar Forest and Hulbert Bog. Michigan Audubon's tour will be held February 15–16, and WPBO's tour is offered on February 8–9.

Both trips are rated as easy. Vehicle travel makes up the majority of the trip, with foot travel being of short duration and less than one mile at a time in length. Targeted species include Sharp-tailed and Ruffed Grouse, Pine Grosbeak, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Bohemian Waxwing, Evening Grosbeak, Snowy Owl, and Northern Shrike. With a little luck you may find Boreal Chickadee, Northern Hawk Owl, or a Great Gray Owl.

The fee to participate in the tour is \$70 for Michigan Audubon members and \$100 for non-members (includes a Michigan Audubon membership). The tour fee does not include meals or lodging. The tour will be led by Skye Haas. Registration can be done online at [michiganaudubon.org](http://michiganaudubon.org) or by calling 517-641-4277.

Myles McNally and Stan Lilley will lead WPBO's tour. The cost of this trip is \$80 for WPBO members and \$105 for non-members (includes a WPBO membership). The tour fee does not include meals or lodging. Additional information and a printable registration form can be found at [wpbo.org/node/173](http://wpbo.org/node/173).

## Two Ornithology Courses Offered

Both the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary (KBS) and the Leslie Science and Nature Center are offering ornithology courses this spring. These courses are great ways to improve your birding skills and will teach valuable information about our avian friends.

For the seventh year the KBS, located in Augusta, will offer a five-week field ornithology course for adults and children aged 14+. In this engaging, hands-on learning experience you will learn more about the fascinating world of birds and improve your bird watching and identification skills. Each two-part lecture will include a talk from a state or local scientist or expert followed by an identification lesson. Potential topics are weather's affect on birds, bird song identification, in-flight identification of ducks, and more. Field trips visit local birding hot spots and are led by experienced birders. The course runs from March 25 through May 13 with lectures held on Tuesday evenings in the Sanctuary auditorium and field trips on Saturday mornings. The fee for the full course is \$180, or \$150 if you are a member of KBS. You can also register for lectures and field trips separately. Visit [bit.ly/fieldornithology](http://bit.ly/fieldornithology) for up-to-date information and a registration form. All skill levels are welcome. Pre-registration is required by Friday March 14; call 269-671-2510 or email Kara Haas at [birds sanctuary@kbs.msu.edu](mailto:birds sanctuary@kbs.msu.edu).

Adults may join Dea Armstrong, expert birder and City of Ann Arbor ornithologist, and Francie Krawcke, Leslie Science and Nature Center's Raptor Program director, for an eight-week ornithology class. Perfect for the beginner or intermediate birder, the course will delve into anatomy and physiology, behavior, taxonomy, reproduction, vocalizations, and identification. The class consists of Tuesday evening lectures beginning on March 4 and continuing through April 29 and Saturday morning fieldtrips beginning March 8 through May 3; field trip start times vary due to lengthening of day and field trip destination. The fee for the course is \$295/person. To register for the course go to <http://bit.ly/18ri5fq>, or for additional information call the Leslie Science and Nature Center at 734-997-1553.

## Michigan Birds and a Changing Climate

The 8th annual Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative Workshop will be held at the Kettunen Center in Tustin on March 20–23. The theme of this year's workshop is "Michigan Birds and a Changing Climate." The workshop is an excellent opportunity to listen, present, and connect with members of the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative network. The weekend will include presentations from undergraduate and graduate students, state and federal agency personnel, conservation non-profit organization staff, and grassroots leaders. Registration opens in January and can be found at [mibci.org](http://mibci.org).

The mission of the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative is to identify conservation needs and promote active conservation, protection, and restoration of bird populations and their habitats in Michigan through ecologically and biologically based partnerships and actions conducted at multiple spatial scales.

## 2014 Spring Bluebird Festival

The Michigan Bluebird Society (MBS) will hold its annual Spring Bluebird Festival on Saturday, March 29. The event, which travels to different locations, will be held in Traverse City this year. For more information on the sessions and activities to [michiganbluebirdsociety.org](http://michiganbluebirdsociety.org).

## Back to School

With well wishes and fond memories the Michigan Audubon staff bid adieu to Brianna Krauss on December 4, 2013, her last day as the stewardship activities coordinator for the organization. Bri decided to take her biology career in a different direction and has returned to school full-time.

Bri started as a volunteer in October 2011 and worked as a part-time administrator in 2012. Starting January 1, 2013, Bri became Michigan Audubon's first-ever stewardship activities coordinator, with a focus on the Haehnle, Baker, and Hawk Valley properties. She made significant progress working with the dedicated stewardship team at Haehnle and led a volunteer team at Hawk Valley that has accumulated over 1,000 in-kind work hours since the beginning of 2013. Bri's achievements at the three properties and her impact of growing Michigan Audubon's presence as a stewardship leader in mid-Michigan will be sorely missed.



Bri, removing autumn olive at Hawk Valley



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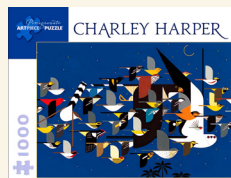
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We've received many new items in the bookstore that feature the artwork of Charley Harper (1922–2007). You are welcome to browse the selection in the bookstore located in our state office. Find a few of these new selections below.



### 1000-Piece Jigsaw Puzzle: Mystery of the Missing Migrants artwork

by Charley Harper

\$18.95

This is just one of several jigsaw puzzles now available through the bookstore. The puzzles are produced by Pomegranate Communications, Inc., a top-quality puzzle maker. Included in the selections are 300-piece children's puzzles. Mystery of the Missing Migrants may be Harper's most iconic piece, created in 1990.



### Sketchbook: How to Draw 28 Birds in Harper's Style

by Charley Harper

\$19.95

Charley Harper is famous for his style of illustration, which used combinations of simple shapes to create birds and other wildlife. In this sketchbook, his illustrations are broken down into black-and-white steps to help you learn how to draw like Charley did. Blank pages follow each illustration (in color) so you can document your work in the book. The sketchbook is a hard cover/spiral bound publication.



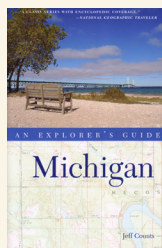
### Charley Harper Memory Game

By Charley Harper

\$15.95

The game includes 36 pairs of heavyweight cards all bearing Charley Harper prints. For younger children, play the game with nine pairs of cards (or fewer). Older children and adults can play with more or all of the cards. The cards

come packaged in a heavyweight 7.5" x 7.5" cardboard game box.

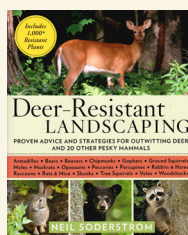


### Michigan: An Explorer's Guide

by Jeff Counts

\$21.95

Now is the time to begin planning your summer adventures around this marvelous state. Each section of the book covers a region that is then divided into the cities and towns in that region. The author includes what to see and do in each of them, including family activities, museums, special events, green spaces, and entertainment venues. Places to eat and stay are also included in the abundant information provided. Cell phone and Internet access is rated for a majority of the locations. This is a great book to have on hand for that quick weekend getaway.



### Deer Resistant Landscaping

by Neil Soderstrom

\$23.85

Winter is also the time to start planning your yard's landscaping scheme. If deer and other critters have made a disaster of your past landscaping efforts, this book may be what you need. The author not only includes advice and strategies to outwit deer, but covers 20 other pesky animals. The book includes over 1,000 plants that are deer-resistant.

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