

Jack Pine *Warbler*

HOLIDAY ISSUE: Turbines and Birds: A Case for Further Study ■ Grebes Galore ■ Positive Trends in Migrating and Breeding Birds in Michigan ■ Tracking Woodcock Nestlings with Powder and Kites ■ CraneFest Photo Gallery



Jack Pine Warbler

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Eared Grebe, photographed in Harney Cty, Oregon with a Nikon D300S and a 200-400 mm lens.

Contents

Features

2
**Wind Turbines and Birds: A
Case for Further Study**

4
Grebes Galore

6
**Positive Trends in Migrating
and Breeding Birds in
Michigan**

Columns

8
Book Corner
What the Robin Knows: How
Birds Reveal the Secrets of
the Natural World

9
**Tracking Woodcock Nest-
lings with Powder and Kites**

10
Young Birder
Jack Pine Memories

11
CraneFest Photo Gallery
by Daniel Flanagan

Departments

1
Executive Director's Letter

8
New Member List

11
**A Special Thanks:
CraneFest 2014**

12
**Calendar
Announcements**



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Executive Director's Letter



NATIONAL AUDUBON CLIMATE INITIATIVE

"Climate change is the greatest threat to birds and biodiversity since humans have been on the planet."

Those are the words of National Audubon CEO David Yarnold. We shared this quote with you in the January-February 2014 issue as part of a feature story about the dangers posed to Michigan's birds by climate change. On September 9, 2014, National Audubon released a ground-breaking new climate change report, which indicates that nearly half of all North American birds are either climate-threatened or climate-endangered. The list includes 50 species that occur in Michigan, including familiar birds like the Common Loon and White-breasted Nuthatch.

The projections in the Audubon Climate Report are based on decades of Christmas Bird Count and Breeding Bird Survey data. In the coming months, Michigan Audubon will begin shaping more of our messaging around the climate change threat. In addition, we will be engaging our members to be an active force in the battle against climate

change and provide you with ways to help birds in the face of this enormous challenge. To read the report, please visit www.audubon.org/climate.

The primary key to thwarting climate change—and preventing the loss of hundreds of North American bird species by the end of the century—is reducing carbon emissions. Michigan is reportedly on track to meet its Renewable Energy Portfolio (RPS) standards by 2015, meaning that electric utilities must generate 10% of their power from renewable sources. As a state, we need to do better. We need to increase the efficiency of our built environment and to continue pushing decision-makers to increase the state's RPS standards. Many of you have expressed concerns about the impact of industrial wind turbines on Michigan's birds. We share your concerns and are working with land owners, scientists, and our partners within the Great Lakes network of Audubon organizations to make sure that wind development is safe for birds. In this issue, we take a closer look at the existing landscape of wind energy in Michigan and the overall impact on our state's birds.

As you're making your plans for year-end charitable giving, consider the impact that your membership dues and donations have on avian life in Michigan. Protecting existing strongholds for birds—places like Haehnle Sanctuary and Whitefish Point—are the second major key to thwarting the effects of climate change on birds. Michigan Audubon owns and manages more than 3,000 acres of bird habitat, and we're working hard every day to further protections and stewardship of these critical areas. Our outreach programs and events consistently carry a conservation thread; the upcoming Midwest Birding Symposium will feature native plant advocate Douglas Tallamy to help deliver the important take-



Charis Tsevis repurposes John James Audubon's paintings to create the stunning cover image for Audubon's climate issue. © 2014 National Audubon.

home message: maintaining a native landscape is critical for birds' survival.

The new Audubon Climate Report makes one thing clear: we're on the clock. Together we can create the changes that are necessary to ensure that the Common Loon remains our "symbol of the north" and that the White-breasted Nuthatch is a frequent visitor to the feeders that will be filled by current and future generations. I am confident we will succeed.

Have a safe, enjoyable holiday season.

Best regards,

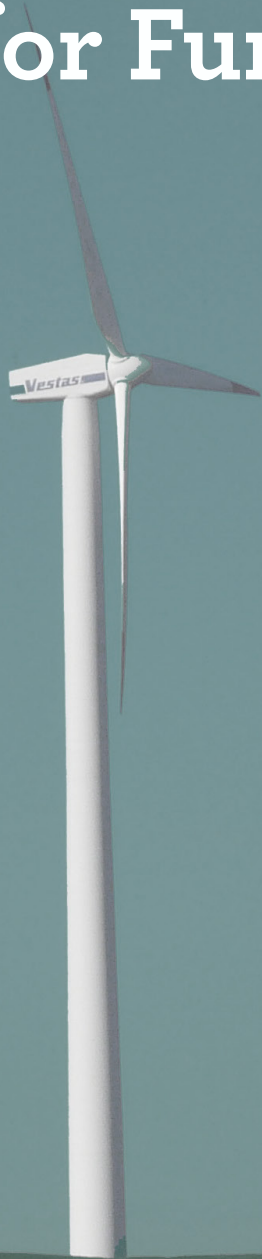
Jonathan E. Lutz, executive director



White-breasted nuthatch © 2013 Skye Haas.

Wind Turbines and Birds: A Case for Further Study

BY HOWARD MEYERSON



Wind power has been a growth industry in Michigan, but one viewed with enthusiasm and concern. Standing high over the landscape, the long-bladed turbines can be seen for miles, powerful symbols of progress and a greener age for electric power production. But as wind's prominence as an energy source has grown, so has scientists' and wildlife managers' concerns about its impacts on birds, bats, and other wildlife.

"The raw numbers (from company reports detailing bird and bat deaths from collisions) are not very high, but it's hard

to know what the actual mortality is," said Scott Hicks, the East Lansing field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). "We absolutely want to see more information and encourage every wind development to collect it."

A 2014 report by the American Wind Wildlife Institute, a partnership of the wind industry, wildlife management agencies, and science and environmental organizations, states: "Fatality rates for most publicly available studies range between three and five birds per megawatt per year... Bat fatality rates can be substantially higher than bird fatality rates, especially at facilities in the Upper Midwest and eastern forests."

In Michigan, that could translate to approximately 8,760 dead birds each year, and 13,000 bats, according to mortality rates calculated in a 2013 Oklahoma State University study done by Scott Loss, an assistant professor of natural resource ecology and management. The Michigan Public Service Commission reported in August that Michigan has 881 utility-scale wind turbines. Their combined production capacity is 1521.7 megawatts, enough to power approximately 550,000 homes, according to energy industry experts.

Loss examined bird mortality rates across the U.S., taking into account newer monopole designs. They cause fewer bird deaths than earlier lattice designs. His findings, published in the journal *Biological Conservation* in May 2013, found bird mortality runs from 2.47 to 5.76 birds per megawatt, depending on the region. He estimates the number of birds killed by U.S. wind turbines to be as high as 327,586 birds a year—a number likely to climb.

"The total amount of bird collision mortality at U.S. wind facilities will likely increase with increased wind energy development in the coming decades," Loss states in his study. "Scaling our estimates to the scenario projected to meet the DOE's 20 percent goal (a six-fold increase from current generation capacity) produces a mean mortality estimate of 1.4 million birds."

Hicks and other scientists studying the question say wind turbines do not result in enough deaths to cause population declines. In fact, they rank low, according to the USFWS, compared to the number of deaths due to collisions with communication towers, building windows, motor vehicles, high-tension wires, and even predation by cats. But they do contribute, and so wind companies are

Picture from pixabay.com

encouraged to consider bird-smart siting practices and employ the best management practices and mitigation technologies. Pre- and post-construction monitoring field studies are also encouraged to provide comparative data about those impacts. An 82-page set of voluntary land-based siting guidelines is available to wind developers from USFWS. Michigan has no such guidelines.

“From a wildlife protection standpoint we have little regulatory authority if they build [wind turbines] on private land,” explains Karen Cleveland, the all-birds biologist with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). “If they build on top of an endangered species, or on state land, we can say something. We do tell them that once they have it built and start killing birds they will be in big trouble—and that we’d like to give them advice about how not to do that.”

Cleveland, who has consulted with wind developers, said fewer wind companies are making inquiries these days. The initial push was driven by the 2008 Michigan law that created the state’s Renewable Portfolio Standard, which called for producers to provide at least 10 percent of the electricity from renewable sources by 2015. Tax incentives were offered to those who built. But a 2012 ballot initiative to increase the standard to 25 percent by 2025 was defeated by voters and resulted in a drop off of interest.

“We don’t have a strong public will for increased renewable development,” Cleveland said. “I haven’t had any contact this past year with wind companies. They had a timeline to do it by the 2015 deadline for federal tax incentives. It’s really tapered off a lot since then.”

Most existing wind power companies work with the USFWS, according to Hicks. Wind farms require a substantial investment. Investors want to know their risks. Few want to be hit with expensive fines for violations of the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, or Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. More and more are conducting the recommended pre- and post-construction monitoring studies.

“Early companies may not have shared that information with us, and there are a few who do their own thing, but a lot of them are in contact with us,” Hicks said. “Most are making a good faith effort to follow the guidelines and recommendations. Bald Eagles are doing well in Michigan. The number of nests keeps going up.” He knows of only one Bald Eagle that was killed in a collision with a Lower Peninsula wind turbine, along with three Red-tailed Hawks and four Turkey Vultures, 44 birds in total. Those figures come from two post-construction reports and two other preliminary reports.

“That’s not all that was killed,” Hicks said. “That’s only what was found. We don’t know about scavenging or search efficiency.”

The species of greatest concern in Michigan are raptors, night-migrating songbirds, and bats, according to wildlife

managers. Work is now underway to learn more about pelagic species, those Great Lakes water birds that could be affected by any future proposals to build offshore wind farms.

Dave Luukkonen, a wildlife research biologist at MDNR, has been surveying waterfowl and other species to better understand where they gather and how many there are. His work is part of a region-wide effort by the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative and Great Lakes Commission to frame future research needs for that purpose.

“What we’ve found is that Lake St. Clair has much higher pelagic bird densities,” Luukkonen says. “Peak populations of diving ducks there are 500,000 to 600,000 birds; some flocks are 12 miles long. From a continental perspective, that’s an important area [for birds]. Then there are other areas. Long-tailed Ducks make pretty heavy use of Lake Michigan.”

Offshore wind development, Luukkonen explains, presents two types of potential impacts: direct mortality caused from flying into turbines and the indirect erosive effects of birds being excluded from significant staging areas because they do not tolerate the towers’ presence. For diving ducks, like the Canvasback or Scaup, that’s a potentially bigger impact.

“If they build, they may not come,” Luukkonen warns. “That’s important to diving ducks, gulls, and bald eagles. I think the public views wind energy as green, which is true, but there are impacts, and we have some concerns.

“We’re interested in better understanding the potential impacts and minimizing them.”

Howard Meyerson (howardmeyerson@gmail.com) has been writing about birds, nature, the environment, and outdoor recreation for 30 years. He lives in Grand Rapids. His work appears in a variety of publications.

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Grebes Galore

BY KIRBY ADAMS

“**A** weird duck landed on my lawn and doesn't look like it can fly.”

That's how many Michiganders were introduced to grebes in the winter of 2013-14. Horned Grebes (*Podiceps auritus*) and Red-necked Grebes (*Podiceps grisegena*) both migrate through and around the Great Lakes in the fall and early winter, with many remaining on the open water of the big lakes throughout the winter. Birders in search of these pelagic grebes head to the shorelines in winter to spot them floating and diving, usually far from shore. But last winter there was almost no open water to be found on the lakes, and that posed a problem for grebes, not to mention for ducks and loons.

Grebes are bound to the water and unable to take off from dry land. Once they land on solid ground, they must find their way back to water to both feed and ever have a hope of flying again. When freezing lake surfaces forced the grebes to the air in January, they were looking for open water, but often descended out of confusion or exhaustion onto snowy fields or ice-covered surfaces. That gave wildlife rehabbers and volunteers plenty of work boxing up stranded grebes and delivering them to what little open water was available, usually inland stretches of rivers. Many inland residents, unfamiliar with the pelagic birds, figured they were ducks with odd pointy bills and the weirdest feet ever.

Even the Red Cedar and Grand Rivers in Lansing, about as inland as you can get in Michigan, hosted both Red-necked and Horned Grebes last winter. This gave birders and naturalists a rare opportunity for close viewing of the

birds without getting on a boat or braving the bitter winds of a lakeshore in February. The excitement over such a great opportunity was tempered by the sad reality that many of these birds perished from starvation, the brutal weather, and general stress.

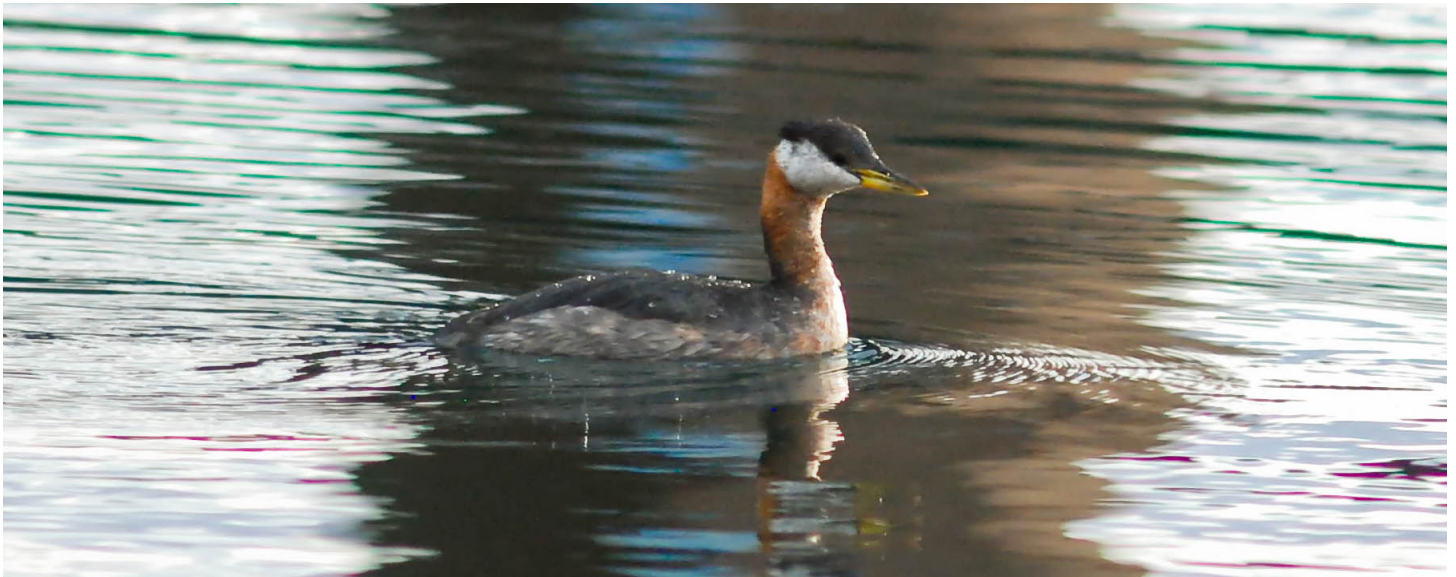
In a normal year, anyone familiar with the family of grebes would associate the widespread Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) with Michigan. If there's a permanent patch of water at least a foot deep, there's a good chance the tiny Pied-billed Grebes will turn up there in the summer. As night migrants, they sneak into the state sometime in spring, and leave just as stealthily in the fall. Seeing one fly is rarer than having a Horned Grebe land on your front porch.

The other grebes that can reasonably be found every year in the Mitten are the two previously mentioned members of the *Podiceps* genus, as well as the Eared Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), a western bird that appears with some regularity throughout the Great Lakes area. Eared Grebes have been annual visitors to the Muskegon Wastewater System property, with some choosing to spend the summer.

All grebes are divers and piscivorous to at least some extent. The larger Red-necked Grebes lean more heavily to fish as prey, while the more diminutive Pied-billed and Eared Grebes rely on aquatic insects and crustaceans. When startled, a grebe's typical response is to dive like a loon rather than fly like a duck. They can cover extraordinary distance under water and will often resurface dozens of yards away from where they disappeared. This is confounding to predatory falcons and eagles, not to mention annoying to birders.



Horned Grebe pair. Denali NPS © 2010 Ken Conger.



A Red-necked Grebe in the lower harbor at Marquette, Michigan. © 2010 Skye Haas.

Despite the ubiquity of the Pied-billed, if we were going to christen a “state grebe” for Michigan, it would deservedly be the Red-necked Grebe, given that this state’s land and water is so critical to the North American population.

Whitefish Point is designated an Important Bird Area (IBA) by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and the National Audubon Society, in no small part thanks to the annual migration of Red-necked Grebes past the point. In a fall season, 20,000 or more Red-necked Grebes can be counted, representing as much as 45% of the entire North American population of the species. Keeping track of the grebes, among other birds, is the reason the Point is staffed with an experienced counter for the first eight daylight hours of every day from August 15 through November 15. (A similar waterbird count takes place in April and May annually.)

With the possibility that almost half of the continent’s Red-necked Grebes may fly within sight of a person standing on the beach at Whitefish Point each fall, the potential for calamity from development becomes clear. Wind power development presents the most likely threat. Offshore wind turbines on any of the Great Lake shores are a significant threat to migrating birds, but in the bottleneck of Whitefish Bay the effects could be monumental. That illustrates the importance of the lone ornithologist and/or birder shivering in an October gale while using the scope on the beach at Whitefish Point. Before the waterbird count, no one knew how many Red-necked Grebes funneled through that area. At a casual glance to all but highly experienced lakewatchers, the flocks over the bay could easily be Red-breasted Mergansers. The count has quantified the suspicion that a great many of the migrants are indeed grebes, and Whitefish Point and its waters are even more critical than previously thought.

If the arctic chill of last winter returns this season, you may just get to see grebes up close and personal in your local river or, somewhat unfortunately for the grebe, in your yard. On the other hand, if we return to the trend of mild winters with open water on the big lakes, the birds won’t be as visible, but they’ll be out there. Hopefully none of the flocks gathering to molt on Lake Huron or passing silently through the fog of Whitefish Bay will ever make the perilous journey from out-of-sight to out-of-mind.

Kirby Adams (kirby.adams@gmail.com) 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.



Whitefish Point is a designated a global Important Bird Area for Red-necked Grebes in migration. © 2014 Jonathan E. Lutz.

Positive Trends in Migrating and Breeding Birds in Michigan

BY LOUIE DOMBROSKI

Birders who've been at it for decades—and I am one of them—will probably tell you that migration isn't what it used to be. Aside from declines in populations of such species as Common Nighthawks and Red-headed Woodpeckers, the volume of most passerines seen during migration seems to have decreased over the decades. I can't recall a spring with fewer Swainson's and Gray-cheeked Thrushes than I experienced in 2014, and the great "fallouts" I remember from the 1970s and 1980s haven't been repeated in recent decades.

But birder-detected migration is only one yardstick for measuring bird populations, and it is not the best one. When birders don't see lots of migrants, it may be that conditions are favorable for migration and the birds are not stopping to refuel as often. Monitoring of breeding bird populations, such as is done by the Breeding Bird Survey program run by the U.S. Geological Survey's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, is key.

I'm going to report here on a few recent, positive trends in Michigan bird populations, beginning with three species recently found nesting in the state after long absences. While sightings of vagrant birds are most often just chance occurrences to be enjoyed for their novelty, sometimes an increase in the frequency of rare species reports may be a precursor to a range expansion.

Loggerhead Shrike reports from Michigan have increased in number over the years, fueling hope that this species might recolonize a state where decades ago it was a widespread but very scarce breeding bird. In 2013, a pair was discovered nesting in the eastern Upper Peninsula, for the first time in

Loggerhead Shrike



the state in two decades and the first time in the UP in half a century. Unfortunately, no pairs have yet been reported in 2014, though the trend of a few migrants being reported in the spring at scattered locations around the state has continued.

Previously not a species of regular occurrence in Michigan, Blue Grosbeak has popped up with increasing frequency in widely scattered parts of the state over the last several years. Singing males began showing up at the same locations in subsequent years. Then furtive females were discovered accompanying the conspicuous males, and you can see where this story is leading. Since 2011, Blue Grosbeaks have been recorded from Cass County along the Indiana border in southwest Michigan to Dickinson County in the western Upper Peninsula. In 2014, pairs nested in both Allegan and Kalamazoo counties.

Then there's the Lark Sparrow, a sparrow that everyone loves because it has such a distinctive pattern that everyone can learn to identify it. This species has been recorded annually for years at widely scattered locations within Michigan. There is a small but stable breeding population in Ohio just 15 miles south of our common border, but there hasn't been a confirmed nesting in Michigan since 1952—until a pair was found nesting on our side of the border this year.

The Pileated Woodpecker's well-known southeastward expansion in the state reached a new milestone when the

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Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, photographed on October 27, 2014, in Mason County, Michigan. © 2014 Jerry Ziarno.

species was reported this year in Monroe County, the state's southeastern-most. Another northern species has been inching its way southward in the state: that wilderness icon, the Common Raven, has recently nested as far south as Muskegon and Gratiot counties.

There are a few migrants/vagrants that have been reported with increasing frequency in Michigan in recent years. In some cases, increasing occurrence in Michigan is part of a bigger regional picture. The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is a boldly patterned and colorful species that is abundant in much of the American tropics, though its United States range is limited. They've been showing up with increasing frequency far to the north, and Michigan has been on the leading edge of this trend, with one showing up at a sewage pond in Berrien County in May and a pair visiting Tawas Point State Park in early June.

A highlight of the fall 2013 migration season in Michigan was the banner year status the Red Phalarope attained—with four found in the Lower Peninsula and three in the UP, far more than is typical. This species breeds in the Arctic and winters on the open ocean but is seldom seen in between. All were documented with photographs and some, such as one in Muskegon County, were enjoyed by many over a period of days.

The Scissor-tailed Flycatcher is one that few birders would claim to have seen enough of (and I would bet that's true of birders in Oklahoma, where they are more common than highway mile markers). In Michigan there's now at least one being reported somewhere in the state every year, but I doubt its newfound regular status will diminish the species in the eyes of the state's birders.

It doesn't seem right to finish a piece on bird populations without some suggestion relating to bird conservation. I'll forego the big issues of habitat loss and global warming, and pick a small-scale problem that, multiplied many times over, is actually a big problem: lighted buildings at night that attract birds, disrupting their migration, often resulting in their deaths.

Detroit Audubon, along with dozens of other bird conservation groups, has been raising awareness of the danger to birds posed by lighted buildings. In a recent conversation with Detroit Audubon Safe Passage program organizers, the Black Swamp Bird Observatory's research director, Mark Shieldcastle, expressed his opinion that "hundreds of millions" of birds pass through the Western Lake Erie basin (and onward up through Michigan) annually. Tall buildings and residential-scale buildings can both be lethal to birds during migration. Birders can make a difference by improving bird-friendliness in their communities. This can be as simple as applying the American Bird Conservancy's Bird Tape (www.abcbirdtape.org) to windows in your home or business. You can also join a local Audubon group or spearhead an effort to work with managers of tall buildings, if you live in a city, to turn lights out during migration. We all need to make these efforts if we want Michigan to maintain its resident and seasonal birds, and provide safe haven for species that may be expanding their ranges.

Louie Dombroski (louie_dombroski@yahoo.com) is a former waterbird and hawk counter at the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. He is currently stationed in Copper Harbor counting waterbirds in fall migration as they pass by the Keweenaw Peninsula.

What the Robin Knows: How Birds Reveal the Secrets of the Natural World

BY JON YOUNG

REVIEWED BY BEA VERBURG

“Deep bird language,” “bird language allies,” “baseline behavior,” “baseline vocalizations.”

If these terms are not part of your vocabulary—indeed, part of your behavior—I hope you will read *What the Robin Knows* by Jon Young. And not just to increase your vocabulary. There is so much information contained in this relatively small book, it’s hard to know where to begin.

From the dedication we learn that this is more than a how-to book. It contains knowledge that has been passed down through the ages: traditional indigenous knowledge which Jon was fortunate to learn at an early age, has honed over time, and now strives to pass to a new generation—a generation quickly losing its connection to the natural world as technology engulfs us.

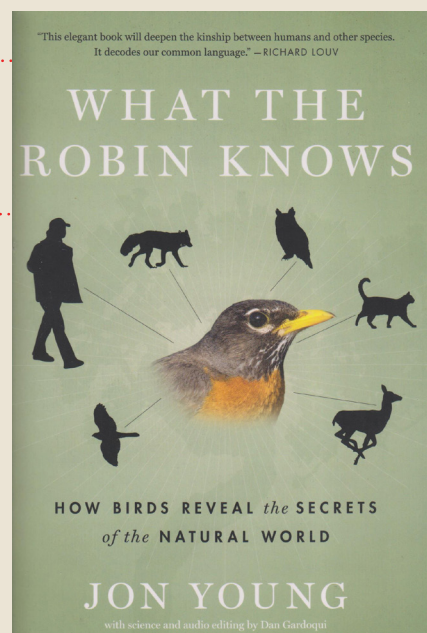
In the introduction, Young describes the discipline of deep bird language as part science and part art. The science is evident in the many studies referenced throughout this book, (there are ten pages of references at the back) as well as in the methodology used to teach deep bird language in chapters one through eight. I believe the art is in the storytelling. *What the Robin Knows* is chock full of stories. Even the introduction is full of stories—one after another—and isn’t that how traditional indigenous knowledge has always been passed down?

Now we are hooked, and we are only just beginning chapter one. In order to have stories to tell, we have to have experiences. To have experiences, we have to go out into the natural world. But we are fortunate: we don’t have to go to faraway places; we don’t have to spend great amounts of time or money. What we do have to do is spend a little time, as often as possible, in our very own sit spot. There we will listen and observe; we will take note of each and every detail happening around us. Over time, we will notice more and more; we will ask questions, and the next time we are there, we will seek to find the answers.

Gradually, the birds of this spot will accept us as part of their territory, and we will come to know them as individuals. We are not threatening to them. We are using our “owl eyes” and “deer ears” as taught to us in chapter four. With practice, we have mastered the walking pattern Jon has named “The Lazy Surveyor.” Now birds are behaving in a normal, comfortable way; they are in their “baseline behavior.” Now we may see the deer, fox, weasel, maybe even bear. We may see many things we have never seen before. “Why haven’t I seen this? I didn’t even know this was here.” Now we see them in their natural state. The key is in the behavior of the birds. Birds, especially common, ground-dwelling birds like the robin, are sentries for the animals—an early warning system. Through their alarm calls and their behavior they give an early warning to all the other animals.

Here now, from chapter seven, are more terms you will want to add to your vocabulary: bird plow, sentinel, hook, popcorn, parabolic

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(umbrella), weasel, cat, bullet, ditch, hawk drop, safety barrier, and zone of silence. What could this be about? These are alarm shapes, which have been identified and codified by bird language specialists. This is the most technical of chapters, and luckily it has excellent drawings depicting what is being described. According to the author, “Understanding these universal alarm shapes allows us to interpret bird language in many contexts around the world without even knowing the species in a particular area.” I ask you, who wouldn’t want that? And good news: this chapter, too, is full of stories.

References are made throughout the book to online audio of bird language vocalizations in connection with the text and which can be found at www.birdlanguage.com. I did not use these as I read, but I did listen to them online. They are very good and easy to use. I’m sure they would add another dimension to what you learn from this book and could also be very useful on their own.

I believe *What the Robin Knows* is more than a “must read”—it is a “must master”! Through the processes described by this author in this book, you’ll be inspired to share your stories, and to be a mentor.

Bea Verburg is a member of Michigan Audubon and a life member of the Grand Rapids Audubon Club. She and her husband, Bob, enjoy being part of the baseline at their residence north of Ada.

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.

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Tracking Woodcock Nestlings with Powder and Kites

BY BRIAN LUCAS, CHRISTOPHER SENSING, AND ALEXANDRA LOCHER

The American Woodcock has been studied at length, because its value as a game bird is significant, although studies of nestling movements are few and far between. As part of an ongoing project investigating habitat characteristics contributing to woodcock breeding success in Michigan, researchers from Grand Valley State University are studying nestling movements by tracking them with a powder that fluoresces under ultraviolet light, and studying their habitat from the ground and from the air.

Our main objective is to determine if using super-high-resolution aerial images may provide a different understanding of woodcock habitat use than implementing only on-the-ground investigations. As woodcock populations have been steadily declining since 1968, they are listed in the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan as a species of high concern. Thus, understanding characteristics of breeding habitat from different perspectives is essential for developing and implementing woodcock conservation plans.



Fluorescent tracking powder being applied to the underside of a woodcock nestling. Researchers used black lights to reflect the powder and track movements of the nestlings at night. © Brian Lucas.



A specially trained dog stood on point when she detected a woodcock hen. © Alexandra Locher.

In close collaboration with seasoned woodcock banders and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, we located woodcock hens and broods with beautiful bird dogs specifically trained for the task. If a hen flushed, we carefully searched for the four cryptic nestlings, recorded beak length to age them, and fitted a small band on one leg to identify them should they be captured again in the future. We then applied a different color of special wildlife tracking powder to the underside of each nestling, so that they could be tracked individually. Fluorescent powder has been used effectively in previous studies to track movements of woodcock nestlings without impacting their survival. Using a GPS receiver,

we recorded the position at which each brood was captured. Once dark enough, we returned to the point of capture and used the GPS receiver to track the path of the chicks as they followed the hen through the forest. With an ultraviolet flashlight in hand, we excitedly followed a fluorescent “highway” over logs, through brush, and even across small streams back to the hen’s position.



Nesting woodcock hen. © Alexandra Locher.

It was impressive that such small birds could travel distances up to one-quarter mile at night, navigating over forest debris and sometimes through water. Once the tracking coordinates had been collected, the aerial mapping of the study site could begin.

On a dry day when the wind was just right, we launched a nine-foot kite with a Pentax WG2 camera suspended from it to collect super high-resolution aerial imagery of the study area. The resolution on each image is about six inches. We then used computer software programs to overlay the GPS tracking data onto the pictures and understand a more comprehensive view of the movement patterns.

With use of the fluorescent powder, GPS receivers, kites, and aerial imagery, we are beginning to see a birds-eye picture of woodcock nestling movements. We hope to find patterns between habitat characteristics and movement of nestlings, and identify factors contributing to survival of broods. This information will help us conserve woodcock populations and their habitat so we may keep enjoying their value, both recreationally and as a key element in the continued health of the ecosystems of which they are a part. In conservation, we must be conscious of the fact that we are as much a part of the ecosystem as the woodcocks are, and if we do not take the proper measures to conserve these resources and ecosystems now, their integrity may be jeopardized in the future.

Brian Lucas is an undergraduate research assistant at GVSU. Christopher Sensing is a graduate research assistant at GVSU. Alexandra Locher is an assistant professor in the Biology Department at GVSU, and the principle investigator in this research. (lochera@gvsu.edu)



Cryptic woodcock nestling among bigtooth aspen leaves. © Brian Lucas.

Jack Pine Memories

BY ALISON VILAG

The breeze played antagonist in the Jack Pine barrens west of Grayling this morning; the Kirtland's muttered from the lower branches, reluctant to leave his shelter from the gusts and the gallery of hungry eyes and lenses. It's only July 2nd, but it could pass for September. This breeze carries blackbird flocks, an unprecedented chill, and change. Tour season is running out, and this is my third—and final—year of working as the Kirtland's bouncer. Every year, I've pledged to never return, but Grayling keeps cajoling, tempting.

Grayling, Michigan, is the heartland of Kirtland's Warblers. The archetypical northern Michigan town, it was conceived during the logging boom, named after creatures exterminated because of the logging boom, and today sustained largely by affluent tourists with an appetite for the outdoors. It's the kind of place where the locals are hospitable types who will pick up a hitchhiker, offer you a donut and a beer, then pop a cold one themselves while driving down the road. It's a town where going to the bar in your waders is perfectly acceptable.

Even though its namesake grayling is long gone, the area is a mecca for another unique animal: Kirtland's Warblers. Grayling is one of two places offering tours into the Kirtland's nesting habitat, so birdwatchers from around the world are drawn to the town for a pilgrimage into the jack pines. The Kirtland's Warbler has brought me to Grayling for the last three years, too; as Michigan Audubon's tour leader, I provide a gateway for all who desire to connect with the warblers.

Every morning, I introduce myself to the eager assembly by stating, "I know why you're here: you want to see a Kirtland's Warbler. That's why I'm here, too—so I can show you one." My cohorts come from all over the world with one goal: to connect with this slate-and-lemon-meringue songster. My duty is unchanging despite rain or snow, sinus infection or exhaustion, black flies or gale-force wind. I just have to deliver the warbler, preferably unobstructed by twigs, in perfect lighting, and somewhere closer than halfway across the clearing.

This morning, my group paced like tortured border collies between two singing warblers refusing to show. I waited patiently next to a pin cherry. They were chasing their phantoms while I chased mine. However, their target had feathers, and mine, memories.

I've grown a lot since summer 2011; this was my first grown-up job. Although I was old enough to drive the work vehicle, I was young enough to be kicked out of Spike's Keg O' Nails (local Grayling bar)



Kirtland's Warbler © Joel Trick.



Allison Vilag guiding a tour.

at 9 PM sharp. The things I needed to learn abounded: how to use the government credit card; how to tactfully tell someone they were a law-breaking hooligan; how to carouse until 2 AM and show up to work at 6:30 the next morning with a smile on my face. The job taught me how to work—and play—like an adult.

And now, here I stand at the end of the 2014 season. I've spent countless hours in a plantation of Charlie Brown Christmas trees, helping thousands of people get their first glimpse of a Kirtland's Warbler. I've received far too many black fly hickeys, driven countless caravans to the tour site, and only lost a vehicle once. The video I show before we hit the field is etched permanently in my brain, and once, I even dreamed that I was a Kirtland's.

But lest anyone think I'm jaded about my job, most days I can hardly believe that I'm getting paid to amble down a sandy two-track through pungent sweet fern. Here I stand patiently, barefoot in the springy lichen, enveloped in ethereal Hermit Thrush melody. Finally, the breeze tapers, and predictably, a male warbler pops up in the cherry to my left. I set my spotting scope on him, gesture the group over, and stand back as joy and relief exude from the gallery. He unleashes his song again and again, his body trembling like my own heart as I watch him. I know what I do is helping his species—and helping people connect with an endangered bird. I am making a difference. I will be passing the guiding torch on, but I have grown to love this species more fiercely than I love my solo canoe or curried jackfruit. Thank you, Michigan Audubon, for allowing me to be the Kirtland's ambassador.

Allison Vilag is a junior studying environmental writing and media at Unity College in Maine. She craves the outdoors, and someday hopes to use her love of words and adventure to connect people with nature. On rainy days, she plays blues mandolin and bakes bread.

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CraneFest Photo Gallery

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CraneFest XX Special Thanks

October 2014 marked the 20th Anniversary celebration of CraneFest—a truly special event. Wonderful weather and Sandhill Cranes highlighted the successful weekend. Our event success was due largely in part to our sponsors, volunteers, partners, vendors, and everyone involved that make the event possible. Michigan Audubon would like to thank the following organizations, businesses, and individuals that donated funds and/or assistance to the 2014 Birder's Soiree and CraneFest:

Partners: Kiwanis Club of Battle Creek
Children's Educational Tent Sponsor: Republic Services

Sanctuary Supporters: Vanguard USA and Opticon

CraneFest Donors: Bellevue First Responders
The Medalist Golf Club
Nottawa Wild Bird Supply
Participating artists, vendors, and non-profit organizations

CraneFest volunteers: Robert Bochenek
Mike & Nancy Boyce
Abbey Carmichael
Celilia Carmichael

Sam Conklin
Win Eck
Dr. Patrick Fields
Dr. Richard Fleming
Tom Funke
Dick Gillespie
Loretta Gold
Audrey Haddock and the Bellevue Middle & High School art students
Eileen Houston
Candace Ivey
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Sandhill Crane Winery
Schuler's Restaurant
Stovall Products
Richard Yarsevich

Birders' Soirée Volunteers: Robert Bochenek
Sam Febba
Elena Millard
Jim Zervos

Announcements

Calendar

December

14–Jan 5, 2015

Christmas Bird Count

Check with your local chapter for exact date and time

January

23–24 Stewardship Network Conference

Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, East Lansing

17–18 Michigan Audubon's Birding at the Soo Field Trip

Sault Ste. Marie

February

2 Tawas Point Birding Festival Registration Opens

13–16 Great Backyard Bird Count (gbbc.birdcount.org/)

14–15 Michigan Audubon's Birding at the Soo Field Trip Sault Ste. Marie

16 Cerulean Warbler Weekend Registration Opens

March

1 Midwest Birding Symposium Registration Opens

Check Your Expiration Date

On the back cover of this issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, just above your name on the mailing label, is your membership expiration date. If yours says December 31, 2014, it is time for you to renew. Please use the envelope stapled in the center of this magazine to renew your membership. Your prompt response now will reduce the number of renewal letters that we will need to mail later. That, in turn, will save Michigan Audubon money that can then be used toward bird conservation. Thank you for renewing now.

115th Christmas Bird Count

It is time once again for the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This December birders from around the globe will again join in the longest running citizen science survey in the world. The count dates are from December 14, 2014 to January 5, 2015.

Young and old, extreme birders or barcalounger feeder watcher can all participate in the CBC. You can find the exact date of your local count and the contact information for the compiler on Michigan Audubon's website at www.michiganaudubon.org/research/surveys_forms_data/christmas_count/.

In 2013 there were 69 count circles set up in Michigan alone, which were the most ever conducted in the state. There were 518,372 individual birds counted in Michigan of 149 species. Details from the CBC in Michigan can be found on National Audubon's website at birds.audubon.org/114th-cbc-michigan-regional-summary or it can be found in the pages of issue #3 of *Michigan Birds and Natural History*.

Although the CBC is now free, the work that is done compiling this information and presenting it in usable format takes funding. Please consider donating \$5 to participate in the CBC; your dollars go to a good cause. For donations of \$20 to the CBC/National Audubon, they will send you a hat.

Birding the Soo

Weekend birding trips to the eastern Upper Peninsula will again be offered by Michigan Audubon during the winter months. These popular car caravan tours fill fast so don't delay getting your reservations. Trips are scheduled for January 17–18 and February 14–15, 2015.

Birds likely to be seen near the Sault Ste. Marie area include Bohemian Waxwings, Snowy Owl, Sharp-tailed Grouse, both Red and White-winged Crossbills, and Evening Grosbeak. A stop at Hulbert Bog may get a Gray Jay or Boreal Chickadee. If 2015 is an irruption year for owls we will hope to see Northern Hawk and Great Gray Owls.

The fee for the weekend is \$70 for Michigan Audubon members and \$100 for non-members (this includes a membership). Hotel fees and meals are extra. Check the Michigan Audubon website event calendar at michiganaudubon.org to register and for additional information.

© Daniel Behm



Birding News

Exceptional Bird Find

On July 17 Allen Chartier, one of only two people in Michigan licensed to band hummingbirds, recaptured an adult female Ruby-throated Hummingbird (RTHU) in Jackson County that he had banded on June 8, 2006. The bird was already an adult when it was banded, meaning it was born in 2005 or earlier, which would make the bird at least nine years and one month old (using the Bird Banding Lab's standard method of calculating bird ages). This makes this bird the oldest RTHU ever confirmed according to the Bird Banding Lab's longevity database.

The bird has been recaptured many times since Allen first banded it, always at the same location. Allen calculated that the bird has traveled at least 36,000 miles in her migrations, possibly as much as 49,000 miles depending on where she goes to spend the winter. Allen also estimates that she has produced between 18 and 36 young in the past nine years, with 4-8 of those likely to have lived to adulthood (the mortality rate of hatch-year birds is 80%). Allen says that the "average" life span that he typically sees in RTHU is four years.

Allen has had a busy year banding RTHU, reporting on July 20 that he had already banded 300+ birds and recaptured an additional 100+ returning from previous years. These numbers are higher than his average banding rates from years previous. We thank Allen for all the time and money he puts in volunteering to band hummers. The information he is gathering is helping scientists understand even more about hummingbirds.

Signature 2015 Events

Please take a moment to record the dates for Michigan Audubon's Signature Events on your new 2015 calendar.

Tawas Point Birding Festival

The festival will be celebrating its 10th year on May 14-17. Our keynote speaker for this special anniversary is Bill Thompson III. Bill is the editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest* and the author of many books and field guides. Bill's parents were keynote speakers at the 2nd Tawas Point Birding Festival back in 2006. You can pre-register for the event at tawasbirdfest.com. The event's website will be updated as information becomes available and the schedule is finalized. Expect registration to begin on February 2.

Cerulean Warbler Weekend

Cerulean Warbler Weekend comes to the Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary on June 5-7, 2015. Birding tours to see Cerulean Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow, Hooded Warbler, and other grassland and woodland species highlight this small birding event. Pre-register and find additional information for this event at ceruleanwarbler.org. Expect registration to begin on February 16.

CraneFest

The Sandhill Crane and Art Festival, better known as CraneFest, will be held at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area south of Bellevue on the weekend of October 10-11, 2015. Event information can be found at cranefest.org.

Midwest Birding Symposium

Although not one of our Signature Events, Michigan Audubon is honored to host the Midwest Birding Symposium (MBS 15) on September 10-13, 2015. The event is expected to draw hundreds of birders from across North America and beyond. Michigan Audubon's event partners include the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, and the Great Lakes Bay Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau. Pre-registration has already begun and can be done by visiting www.midwestbirding.org/mbs2015. Expect registration to begin on March 1.

MBS will be headquartered at the DoubleTree Hotel in Bay City. You can make your reservations at the DoubleTree now by calling 989-891-6000. Please make sure to mention that you are coming for the Symposium to be able to book a room at our special rate. Rooms will be \$129 per night.

We have a fantastic schedule planned for MBS 15 with keynote programs by Douglas Tallamy, Brian "Fox" Ellis, and Alvaro Jaramillo. Birding tours to the hotspots around Saginaw Bay and Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge are planned as are birding by boat tours. Sessions in the afternoon include topics on bird identification, birding skills, bird conservation, and backyard habitats. We are so excited to host this great event with our partners. We hope you will consider joining us for a great time in Bay City.

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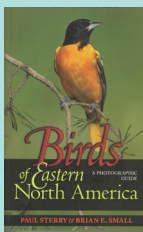


Ohio Lake Erie Birding Trail Guidebook

by Ohio Division of Wildlife

\$20.00

A great gift for fans of birding at Magee Marsh, this book provides all the information you'll need to get to all the birding destinations along the Lake Erie shoreline in Ohio. The guide starts in Conneaut Harbor along the Pennsylvania border and heads west along the lake until you hit birding spot #88 in the Maumee State Forest west of Toledo. Birding locations include the islands off of Marblehead Point. Beautiful photos with clear maps and directions make this a great guide for any birder that frequents Ohio.

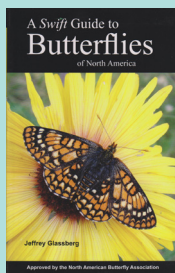


Birds of Eastern North America, A Photographic Guide

by Paul Sterry and Brian E. Small

\$18.95

Another in the long line of bird field guides available. What makes this one different is the stunning photographs. Although the authors only provide a few photos per species, these up-close shots will certainly help you with species identification. After running through the taxonomic order of North American species the authors include a section of "out of the ordinary" species, the rare birds that tend to show up in North America on a frequent basis.



A Swift Guide to Butterflies of North America

by Jeffrey Glassberg

\$29.95

From the author of *Butterflies through Binoculars* comes a guide approved by the North American Butterfly Association and a must have for the Lepidoptera fan. The page edges are color coded by families to speed your search and the book includes a visual index—small photographs of the butterfly with a page number. This index can really speed up your search for an unknown species. Very clear up-close photos have lines pointing to identification marks. The book claims to be "the most user-friendly butterfly guide ever created" and we believe it.

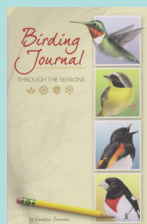


The Kids' Outdoor Adventure Book 448 Great Things to Do in Nature Before You Grow Up

by Stacy Tornio and Ken Keffer

\$18.95

This book is compiled like a "bucket list" for children. Divided by the seasons, each one has a checklist of 50 items: 50 challenge items, three items each for projects, destinations, garden recipes, and outdoor games. Items can be as simple as "run barefoot on the beach" to more difficult as in "making a German apple cake." Many of the items can be done for free as you only need to be outdoors to do them. Some items can be very site-specific such as "Take a Picture from the Top of a Mountain," but all are rated on an "Adventure Scale" from 1 (easiest) to 5 (hardest).



Birding Journal: Through the Seasons

by Vanessa Sorensen

\$12.95

Start your favorite birders' year off right with a gift of a birding journal. Beautiful artwork accompanies the pages that include a list of species for the month, pages for monthly notes, plus natural history information, and tips to help you bring the birds to your backyard. This is not just a bound lined journal—the note pages are free of lines in case you want to sketch your sightings and a life list of North American species is included in the back of the journal.

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