

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

*THE WINTER BIRDING ISSUE:* Bird Town: Detroit Bird Conservation Efforts on the Rise ■ Chasing a Kite ■  
WPBO 2015 Waterbird Count ■ Restoring Oak Savanna for Grassland Birds at Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary ■



# Jack Pine Warbler

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Guidelines available on request.

## PRINTING

*Jack Pine Warbler* (ISSN 0021-3845)  
is published six times per year and  
is received by all Michigan Audubon  
members. It is printed by

### Foresight Group

2822 N. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Lansing, MI 48906  
www.foresightgroup.net

Member of  
**EarthShare**  
Michigan



Printed on recycled  
paper made from 100%  
post-consumer waste.



## Cover Photo ■ Swallow-tailed Kite

### Photographer: Greg Smith

This picture was taken August 24, 2015 on Williams Road in Clinton County. After searching for the bird in the rain for two hours the day of the discovery, Greg Smith skipped out of work early the next day to find the bird. Within two hours, he had discovered it only 20 minutes from his home.

Camera: Hand-held Nikon D600 camera, Sigma 150-500mm lens. Apperture: f10 1/2000. ISO 800.

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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.

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# Executive Director's Letter

## WPBO NOW JOINED WITH MICHIGAN AUDUBON

BY ALEC LINDSAY, CHAIR, MICHIGAN AUDUBON BOARD OF DIRECTORS



The busy holiday season is behind us now. Christmas Bird Counts are tallied, the days are lengthening, and it won't be long before the maple sap starts running and the earliest of spring migrants appear. I realize that in January, it is sometimes hard to believe that the darkest days of the year are truly behind us, but as surely as our tilted earth goes around the sun, these transitions shall come to pass.

I remind myself of hopeful transitions as we on the board work diligently to find a new captain for our Michigan Audubon ship. The departure of executive director Jonathan Lutz in mid-November required some extra investment by the staff and board, but it also provided new opportunities for us to reflect on and evaluate the status and future of our growing organization. Back in October we revisited our process of strategic visioning and actively pursued our executive search planning. We reached out to our staff, our volunteers, and our partners for feedback on the pending search for new executive leadership. We advertised widely and received an impressive set of responses from many qualified applicants. The board's search committee is currently in the midst of evaluating those applicants, so we can't tell you more at the moment, but we are encouraged by the progress. Thank you all for your patience, input, and assistance during this transition period.

I am pleased to relay a few other updates regarding another important and exciting transition for Michigan Audubon. After a thoughtful and deliberate transition process by the dedicated members of the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO) board of directors, Whitefish Point Bird Observatory is now fully operated and managed by Michigan Audubon. Our two boards have worked together diligently to be sure the same levels of migratory research, habitat conservation, and educational outreach are maintained at the Point (and beyond). We are pleased that Mike Bishop, outgoing president of the former WPBO board, has agreed to join the Michigan Audubon board. His input, along with the continued dedication of other former WPBO board members and WPBO staff, has been instrumental in ensuring that activities at the Point continue into the future without interruption.

I don't think it is hyperbolic to say that we recognize Whitefish Point Bird Observatory as the ornithological and geographic crown jewel in Michigan's treasure of significant birding areas—and we aim to treat it as such. We are proud to be honoring WPBO's life memberships by rolling them into life memberships with Michigan Audubon, and we

are similarly looking forward to providing membership benefits to all WPBO members who renew with Michigan Audubon. Look for the WPBO update later in this issue, and keep your eyes on Whitefish Point in the coming year. We can't guarantee how many migrants (expected or vagrant) will happen through our Important Bird Area, but we can guarantee that we are going to do everything possible to keep those birds and the people who care about them connected to one another.

Transitions are clearly afoot, which is really exciting for our staff and our board. We hope you too are excited by the prospects for Michigan Audubon. With your support and dedication, we know this can be a great year of connecting birds and people, for the benefit of both.

Cheers,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alec R. Lindsay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alec" and last name "Lindsay" clearly legible.

Alec Lindsay

Broad-winged Hawk kettle at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. © Nova Mackentley



# Bird Town: Detroit Bird Conservation Efforts on the Rise

BY HOWARD MEYERSON



The marshland habitat along the Detroit River where industry is ever present provides important habitat for birds and waterfowl. © Howard Meyerson

Call Detroit Michigan what you will: Motor City, Hockey Town, Tiger Town, or Motown. Increasingly, it is becoming a Bird Town. Greening efforts all across its urban landscape, from tree plantings in parks and overgrown lots to urban gardens and wetland restorations—all are improving living conditions for birds.

“Detroit is a hotbed for birding,” notes Greg Norwood, biologist for the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR), which encompasses 10,577 acres of quality habitat along the Detroit River and western Lake Erie. Those include coastal marshes, islands, wetlands, and shoreline parks. “This is an internationally recognized good birding area because of its geography. We have a world renowned hawk migration and a really significant waterfowl migration here.”

Established in 2001 and managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Canadian Wildlife Service, DRIWR is the only international wildlife refuge in North America. Its purpose is preserving habitat that otherwise would be lost, including stopover habitat for migrating birds and waterfowl. Several hundred thousand Broad-winged Hawks and Turkey Vultures come through each fall headed south. Giant flocks of Tundra Swans, Redhead Ducks, Scaup, and Canvasbacks also move through during their west-to-east migration between nesting areas on the North American prairies and wintering grounds on the Atlantic seaboard.

Refuge staffers also work in concert with bird and habitat conservation organizations to eliminate invasive plants that have crept in along the river, according to Norwood. That work often directly benefits birds. Phragmites, for example, is so prolific that where it takes over, diverse plant communities disappear. In turn, the numbers of bird species that use the landscape drop dramatically.

“That means there is no longer a symphony of bird sounds in the morning,” Norwood explains. “Where you once had moorhens nesting near Least Bitterns nesting near rails nesting near coots, you get a more generalist species that would nest in a ditch near a Wal-Mart. Red-winged Blackbirds do just fine in phragmites.”

Detroit is also ground zero for several Important Bird Areas (IBA), an internationally recognized classification system developed by BirdLife International. The classification flags for natural resource and other conservation professionals that an area is important for birds. One example is the 25,002-acre Detroit River IBA, home to Canvasback Ducks, American Coots, and Common Terns. It is one of ten globally significant IBAs in Michigan. Lake Erie Metropark, at 1,601 acres, is a state-significant IBA, home to 30 bird species. Lake St. Clair, St. Clair Flats, and Pointe Mouillee State Game Area in Monroe County are also state-level IBAs. More about each can be found at [web4.audubon.org/bird/iba/michigan](http://web4.audubon.org/bird/iba/michigan).





Refuge manager John Hartig looks out over a coastal marsh along the Detroit River. © Howard Meyerson

Just a few miles upstream from DRIWR, in the heart of Detroit at Belle Isle Park, work to improve nesting conditions for Common Terns has been underway since 2009. Common Terns are a state-threatened species in Michigan and a federal species of concern in the Great Lakes region. Michigan is one of several states where “nesting pairs have shown a precipitous decline throughout most of the 20th century,” Greg Norwood wrote in the 2011 *Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas II*.

Belle Isle was home to hundreds of nesting pairs in the 1960s. Thousands of nests could be found at that time all along the Detroit River on islands, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. By 2012 fewer than 200 nesting pairs were found. Their decline was caused by forests growing up on islands, predation, contamination, and competition with Ring-billed Gulls.

Tom Schneider, curator of birds for the Detroit Zoological Society (DZS), which partnered with the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and DRIWR staff, is working to improve nesting conditions for Common Terns, which typically nest on sandy or gravelly beaches. The partners created 8,600 square feet of nesting habitat on the east end of Belle Isle in recent years. Schneider hopes eventually to have a large colony nesting on Belle Isle again. To date, only six nests have been found there, and only a few chicks have been raised successfully.

“The biggest threat to nesting tern colonies are mink, Great-horned Owls, Black-crowned Night Herons, and/or snakes,” Schneider says. DZS is also monitoring Common Tern nest sites on the Grosse Isle Bridge and doing nest site restoration at lighthouses on Lake St. Clair, working with the Save our South Channel Lights organization. They can be found at [www.soschannellights.org](http://www.soschannellights.org). More than 100 nesting pairs were found on the St. Clair Flats front range light in 2014 and 2015, according to Schneider.

DZS also partnered with others to reestablish Ospreys in southeast Michigan, including regional metropark authorities, the Department of Natural Resources, and the nonprofit group Osprey Watch of Southeast Michigan. Earlier work relocating Osprey chicks over a ten-year period ending in 2007 resulted in observations of 48 nesting Osprey pairs in the region in 2015.

Detroit Audubon also has a hand in Detroit-area bird conservation work. Its members are involved in grassland restoration, tern monitoring, public education, and trying to make the city a safer place for birds. Rob Duchene, a retired Detroit school teacher and Audubon member, coordinates Project Safe Passage, a lights-out program that encourages building owners to turn lights off at night during spring and fall bird migrations to reduce bird/building collisions. Fifteen to 20 government and corporate entities now participate, Duchene said.

Audubon volunteers have gone out at dawn to circle buildings in downtown Detroit and Troy, a suburb of Detroit. They’ve found an assortment of dead birds, including Nashville and Tennessee Warblers, a Red-headed Woodpecker, Woodcock, White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Lincoln Sparrow, and Chipping Sparrows. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird found injured was sent to a professional rehabilitator. Duchene says total counts have not yet been compiled.

“We knew keeping lights on was killing birds, but we couldn’t actually prove it,” Duchene notes, in reference to resistance he encountered talking with some building owners. “So we initiated the bird collision surveys and we do them at dawn before the maintenance guys can sweep them up or before gulls pick them off.”

Detroit Audubon members are also working to improve grassland habitat in Oakwoods Metropark along the Huron River near Flat Rock, just northwest of DRIWR. They also monitor tern nesting activity along the Detroit River.

“Detroit is now experiencing a renaissance, and bird conservation work in Detroit is starting to gain momentum,” said Sara Cole, program coordinator for Detroit Audubon. “Everyone seems interested in promoting bird conservation and education. Detroit public school teachers are interested in incorporating birding packages into their curriculums, and the Detroit Institute of Art is interested in habitat restoration and promoting it. Personally, I am meeting with educators and kids in the area to promote bird conservation through education, getting them to notice birds, but also to be interested in conserving them.”

Howard Meyerson ([howardmeyerson@gmail.com](mailto: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.

Refuge sign.  
© Howard Meyerson





# Chasing a Kite

BY KIRBY ADAMS



Swallow-tailed Kite flying. © Andy Morffew

**Y**ou're watching a Swallow-tailed Kite, stalwart summer lizard-hunters of the Florida peninsula and one of North America's most striking black-and-white birds. Last Halloween, you were watching a Gray Kingbird, just 35 miles away (as the kite flies). Where are you? The Everglades? Cape Canaveral?

If you, improbably, said you were standing beside a busy freeway in St. Johns, Michigan, you would be correct. There's an old adage: birds have wings and they use them. That's been proven true more than once in the past few seasons here in Michigan.

The fall of 2014 saw two exceptionally unlikely hummingbirds from the southwest make their way to the shores of the Great Lakes. A Beryline Hummingbird in Grand Marais and a Costa's Hummingbird in Onekama were both firsts for the state. Those were followed by the Gray Kingbird in Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. October of 2015 produced a Hepatic Tanager at Whitefish Point, another state first.

Probably the most accessible and most observed rare bird was the Swallow-tailed Kite during the last week of August 2015. While birders often find themselves on dead-end roads, derelict two-tracks, and other unpleasant surfaces, this kite was camped out right beside US-127 in Clinton County. The fact that it spent a lot of time swooping right above traffic on the highway is part of the reason it was identified and located. A motorist with knowledge of birds recognized it as something strange. Other serious birders caught wind of the sighting and the chase was on.

Swallow-tailed Kites are incredibly conspicuous birds—when they're flying around. Unfortunately, when those of us who sped to St. John's that afternoon arrived at the scene, a storm was approaching with wind and rain that was likely to keep the bird hunkered down. We knew which woodlot the bird had been seen in, so we posted lookouts on every side and waited. The rain came down, and we all spent a couple hours hoping to glimpse a black-and-white bird between passes of windshield wipers.



As dinnertime approached, most of us tired of the needle-in-a-haystack search and left. I was only one mile from my home in Eaton Rapids when my text alert went off. I pulled over to check: it was a photo of a Swallow-tailed Kite in a rainstorm, sent to me by the only two searchers to remain at the woodlot. Fortune favors the persistent.

If I'd never seen one before, I probably would have turned around and motored back to St. John's before dark to get a glimpse of the kite. I was disappointed at missing this one for my Michigan list, but not enough to risk another drive, having seen plenty of this species in Florida. Sometimes you get the bird and sometimes you sit in your car in the rain for a few hours. That's how birding goes.

The next day I was wrapping up things at my early-morning job a little before 9:00 AM when my phone erupted with notifications. I saw that there was a post on the rare bird Facebook page, a couple of emails from the bird listservs, and several texts, the most recent of which was from Michigan's top listing birder, Adam Byrne. Without even reading the texts and posts, I told my boss I was headed out ten minutes early and ran to the car, knowing well what the message was. I called Adam and he confirmed that the kite was back and a who's-who of Michigan birders were on site watching it.

Twenty minutes later I approached a line of cars parked along a gravel road and caught site of a large black-and-white raptor with absurdly long wings gliding above. Fortune favors those who can get out of work early.

It ended up that I needn't have rushed. The kite remained for several more days and anyone who wanted to see it had plenty of opportunity, but I'm happy I got to see it on that cool and clear late summer morning. For one thing, it gave me a chance to touch base with birders from around the state who chased the bird that morning. Rare birds are like family reunions for serious birders: they just happen irregularly and with no notice. Everyone watches the bird and shares stories of recent trips, great yard birds, plans for future trips, and speculation about what the next rarity will be. There may not be much eye contact (since you have to keep scanning for the bird), but listening to the social interaction at a rarity stakeout goes a long way toward debunking the idea that birders are all introverts.

My story had a happy ending, but what of the kite's? No one knows where the bird is today. It disappeared when the calendar rolled to September and has not been seen again. It may have continued heading the wrong way and spent the fall further north. It could have come to its senses and headed back to warmer climes. Hopefully it didn't meet its demise after letting us watch it for a week, but such is often the fate of wayward birds. We will never know for sure, and that, too, is as much a part of birding as seeing the bird and adding it to a list. All we can do is thank it for gracing a Michigan woodlot for a week and wait for the next chase. After all, fortune favors the grateful.

Kirby Adams (kirby.adams@gmail.com) writes the birding column for the online travel blog, National Parks Traveler. Kirby lives in Eaton Rapids.

## We welcome our newest Michigan Audubon members:

Wm Tower Family  
Frederick Allen  
Roberta Allen  
Stephen Allen  
Gretchen Allison  
Donald Angell  
Diane Arnold  
Joseph Bailey  
Tobin Bailey  
Michael Barkey  
Ellen Bates  
Daryl Bernard  
Mike & Sean Berry  
Terra Berry  
Emily Bertucci  
Patricia Birkholz  
Robert & Joan Bonin  
Thomas Boven  
Harry Bowman  
Amy Bragg  
Samuel Burckhardt  
Maren Burgeson  
Judith Caldwell  
Daniel & Audrey  
Carpenter  
Barbara Cassell  
William Chaney  
Brian Clegg  
Fred & Judy Clowney  
Lisa Combs  
Jack & Debbie Cook  
Nathaniel Crane  
Eric Crawford  
Jane Crockett  
Rowena Demio  
Jan & Chris Deur  
M J Diller

Rachelle & Michael  
Duffy  
Zach Dykema  
Rudolph Ellinger  
Sue Fisher  
Harvey Fogel  
Dan Fox  
Sharon Fox  
Cassandra Frabutt  
Barbara Gamache  
Marilyn Gardener  
Gerald Garner  
Judith Gass  
Dennis Gaswick  
Frank GIBLIN  
Debra Gibson  
Michael Giddings  
Susan Gillham  
Edward Gomez  
Deborah Green  
William Green  
Jim Gregart  
Roy Haeusler  
Laurie Hammond  
Thomas Hankins  
Elizabeth Hansen  
Agnes Hayden  
Ted & Tedra  
Hemingway  
Steve Henry  
Kelly Higgins  
Lynne Holmberg  
Jim Holtrop  
Mary Jewell  
Margo Jonker  
Marcia Karas  
Ellen Karcher  
Elizabeth Keen

Phil & Mary Kinney  
Kurt Tiesman & Kerry  
Klee-Tiesman  
Richard Learman &  
Kristi Kozubal  
Charity Krueger  
David Sheridan &  
Mickey Lamb  
Arnold Lerjche  
Leonard Liu  
Jeffrey Loos  
Jan Lozon  
Amy Lyyski  
Julia Malpass  
Paul Maracle  
Linda Marchio  
Nancy Mariotti  
Jennifer Sitze Martin  
Greg Thomas  
McClellan  
Rebecca Mehall  
Joni Norris  
Sandra Nye  
Nancy Parmenter  
Howard Patch  
John Peters  
Linn & Katherine  
Petersen  
Betsy Petoskey  
Ron Platt  
Dawn  
Pornthanomwong  
William Porter  
Freida Pruitt-Craig

Paul Regnier  
Barbara Ribbens  
Denis Robison  
Eva Roos  
Albert Rowell  
Jill Samples  
Pamela Schabes  
Laurie Schubert  
Dale & Barbara  
Scrimger  
Paul Selden  
Claire Sheridan  
Steven Sherman  
Diane Smiley  
Lisa & Leonard Sokol  
Mitchell Speers  
Kate Stoddard  
Ann Swagman  
Nancy Swift  
Lisa Symons  
Michael Tiedeck  
William Tilley  
Carol Trosper  
Ann Tucker  
Nancy Turner  
Russell Utych  
Sue Vanderveen  
Richard Vogel  
Joseph Vostrizansky  
Robert Weise  
Colleen Whitehead  
Benjamin Winger  
Julia Young  
Virginia Zlotucha



Swallow-tailed Kite perching on a branch. © Don Faulker

# Changes Coming to Signature Events

BY WENDY TATAR

## Spring Fling

The year 2016 will bring changes here at Michigan Audubon. Not only are we getting a new executive director, there is a new Signature Event being added to our list, plus our old standby events will see changes as well.

When Michigan Audubon accepted the gift of the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO), we agreed that we would continue to operate Spring Fling, the annual ode to spring migration. It becomes the newest Signature Event even though it is the longest running of any of the events that we now offer, and because it falls first, it now leads off our Signature Event calendar.

Spring Fling is almost as old as the bird observatory itself, and it has a long history of bringing great birders and researchers in as keynote speakers. Our keynote this year will be Cameron Cox, co-author of the *Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching: Eastern Waterbirds in Flight*. Employed as a birding and photography guide for Tropical Birding, Cameron considers himself a “bird bum,” traveling the world working as a counter, birding guide, and photographer. He has been birding since the age of 13 and loves the challenge that identifying distant waterbirds on the wing can bring. We are sure that he’ll feel right at home at WPBO. Besides presenting the keynote at the Saturday evening banquet, Cameron will also lead a tour on both Saturday and Sunday. As these tours will be fundraisers for WPBO, there will be an additional fee to participate, and there will be a very

limited number of spaces available.

We are also bringing in one of the leading experts on raptors to offer Hawk Identification workshops on both Friday and Saturday. These workshops with Jerry Liguori, author of *Hawks at a Distance* and *Hawks from Every Angle*, will also have an additional fee.

Spring Fling speaker Cameron Cox is bringing some of the other guides from Tropical Birding, who will be guest birders on many of the local birding tours held during the event. There will still be a pre-event early spring migrants birding tour on April 29 and a post-event birding tour to find Spruce Grouse on May 2.

Registration for Spring Fling is now open. You can find the schedule and a path to registration by visiting [wpbo.org](http://wpbo.org).



## Calendar

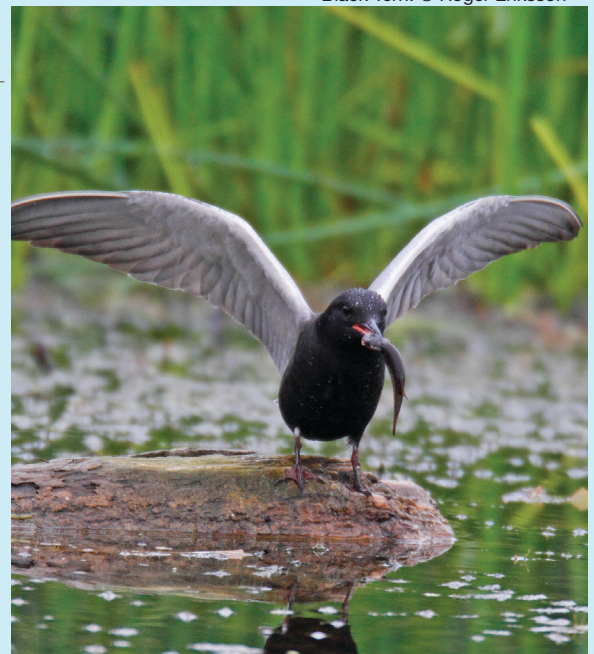
### February

- 1 **Tawas Point Birding Festival registration opens**  
[tawasbirdfest.com](http://tawasbirdfest.com)
- 6–7 **Michigan Audubon's Birding at the Soo field trip**  
Sault Ste. Marie
- 12–15 **Great Backyard Bird Count**  
<http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>
- 13–14 **Michigan Audubon's Birding at the Soo field trip**  
Sault Ste. Marie
- 29 **Cerulean Warbler Weekend registration opens**  
[ceruleanwarbler.com](http://ceruleanwarbler.com)

### March

- 5 **Quiet Water Symposium**  
MSU Pavilion, East Lansing
- 6–7 **Wildflower Association of Michigan Conference**  
Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, East Lansing
- 19 **Spring Bluebird Festival**  
Location to be determined

Black Tern. © Roger Eriksson





# Tawas Point Birding Festival

The guides from Tropical Birding will also be in attendance at the Tawas Point Birding Festival (TPBF), May 19-22. Prepare to be dazzled by the change in venue, as the event headquarters is moving to the East Tawas Community Center (ETCC) for 2016. We will have lots of room at the ETCC, so much so that we anticipate optics and tour vendors, along with wildlife artists being able to display their art and products at the headquarters.

Of course, there will still be tours at Tawas Point State Park, but there will be changes to the organization of the tours. You can still expect bus tours to see the Kirtland's Warbler. The 2016 schedule of activities for TPBF along with the path to registration can be found online now at [tawasbirdfest.com](http://tawasbirdfest.com).



Cerulean Warbler. © Daniel Behm

Sandhill Crane. © Roger Eriksson



## Cerulean Warbler Weekend

Cerulean Warbler Weekend (CWW) will be shortened slightly as we tie this event in with the Kirtland's Warbler Festival (KW Fest), which occurs the same Saturday in Roscommon.

CWW is headquartered at the Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary near Hastings and offers great birding opportunities. We've streamlined registration for the event which will start with a pre-event tour on Friday June 3. The actual event is being winnowed down to just Saturday and half a day on Sunday. We will still have tours to see Cerulean Warbler (CERW), Henslow's Sparrow (HESP), the five Empid flycatchers that nest in Barry County, and the most southerly nesting Common Loon in North America. Many of your favorite Michigan birding guides will be here to make sure that you add these birds to your list.

For those of you wanting to participate in the KW Fest, which only operates on Saturday June 4, but also wanting to add CERW or HESP to your list, you can either participate in an all-day tour on Friday or join in the fun on the Bus Full of Birders tour of Barry County on Sunday June 5. CWW schedule details will be available soon with registration opening on February 29 at [ceruleanwarbler.com](http://ceruleanwarbler.com).



## CraneFest

It seems a ways off, but planning has already begun for CraneFest. We still have much to do to get that schedule complete; you can keep up with details of the event by visiting [cranefest.org](http://cranefest.org). The event will occur on October 8-9 at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area located just south of Bellevue in Calhoun County.

CraneFest 2015. © Michigan Audubon







BY RACHELLE ROAKE

# Restoring Oak Savanna for Grassland Birds at Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary

**M**ichigan Audubon, in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, is working to restore 65 acres of oak savanna habitat at Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary. Historically, Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary featured large swaths of oak savanna habitat that were maintained by regular, likely annual, low-intensity fires, from pre-historic times until the late 1950s. Bird survey records from 1941 to 1961 reveal that Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary was a haven for grassland bird species including Henslow's Sparrows, Bobolinks, and even Passenger Pigeons and Greater Prairie Chickens, which are now extinct and extirpated from the state, respectively. Sadly, by 1997 the oak savannas had been degraded after years of agricultural use, fragmentation, and fire suppression. The once-native grassland had fallen under a blanket of aggressive and non-native plants, including smooth brome grass, autumn olive, and multiflora rose, which out-competed native plants and degraded habitat quality. Following the decline in habitat quality, sensitive grassland bird species were rare across the once bustling savanna.

Oak savanna restoration efforts at Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary began in the fall of 2014 and received a lukewarm response from the public. Habitat restoration is a long-term process and can be visually unappealing for some time as aggressive invasive plants and opportunistic tree species must be removed to allow native grasses, forbs, shrubs, and mighty oaks to thrive. I will be the first to admit that by first snowfall the sanctuary appeared to have been hit by an F5 tornado. Through ecologist-tinted glasses I viewed this chaos as huge progress for a severely degraded habitat. We had given invasive plants a one-two punch and were ready to plant a diverse, high-quality, native seed mix by June. I held my breath and hoped a positive response from plants and birds would change public attitudes toward the controversial project.

By fall, it was clear that the flora and fauna were on board with the project. Thousands of tiny native seedlings, miniatures of fully grown plants, were thriving under the newly opened canopy. A PhD student from Michigan State University successfully tracked a gravid (pregnant) female Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (state-threatened) to her birthing den, where six young rattlers safely entered the world. Several birders have

The restoration aims to restore open conditions and native grasses and forbs to attract grassland bird species, including Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Blue-winged Teal. Top and bottom photo of Baker Sanctuary © Michigan Audubon

reported the presence of juvenile Red-headed Woodpeckers, a species typical of oak savanna that has not been recorded at the sanctuary for decades. The positive response from these and other grassland species is a strong sign that the restoration is headed for success.

Just over a year ago this site held a broken system, ecologically speaking, that had lost its ability to provide healthy habitat for grassland birds, a site that is already being hit hard by urbanization, unfriendly farming practices, natural succession, and toxic pesticides. I sincerely hope that this project demonstrates to visitors the importance of bird habitat management and the idea that not everything that is green is good. Invasive plants have dramatically decreased habitat health for breeding, migrating, and wintering birds; if we want to continue to see birds, we must take action to prevent the spread of invasives and encourage native plants to reclaim their ground. Habitat restoration requires extensive amounts of time, money, and resources, and it is not always pretty. But without it, the birds we adore will continue on a downward trajectory. The oak savanna restoration project at Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary is just one way Michigan Audubon is enhancing bird habitat. How will you do your part?

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Rachelle Roake is the conservation science coordinator for Michigan Audubon and can be reached at [roake@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:roake@michiganaudubon.org).

Are you working to improve bird habitat in your yard or local natural area? Tell us how. Your story could be featured in future Michigan Audubon print or online media.

Michigan Audubon is looking for volunteers to survey birds, butterflies, or plants at several of our sanctuaries, including Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary. Options are available to conduct breeding or year-round bird surveys. Please contact Rachelle Roake for more details at [roake@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:roake@michiganaudubon.org).



# Book Review: *Winter Finches & Friends of North America: A Naturalist's Handbook*

BY SPARKY STENSAAS  
(STONE RIDGE PRESS, 2015, 96 PP)  
REVIEWED BY GARY SIEGRIST

When I was first asked to review a new book on winter finches—part of the BirdNerd series—I jumped at the chance. I mean, who wouldn't? I am always looking for another great in-depth study on birds. Then I saw the book and noticed how small and thin it was, I immediately dismissed it, thinking it would be pretty basic, possibly even a children's book. I thought to myself, nuts, what a waste of my time.

Then I started flipping through the pages and reading. The more I read, the more I liked this little naturalist's handbook on 18 species of winter finches and, as the author calls them, their bird "friends." I found that it was packed full of interesting facts and tidbits, and had many catchy phrases that would be easy to remember.

As I looked deeper into the recesses of the handbook, I saw that the range maps are easy to comprehend and more than adequate. I also thought Sparky Stensaas's use of excellent photographs (most are his own) really brought out the image of each bird species in a way that would help with its ID. His use of a numbering system when describing what to look for in similar species is also very helpful.

So in retrospect, I see how misled I was by size. I would highly recommend this book to beginners and intermediate birders, to naturalists who are working on their finch ID skills, and to anyone who has a general interest in our natural world. I think it would make a great holiday gift, with its brightly colored cover. And what perfect timing as winter approaches and our feathered friends from the north visit us for the "milder" climate.

This guide would be very useful also for those of you who enjoy winter birding in the Upper Peninsula, as many of the species can be found there during the winter months. Even if you are experienced with identification of winter finches, the information contained in the guide is worth checking out.

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Gary Siegrist turned his passion for birding into a job and is currently employed at the John and Mary Dahlem Environmental Education Center as a naturalist and stewardship coordinator/land protection specialist. For many years he has led birding trips around the state and the Midwest. Gary is a past president of Michigan and Jackson Audubon and now lives in the beautiful Waterloo Recreation Area with his wife, Nancy.



## *Winter Finches & Friends of North America: A Naturalist's Handbook*

\$12.95

Available in the Michigan Audubon Bookstore.



Purple finches, male and female. © Daniel Behm



# Chapter Spotlight: Muskegon County Nature Club

BY KRISTIN PHILLIPS



Red-breasted Mergansers fight over a perch in the Muskegon Channel. © Charlie DeWitt

**T**he Muskegon County Nature Club (MCNC), established in the early 1940s, is a Michigan Audubon chapter of about 60 members. MCNC's mission, explains club president Ric Pedler, is "to appreciate birds and nature in good company." Many of MCNC's members are birders, and the club has a strong focus on birding and nature hikes. Its origins go back to the 1930s with Muskegon High School biology teacher Ann Verne Fuller leading students on nature hikes. Several students continued these excursions with encouragement from their school librarian, well-known naturalist Margaret Drake Elliott. MCNC has stayed true to these roots and maintains an active schedule of field trips year-round.

MCNC conducts a local trip every month of the year, which Pedler believes makes the club unique. Field trips are open to the public and are documented on the club's home page. MCNC hosts a second web page highlighting local bird sightings, often illustrated with photographs. Frequently updated, this "Recent Sightings" blog provides MCNC the opportunity to connect with non-members and out-state birders regarding wildlife and birding in the Muskegon area. MCNC members have also taken field trips to Tawas Point, Whitefish Point, Ohio, Texas, and Arizona.

The club's November 21 field trip found thirteen participants at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve (MLNP) braving the first snow of the season to see a dozen species. After birding at the preserve, eight participants continued west to Snug Harbor in Muskegon State Park.

Sixteen species were counted that day including several American Tree Sparrows, a Pied-billed Grebe, three Fox Sparrows, and a first-year White-crowned Sparrow. The sixteenth species was, appropriately, the "Snow Bird" (a Dark-eyed Junco at Snug Harbor).

In addition to birding and regular field trips, MCNC also engages in citizen science. Members conduct two Christmas Bird Counts, one centered near the Muskegon County Wastewater Management System (MCWMS) and one centered in downtown Muskegon. Additionally, members participate in the Great American Migration Count, shorebird surveys at MCWMS and an all-day Muskegon County Big Day Count on the third Saturday in May. One club member, Brian Johnson, independently conducts a bird-banding project at the MLNP partially funded by the Muskegon Environmental Research and Education Society. MCNC also monitors several bluebird boxes along White Road on the MCWMS property. (Grand Rapids Audubon annually cleans bluebird boxes there.) Working with MCWMS laboratory supervisor and community liaison Anita Friend, MCNC is able to conduct this monitoring along with its regular birding activities. At the club's November 19 meeting, Friend provided updates on the bluebird box project and discussed how MCWMS relates to birds and maintains procedures for birding the property. Further meeting times and locations can be found below.

Kristin Phillips is the marketing and communications coordinator for Michigan Audubon and can be reached at [kphillips@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:kphillips@michiganaudubon.org).

## Meetings

MCNC meets on the third Thursday Sept.–Nov. and Jan.–April at 7:15 p.m. in the Roosevelt Park Community Building (corner of Glenside Blvd. and Roosevelt Rd.). On the third Thursday of May the meeting includes a 6:00 p.m. potluck in the MLNP pavilion. The public is welcome at all MCNC events.

## Websites

Homepage: [muskegoncountynatureclub.blogspot.com/](http://muskegoncountynatureclub.blogspot.com/)  
Recent Sighting Blog: [muskegonbirdblog.blogspot.com/](http://muskegonbirdblog.blogspot.com/)

## Leaders

Ric Pedler, president, [oakridge35@yahoo.com](mailto:oakridge35@yahoo.com)  
Judy Fleener, vice president, newsletter  
Kathy Neff, secretary  
Greg DeWeerd, treasurer  
Carol Cooper, refreshments chair



City of Muskegon Christmas Bird Count at Muskegon State Park. © MCNC



Ruby-crowned Kinglet at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve. © Mike Boston



Three young birders check a bluebird box on the Muskegon Wastewater properties. © Charlie DeWitt



# WPBO: Double Feature

## Fall Waterbird Count

EXCERPTED FROM REPORT BY ERIC RIPMA,  
WITH PERMISSION

**W**hitefish Point has documented and monitored waterbird migration for 27 years. The count is conducted for eight hours daily, from August 15 through November 15. This year, a total of 743.2 hours were logged.

While this year's count of 90,379 is slightly above average, it was the lowest total since 2009. The number of species—76 recorded—was also above average.

Waterfowl numbers were rather inconsistent: some species had above-average years while others were seen in below-average numbers. Gadwall (468), American Wigeon (4028), Northern Shoveler (206), and Redhead (6233) were all recorded at new seasonal high counts. Common Loons numbers were below-average, while Red-throated Loons were seen at slightly above-average numbers. A total of 16,397 Red-necked Grebes were counted, with almost all coming from late August through early September. Long-tailed Ducks (15,074) were mostly recorded in October when 10,642 of the total moved through.

Shorebirds were quite exciting at the Point this season. Four shorebird species ended up with record high counts, including Piping Plover (28), Whimbrel (34), White-rumped Sandpiper (68), and Buff-breasted Sandpiper (33). Other shorebird highlights included two Willets, only the 7th fall record, and two Short-billed Dowitchers, only the 4th time more than one has been recorded in a season.

One of the few groups of birds that did not show up in great numbers or diversity were gulls. Not a single Sabine's Gull was recorded, and only one Black-legged Kittiwake was seen. Common Terns were recorded in record numbers (4,764), and a single Arctic Tern graced the Point in early October. Jaeger highlights included a single Pomarine as well as many adult Parasitics.

Whitefish Point is a well-known location for turning up vagrants and rarities. A single Western Kingbird kicked things off on August 31. We ended up recording four in total. Next up was a Yellow-headed Blackbird that spent some time close to the waterbird shack in early September. September also produced a Lark Bunting, which spent the entire day on the beach. As part of an "invasion" of Common Ground-Doves into the Great Lakes region, one stopped by Whitefish Point for a day in mid-October. A first state record, a Hepatic Tanager, spent the day at the point on October 20. We also recorded two Cave Swallows and two Scissor-tailed Flycatchers throughout the rest of the season. This fall will definitely go down as one of the better vagrant seasons in Whitefish Point history.

Excerpts from the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory waterbird count blog, written by Eric Ripma (wpbo.org), are used with permission.

## History of WPBO

BY JOHN BAUMGARTNER



John Baumgartner

**N**ow that Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO) is becoming an integral part of the Michigan Audubon organizational structure, I want to take this opportunity to warmly welcome all the WPBO members to Michigan Audubon. As someone who was involved in the initial formation and as a board chair for WPBO for the first ten years, I can't tell you how excited I am over this new development. Michigan Audubon—with its strong operational staff—can provide both leadership and organizational strength to continue and grow the great research and educational work of WPBO.

In 1979, WPBO became an affiliate of Michigan Audubon. While WPBO had an independent board and funded the research at the Point, Michigan Audubon handled accounting, legal, and insurance matters for many years. In due time, WPBO purchased and maintained a headquarters and staff housing at the building on Whitefish Point Road. In 2002, as part of the Coast Guard property settlement with USFWS, the Great Lakes Historical Shipwreck Society, and Michigan Audubon, the Owl's Roost Gift Shop and approximately two acres of property became part of Michigan Audubon.

Over the past couple of years, there have been discussions about integrating the work of WPBO with Michigan Audubon. With the patient and careful work of members of the WPBO board, especially Mike Bishop and Jonathan Lutz, who was then Michigan Audubon executive director, a decision was reached. The WPBO board decided to dissolve and to turn both assets and managerial responsibility for the observatory over to Michigan Audubon. Those of us on Michigan Audubon's board appreciated the care with which this was handled and voted to accept this move.

As a result, assets owned by WPBO were transferred to Michigan Audubon, but in many ways WPBO will continue as before: permits needed for research are in good standing, life members of WPBO have become life members of Michigan Audubon, and the president of WPBO board has been appointed to a position on the Michigan Audubon board.

It is in this context that I offer my words of welcome to those who have contributed much time and effort through WPBO's 37 years, with the assurance of a great and exciting future.

John Baumgartner has been a member of the Michigan Audubon board on and off for over nine years. He is a retired United Church of Christ (UCC) clergy living in Grand Ledge. He has served as president of two MAS chapters and was one of the founders of WPBO.

# Announcements

Tufted Titmouse. © Daniel Behm



## The Great Backyard Bird Count

Counting the birds during the winter months can be a lot of fun and on a “birdy” day, a big challenge. We hope that many of you were able to participate in the nation’s longest-running citizen science survey, the Christmas Bird Count, which recently ended. To help make the winter seem to go by a little faster, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada team up to run the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). This year’s count is being held February 12–15. During this survey time you are asked to watch your backyard feeders and count the highest number of birds of a species that you see at one time. In this way the scientists can make sure you are not counting the same bird more than once. You can choose to participate just one day or several—it’s all up to you. This is a great way to get the entire family involved. You can even have your own competition going to see which family member can find the highest number of species or the largest number of species.

In recent years this citizen science project has grown to include participants from all over the world. Participation in 2015 resulted in the largest number of species ever (5,090). That is about half of the bird species in the entire world. GBBC participants must input their data to eBird, Cornell’s popular online bird reporting site. This is one of the reasons that the project has become so popular globally.

If you would like to participate in the GBBC this year, go to [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org) and get registered. There’s no fee to participate.

Barred Owl, taken during Soo Trip 2013. © Phil Odum



## Birding Tours Raise Funds for Whitefish Point Bird Observatory

Michigan Audubon’s tours to find Boreal species in the eastern Upper Peninsula during the winter have proven more popular than ever. Both tours (one in January and one in February) filled to capacity in just five days after registration opened. In order to accommodate all the people on the waiting list and to fulfill fundraising goals for the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO), guides that have previously led tours for WPBO have agreed once again to lead tours, thus making it possible for us to offer an additional weekend tour in February.

That tour is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday February 6–7. The car caravan tour operates from a base in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. You will bird from sunrise to sunset on Saturday and from sunrise until mid-afternoon on Sunday. Complete details are available at the Michigan Audubon website under the Go Birding tab.

In the Sault Ste. Marie area, the tours will likely see birds such as Snowy Owl, Evening Grosbeak, Bohemian Waxwing, both Red- and White-winged Crossbills, and Sharp-tailed Grouse. Other possible sightings include Gray Jay or Boreal Chickadee, and if 2016 is an irruption year there may even be Northern Hawk and Great Gray Owls.

The tour fee for Michigan Audubon members is \$75 and for non-members \$105 (which includes the price of membership). Hotel fees and meals are extra. To find more information and register, visit our Michigan Audubon event calendar at [michigan-audubon.org/calendar](http://michigan-audubon.org/calendar). All proceeds from this additional tour will go to support WPBO.



## VOTE FOR YOUR BOARD!

Four new Directors are elected to our Board each year for three-year terms. Each Michigan Audubon member has the opportunity to vote once for up to four candidates. Each member has two options for submitting their ballot:

- 1) Cut out the top portion of this page, mark your selections, and mail the ballot in an envelope back to the Michigan Audubon Office (address on flip side).
- 2) Go online to [www.michiganaudubon.org/board-elections](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/board-elections) and fill out the online ballot. Note: You will need to have information from this issue of the JPW to complete the ballot. The Online Ballot Password is "connectingbirds" (no quotes, all lowercase).

**Votes must be received by 12:01 a.m. on March 1, 2016 to be counted.** You can view candidate profiles at [www.michiganaudubon.org/board-elections](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/board-elections).

Vote for not more than four (4) candidates. You may write in other candidates using the "Other" box.

- ☐ Elizabeth Abood-Carroll      ☐ Dea Armstrong      ☐ Rosann Kovalcik      ☐ Penny Meints
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Field Ornithology Course Offered

Are you looking for a way to improve your birding skills in the new year? For the ninth year, the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary, located in Augusta, will offer a five-week field ornithology course for adults and children ages 14+. In this engaging, hands-on 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/expert followed by an identification lesson. Possible topics include bird anatomy and biology, bird families, and identification. Field trips visit local birding hot spots and are led by experienced birders. The course begins on March 15, with lectures 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 required by Friday March 11; call 269-671-2510 or email Lisa Duke at [birdsantuary@kbs.msu.edu](mailto:birdsantuary@kbs.msu.edu).

### Michigan Bookstore on the Road

The full Michigan Audubon bookstore will be set up at the Quiet Water Symposium (QWS) on March 5 at the Michigan State University Pavilion, located on Farm Lane. This is the 21st year for the QWS, and it continues to grow with each passing year.

The QWS was established to celebrate non-motorized outdoor recreation and a shared concern for the Great Lakes environment. If you are looking to purchase a kayak or canoe, learn about paddling trips within Michigan or throughout North America, or are just interested in outdoor adventures, the QWS is well worth a visit. There are presentations by photographers, authors, and expedition travelers that may cover skills, safety, destinations, and history.

The event gets underway at 9:00 a.m. and wraps up at 5:30 p.m. The fee to attend the QWS will be \$10. For more information regarding this event visit their website at [www.quietwatersymposium.org](http://www.quietwatersymposium.org).

Don't forget to vote! You can do so by either going online at [michiganaudubon.org/board-elections](http://michiganaudubon.org/board-elections) or by cutting out the above ballot and mailing it in an envelope to Michigan Audubon.

### Preventing Window Strikes

The American Bird Conservancy is dedicated to achieving conservation results for birds of the Americas. To that end they have developed a Bird-Smart Glass Program, which lists 18 tested and proven products that are now available. For those of you considering new construction, an addition to your home, or replacement windows, check the list for products that can help prevent birds from hitting windows. The list also contains ways to prevent strikes on existing windows and provides a rating system and cost for the products. The list can be found on the ABC website, [abcbirds.org/get-involved/bird-smart-glass](http://abcbirds.org/get-involved/bird-smart-glass). If you know an architect of large buildings, please let them know about this important resource.

### Lake Michigan Islands Protected

The Green Bay National Wildlife Refuge gained two islands located in the northwest portion of Lake Michigan. According to a press release by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Rocky Island (which is approximately two miles off shore from the Garden Peninsula) and Saint Martin Island (which is located about five miles away from Door Peninsula in Wisconsin) were given to the federal government by TNC to be added to the refuge located in Wisconsin. These islands are known as stepping stones for migrating songbirds in both spring and fall, providing birds with a place to rest and eat during their migration through the Great Lakes.

Dated Material

## Michigan Audubon Bookstore

Your purchase from the bookstore supports Michigan Audubon's educational programs.

Information or phone orders **517-580-7364**

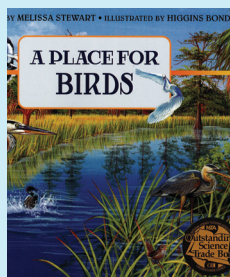


### Shorebirds of North America

by Kevin T. Karlson

\$7.95

This is one of the laminated, waterproof, foldable field guides that are so popular and easy to carry. Currently this is the only one that we know of that addresses the shorebirds of North America. The guide contains Karlson's wonderful photographs of 51 species of sandpipers, plovers, and other birds that make up this family. This is a great guide to carry with you when you head to the beach or sewage ponds, providing a quick way to identify this tough group of birds.

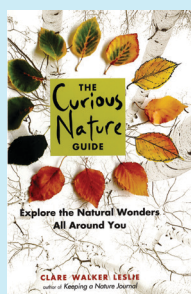


### A Place for Birds

by Melissa Stewart

Hardcover: \$16.95; Soft cover \$7.95

We have this book for ages 6-10 in both hardcover and paperback versions. It received the Outstanding Science Trade Book award from the National Science Teachers Association and the Children's Book Council when it was originally printed in 2009. This 2015 version has been updated with the latest information. It is a great book that outlines both the challenges that birds face and the success stories of several species (including the Kirtland's Warbler).



### The Curious Nature Guide

by Clare Walker Leslie

\$14.95

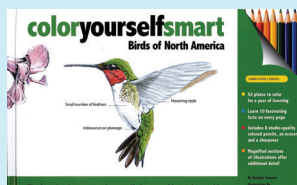
Walker Leslie is well known for her instructional journaling books (most popular: *Keeping a Nature Journal*). This book is another title to add to that list. In this book she provides many tips and tricks to inspire you on your journaling quest. Although written for adults, it would also be helpful to young naturalists in middle and high schools.



### The Guardian Jigsaw Puzzle

\$16.99

Set up a table near the window so you can enjoy putting together this lovely puzzle while watching the birds at your feeders. It features artwork from wildlife artist Jim Kasper depicting a Common Loon parent on alert near its two chicks. The 1,000-piece puzzle produced by Willow Creek Press is a finished size of 26 5/8th" x 19 1/4th". This item requires additional shipping charges. Contact the Michigan Audubon office to order.



### Color Yourself Smart: Birds of North America

by Dominic Couzens

\$19.95

We've carried this in our store for several years. Who knew that adult coloring books would become all the rage in 2015? This hardcover coloring book includes a set of eight studio-quality colored pencils, an eraser, and a sharpener. There are 52 plates to color with each plate accompanied by the natural history of the bird and ten things to remember about the species (valuable and informative!).

**10% off** for all Michigan Audubon members!

**Order online, by phone, e-mail, or mail**

**Online.** michiganaudubonstore.com (Discount code: MIAudubon14)

**By phone.** 517-580-7364

**By e-mail.** Wendy@michiganaudubon.org

**By mail.** Send name, address, phone number, and payment to Michigan Audubon Bookstore, 2310 Science Parkway, Suite 200, Okemos, MI 48864. Prepayment includes list price + 6% sales tax + \$4.25 postage and handling for the first item + \$.85 for each additional item.

**Payment accepted:** Visa or MasterCard