

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER: Giving Back to Birds ■ Birding Wastewater Treatment Plants ■ Baker Sanctuary Restoration ■  
Fall Gardening for Birds ■ CraneFest ■ Sandhill Soirée Birder's Social ■ Connecting Warblers and People



# Jack Pine Warbler

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## Cover Photo ■ Northern Flicker

Photographer: Pam Bedsole

Being an amateur photographer with an immense love for birds Pam Bedsole is very grateful to be from Cheboygan in beautiful northern Michigan. Pam delights in the wide variety of species to photograph in her region. Pam photographed this male Yellow-shafted Northern Flicker as he was standing guard while his mate was nesting on eggs in a nearby snag they had hollowed-out on Lake Huron in Tawas City, Michigan.

*Thank you to Pam Bledsoe for submitting this wonderful image for the 2017 Jack Pine Warbler cover photo contest. If you have photographs you would like considered for inclusion in future issues of the Jack Pine Warbler, please contact Communications & Marketing Coordinator Diane Huhn at dhuhn@michiganaudubon.org or (517) 580-6374.*

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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.

*Visit [MichiganAudubon.org](http://MichiganAudubon.org) for more updates, and follow MichiganAudubon on social media*



# From the Executive Director

## GIVING BACK TO BIRDS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Birding is, simply put, the activity of observing wild birds. It doesn't require one to have a degree in any particular field of study, an impressive checklist of places-been or species-seen, or even expensive equipment. Birds are for everyone, no matter what your entry point or expression. I remind myself of this daily, and it motivates us here at Michigan Audubon to reach more people in new ways, to try to connect and engage people with the natural world.

When I moved back to Michigan from Oregon, what drew me to becoming a member of Michigan Audubon was not the special events or the field trips. Simply stationing feeders in my backyard, in addition to hiking with my dogs (not to mention swerving on free-ways) — offered me daily opportunities to intersect with the avian world and feel connected. I found many wonderful native Michigan birds right in my community.

The motivation for my membership decision was more about committing to a larger community and personally supporting a non-profit organization dedicated to bird conservation. Even if I couldn't do the habitat restoration, the bird banding, the education programs in schools, the point counts, and the work of it all myself, I wanted to give what I could and be a member, put my name behind the cause. In a changing world, conservation organizations need to stay alert, fluid, focused on their mission, and connected to our friends and supporters. I want to thank you for the ways in which you have contributed, even simply your membership dues

— because every contribution counts. Thank you for putting your name behind our mission.

And we have our work cut out for us, don't we? Think of all the beautiful birds there are to see, all the interesting behaviors to observe. The moments to capture in our minds or on camera that will stay with us and serve as fuel. But we have a lot of work to do socially and ecologically, too. Opportunities to give back to birds and impact a statewide effort really come together at the community level.

With 41 chapters throughout the state, we have quite a few communities that could really make a difference in big and small ways for bird populations (which, in turn, bear benefits for the ecosystem as a whole). In 2016, Michigan Audubon launched the first year's programming of our Bird-friendly Communities Initiative with the native plants program. Rachelle Roake, Conservation Science Coordinator, developed a suite of outreach materials that we distributed state- and regionwide to encourage people to go native in their yards and to encourage nurseries to sell natives. Of course, educating about native plants requires us to share equal, if not more, information about invasive plants, too. This is ongoing, pivotal work for our sanctuaries, for public lands, and for all of our backyards.

In 2017, our two species specific programs — focusing on Chimney Swifts and Purple Martins — took root with a variety of educational and citizen science opportunities that will allow us to better gauge the health and distribution of these species in decline (both



aerial insectivores). These programs also offer our members, you, ways to make a difference in the bigger work of bird conservation in our state and beyond. We have worked to offer you an entry point to this bigger world of bird conservation and keep you updated via monthly eNews, social media, website, and the publication in your hands. If you haven't found your entry point or have questions about implementing this program or aspects of it in your yard or community, write to us at [birds@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:birds@michiganaudubon.org).

For this work and our intention to deepen our impact in Michigan's capital city, Michigan Audubon is partnering with a variety of businesses, schools, churches, and other institutions to designate Lansing as an Urban Bird Treaty City. A fundraising gala will be held at Sandhill Crane Vineyards on September 16 to further support this program's projects for 2018. If you aren't able to make it to the gala, you can give to this program in particular by visiting [michigan-audubon.org/donate](http://michigan-audubon.org/donate) or calling us at 517.580.7364.

Stay tuned to the next issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler* to learn more about the components of our Bird-Friendly Communities Initiative and how you, your chapter or community can use it as a template. Bit by bit and bird by bird, we hope to work alongside you to make our state as supportive of native bird populations as possible.

Thank you for being a part of our community!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Good".

Heather Good, Executive Director







A composite image of two Black-bellied Plovers in flight over the Muskegon Wastewater Treatment Plant. © Nathan DeBruine

# The Sweet Smell of Checklist Success at Your Local Sewage Pond

BY KIRBY ADAMS

Returning from a field trip during a birding festival a few years ago in West Virginia, I was carpooling with some birders I'd just met. Their names are lost to the years, as well as where they were from. We made birder small talk for a bit, then all of us immediately swung our heads portside to look at a sign that proclaimed the next left as an entrance to a wastewater treatment facility. It wasn't part of the festival itinerary, but one of my passengers asked, not unlike a child passing an ice cream stand, "Can we check it out?" A sewage pond? Of course we can check it out!

It's an inside joke with birders that we think it's fun to spend a hot afternoon at the sewage lagoons. There have even been birders that proposed marriage at such traditionally un-romantic locations. It's more than a quirk of an esoteric hobby to the birds, though. The artificial wetland that is a wastewater facility can be a matter of life and death for a migrating bird.

Waterfowl, waders, shorebirds, many raptors, and some songbirds are drawn to watery or wet spots during migration. Lakes, rivers, and ponds serve as

stopover habitat, but those natural features are in short-supply in many areas, at least in an undeveloped condition. They also lack a couple key attributes that wastewater ponds just happen to have.

The most obvious aspect of sewage treatment water is nutrients. The water is laden with nutrients, because that's simply what wastewater is. There's no need to spell out the particulars of that. Water that is full of nitrogen grows a lot of plant biomass that feeds aquatic invertebrates that in turn feed the birds. Some of the algae and aquatic plants feed birds like dabbling ducks directly.

Some large WWTPs (wastewater treatment plants) have outdoor aeration tanks where the water is constantly agitated to oxygenate it and promote aerobic bacteria for decomposition of solids. This leads to water that is unfrozen in winter when many other wetlands are frozen over. That's quite a boon to waterfowl, especially in cold winters.

Michigan is lucky to have one of the nation's best wastewater plants, from a birding perspective,



American Golden-Plovers at Muskegon Wastewater Treatment Plant © Thomas Gass

in Muskegon County. The Muskegon County Wastewater Management System (usually called Muskegon Wastewater by birders) rivals hotspots like Pointe Mouillee and Whitefish Point for rare bird sightings in Michigan. Muskegon Wastewater encompasses 11,000 acres of treatment cells, storage lagoons, farms, forest, and grassland. The two 850-acre storage lagoons are big enough that each would be in the top 100 of Michigan's biggest lakes – not bad in a state with thousands of lakes.



American Pipit at Muskegon Wastewater Treatment Plant  
© Thomas Gass

At various times of the year, Muskegon Wastewater provides birders with looks at Upland Sandpipers in the grassy areas, Eared Grebes in summer on the lagoons, thousands of Northern Shovelers in fall, and Snowy Owls sprinkled about the flat expanse in the winter. The raised dike splitting 5 billion gallons of water into the two big lagoons often holds enough gulls to overwhelm even the most dedicated gull watcher hoping to pick out an Iceland Gull or something even rarer.

Muskegon Wastewater is certified by the Wildlife Habitat Council and won the organization's "Rookie of the Year" award in 2014 at a symposium called Celebrating Corporate Conservation. That may sound like an oxymoron, but in this era, conservation has to be embraced wherever it can be. Treatment of wastewater is necessary, and if it can be conducted in a manner that provides and protects habitat for wildlife, everyone wins.

There are too many WWTP's with good birding opportunities in Michigan to name them all. Your county likely has at least one that's accessible. It's important to check that visitors are allowed before heading out to bird a WWTP. They are, as a rule, sensitive about trespassing, mostly because of the danger that large bodies of water and heavy machinery pose. When in

doubt, don't enter! Most facilities want visitors (birders) to check in at an office and only bird during office hours. Muskegon provides biannual passes, yellow placards that you'll find in the glove boxes of most of the avid birders in the state. Sometimes the rules can seem draconian, but it's critically important that birders follow them, so as not to lose access to a WWTP for everyone else. These facilities aren't required to let birders in, and more than one has rescinded a visitor policy after the rules were disregarded.

A final note about birding wastewater plants concerns the question all non-birders ask: doesn't it smell bad? The short answer is, yes. On a humid day in July, they can smell absolutely awful, while at other times they aren't so bad. A day at a sewage pond isn't for the faint of heart. Sludge is ugly. If you stand near a solids deposition cell, you'll see all the things that everyone in the county flushed down their toilets, from plastic to organics. The upshot is, you might also see a Red Phalarope in breeding plumage. You take the unexpected wonders along with the unpleasant realities of a large human population with a throw-away mentality. Birding is a metaphor for conservation in that sense. Southern Michigan will never again be dotted with pristine ponds in oak savannas. In lieu of that, we have wastewater facilities where a flock of American Pipits can rest en route to the tundra. It may not be perfect, but the pipits, like birders, take what they can get where they can get it.



Red Phalarope © Mick Thompson



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



# Fall Gardening is for the Birds

BY RACHELLE ROAKE, CONSERVATION SCIENCE COORDINATOR

When fall arrives, most gardeners are planning to put their gardens “to bed.” Blooms and foliage are fading, trees are becoming bare — it’s time to trim, rake, and bag, right? Not if you want to attract birds to your yard! Fall cleanup creates a barren wasteland for birds and wildlife. If your yard provides nowhere to find shelter against cold winter winds and nowhere to forage for seeds, berries, and dormant insects the birds will find somewhere else to reside. Don’t miss out on exciting winter birds this year; leave your leaves, stalks, and stems!

Fall is a spectacular time for late-blooming flowers and gleaming berries, which are two important elements of a bird-friendly backyard. Many autumn-blooming flowers later provide a valuable source of seed for birds. Following the burst of lavender, white, pale blue, and brilliant yellow, native aster (*Symphyotrichum* species), sunflower (*Helianthus* species), and goldenrod (*Solidago* species) blooms fade into fluffy clouds of nutritious seed, voraciously consumed by finches and sparrows. Long-distance migrants flock to native berry-producing shrubs including spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and viburnum and dogwood (*Cornus*) species. Consider creating a native hedgerow for migrants; trust us, non-native Japanese barberry and burning bush cannot hold a candle to the value of native shrubs. Other beautiful replacement shrubs that will provide year-round bird food include native high- and lowbush blueberry (*Vaccinium* species), fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), and chokeberry (*Aronia* species).

A common concern with planting natives or avoiding fall cleanup is the “messy” appearance, but there are many native species that provide gorgeous fall color and winter interest when left standing. Big leaf aster (*Eurybia macrophylla*), as the name suggests, brings large, interesting foliage in colorful hues to shady, woodland gardens. Both wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) appear to catch fire in fall, turning a brilliant red. Young red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) stems are also a fire-engine red that contrast brightly against fresh snowfall. Other

## Stunning fall-blooming flowers for birds:

Flat-topped white aster (*Doellingeria umbellata*)  
New England aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*)  
Sky-blue aster (*Symphyotrichum oolentangiense*)  
Smooth aster (*Symphyotrichum laeve*)  
Western sunflower (*Helianthus occidentalis*)  
Woodland sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)  
Showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*)  
Stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*)  
Zigzag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*)  
Ironweed (*Vernonia missurica*)  
Black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*)  
Cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*)

stunning fall shrubs include winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), mountain ash (*Sorbus decora*), witch-hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), and sumac (*Rhus*) species.

Grasses are often overlooked in gardens, but gramanoids can provide a natural seed source and excellent shelter for overwintering birds while giving interesting structure to the garden. Shorter, clump-forming species are useful in more manicured spaces; check out little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), purple love grass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*), or prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*). For more naturalized areas, taller grasses including Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*), and big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) provide ample cover and seed for birds.

So as the temperatures drop with the leaves, save your time, knees, and back and shelve garden cleanup for spring. The fall colors and textures are sure to delight, if you can take your eyes away from the flurry of bird activity.



Rachelle Roake is the Conservation Science Coordinator at Michigan Audubon. Rachelle oversees conservation efforts at our bird sanctuaries and coordinates Michigan Audubon's Bird-friendly Communities program. Contact her at [roake@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:roake@michiganaudubon.org).





Clockwise: Indian grass, New England aster, cup plant, ironweed, black-eyed susan, New England aster and milkweed seeds. © Carolyn Jean Miller



# Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary Oak Savanna Restoration Update

Started in the fall of 2014, the Oak Savanna Restoration at Baker Sanctuary is now in its third year. What once was a labyrinth of autumn olive, multiflora rose, and smooth brome grass (all invasive species) is now sparking to life with native grassland flowers and grasses. The clear transition from wetland to grassland is encouraging Sedge Wrens and Northern Harriers. Open meadows with oaks and snags are attracting Red-headed Woodpeckers, Orchard Orioles, and the occasional Eastern Meadowlark and Savannah Sparrow. An incredible diversity of butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies flit among the blooms. The project has expanded to nearly 90 acres of invasive plant removal, prescribed burns, and native plantings. Michigan Audubon is thankful for our partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, whose financial support makes this restoration possible. While the work to restore and improve native habitats at Baker Sanctuary continues, we wanted to share a photographic update contrasting the past and present. We look forward to supporting the re-creation of this rare natural community and watching the unique plants, insects, birds, and wildlife return.



THEN 

Down on Trumpeter Swan Pond (Above)

The view from the pond was rather bleak prior to the restoration. The most drastic change was the removal of many low-quality trees to dissolve fencerows and create an open oak canopy setting. Any snags (dead trees) were also saved to support woodpeckers and other cavity-nesting species. The squawking calls of Red-headed Woodpeckers are often heard from this very spot. While we like to think they are attracted to the snags and oaks, the Red-headed Woodpeckers frequent the sweet cherry trees that grow along the road.

## Visiting the Sanctuary

The Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary is located in Bellevue, Mich. and is open to visitors from dawn to dusk 365 days a year. The Meadow and Marshland Trail, accessible from 15 Mile Road between T Drive North and Q Drive North, was established in the spring of 1996 for hiking, cross country skiing, and nature observation. The trail is mowed during the summer and is easy to navigate.







A pair of Trumpeter Swans raised seven cygnets at the sanctuary this summer.



## NOW

### View from the Parking Lot (Below)

You don't even have to stray from the parking lot to see the difference at Baker Sanctuary. The degraded jungle that was Baker Sanctuary's Meadow and Marshland Trail was ground up and mowed, then treated with herbicide to provide a clean slate for native seed to thrive. The view from the parking area is now lush with native lupine, coreopsis, and yarrow. Volunteers planted several hundred milkweed seedlings this summer to support monarchs and other pollinators.







*A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity.*

—Aldo Leopold







Male Kirtland's Warbler © Charles Grisham

## Connecting Warblers and People for the Benefit of Both

BY BRYANT EDDY, 2017 KIRTLAND'S WARBLER GUIDE

In keeping with our mission to “connect birds and people for the benefit of both,” Michigan Audubon has led free tours into the jack pine forests of Northern Michigan for many years so people can see the endangered Kirtland's Warbler. The tours have been led out of Hartwick Pines State Park in Grayling every morning between May 15 and July 4. An experienced guide is always hired and this year, I was honored to be that guide. Craig Kasmer, Chief Interpreter at Hartwick Pines, also led several tours every week.

I am a local birder and familiar with the Kirtland's Warbler. In 2015, I left Michigan to attend a one-year program at Alderleaf Wilderness College in Monroe, Wash., to train as a nature guide with a focus on birds, my favorite subject. I was most privileged to help birders and

nature enthusiasts see the Kirtland's Warbler and explore the jack pine ecosystem, a place that both the Kirtland's Warbler and I call home.

Many participants came in search of one of the rarest birds not yet on their lifelist. For many, it was a long trip. One enthusiastic birder from Kentucky continued north despite losing her vehicle in an accident along the way because, “it is for the Kirtland's Warbler,” she said.

On typical mornings, a dozen or so gathered at the Michigan Forest Visitor Center. Engaged in lively conversation as they watched Evening Grosbeaks at the feeders, they made their way to the classroom for our presentation and this fascinating story of recovery from the brink of extinction.



Participants on a 2017 Michigan Audubon Kirtland's Warbler tour spot their target in the jack pine ecosystem.



After questions were answered and gear collected, the group caravanned to a site outside the park with ideal warbler habitat. Many, expecting to venture into a shady pine forest, were surprised to arrive at our spot overlooking a vast shrubland of young jack pine the size of large Christmas trees. The Kirtland's Warbler, like many rare species, is a habitat specialist, but brings it to the next level. It requires large tracts of young jack pine and builds its nest on the ground at the base of these young trees.

This habitat was historically created by wildfires. Because of modern forest fire suppression, however, it is now managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources who work together to plant thousands of acres of jack pine every year.

On our trek down a sandy dirt road, we would stop at a trap designed to capture the parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird, so infamous for destroying the young in native birds' nests, especially those of the Kirtlands. During the 1960s, prior to cowbird control, over 70 percent of Kirtland's Warbler nests were parasitized with cowbird eggs.

Venturing further down the road, we would inevitably hear the emphatic "chirp-chirp-chirp-CHI-CHI-wa-wa" call of the warbler, followed by a streak of gunmetal blue flashing across the road and a male warbler landing to perch in a jack pine. After turning its bright yellow breast toward the eager spectators and proudly singing his song, photos would be snapped, and smiles and congratulations would ensue.

As the males arrived and settled into their territories this season, most were concentrated deep in the pines leaving a large uninhabited area toward the beginning of the road. One male claimed this stretch as his own to attempt to attract a mate. And he was going to make the most of his chance. No other warbler sang as persistently as did he. The song he sang, "chip-chip-chi-chi-CHU-CHU!"



Bryant Eddy, the 2017 Michigan Audubon Kirtland's Warbler Tour Guide, points out a nearby singing male warbler for visitors. Tours this season included visitors from twelve countries.



Affectionately referred to as "Gene" for his charismatic personality, this male Kirtland's Warbler suffered a broken wing, but was able to continue feeding himself. © Matt Williams

was distinctly different, shorter and simplified, yet he was unashamed of it. The song is occasionally heard as an alternate song in other males, but this was the only song he knew.

Every day, there he sang, coming forward to show everybody his bright yellow breast. He would perch on a snag, throw his head back with beak wide open and sing his merry little song. He was truly the star of the show, the most reliable bird in the forest. He was called Gene, after the singing movie star of the 1940s, Gene Autry. For two days at the very end of May, Gene had not come forward to see us, but stayed just out of sight singing. When we finally caught sight of him it was clear why. His right wing was broken at the wrist. He did not let this slow down his singing though — he just hopped up to the top of a jack pine and sang all day long. There was nothing better we could do for Gene than to leave him in his home for the time being. Kirtland's Warblers are very difficult to care for in captivity and too small to operate on. He was still able to forage for insects, and we felt sure he would be safe at night nestled into the thick jack pines.

A couple of tour groups this season had the opportunity to meet individuals connected to Kirtland's Warbler research and conservation efforts. A cowbird trap at one of the sites we visited on tours was closed due to a research project conducted by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. On one occasion, Chris Fox, researcher on this team, met the group on the road and kindly shared with us his study, including his work in the Bahamas on the warblers' wintering grounds.

Another time we met Mike Petrucha, a VIP in Kirtland's Warbler recovery, while he scouted for sites for the upcoming Kirtland's Warbler Festival. We discussed cowbird trapping and why it was essential for the survival of the warbler. The cowbird population seems to be declining in



the warblers' breeding areas, and although the trap was closed all season, researchers did not find a single cowbird egg in any of the warblers' nests at this site.

By late June the breeding season was fast advancing. Many of the males were not singing from their original posts, but were moving low in the pines bringing food to their young. Females were seen more regularly as they were liberated from their station on the nest and busily collecting insects to take to their chirping young. The very last group of the season saw a family of Kirtland's Warblers flitting about in an opening, as our national bird, the Bald Eagle, flew overhead on the 4th of July – a wonderful way to end the season!



Students from University of Michigan spot the "maize and blue" of a male Kirtland's Warbler in the jack pine forest of northern Michigan.

Such a great season as this is a team effort. Education Coordinator Lindsay Cain and other Michigan Audubon staff supplied materials and support throughout the season. Craig Kasmer was not only a guide several days each week, but a mentor to help me learn the ropes. Mike Petrucha and Chris Fox took time to share with us their experience and research on the Kirtland's Warbler. Photographers Charles Grisham and Matt Williams gave permission to use their photographs. Many eager birders made donations to assist the long-term management for this conservation-dependent species. I want to thank all these people for their support. Last but not least, I give a big thanks to the Kirtland's Warblers for their cooperation! I wish them all a happy winter in the Bahamas (and wish I could be there too). Safe travels, and we will see you again next spring! Fly on Kirtland's Warblers!



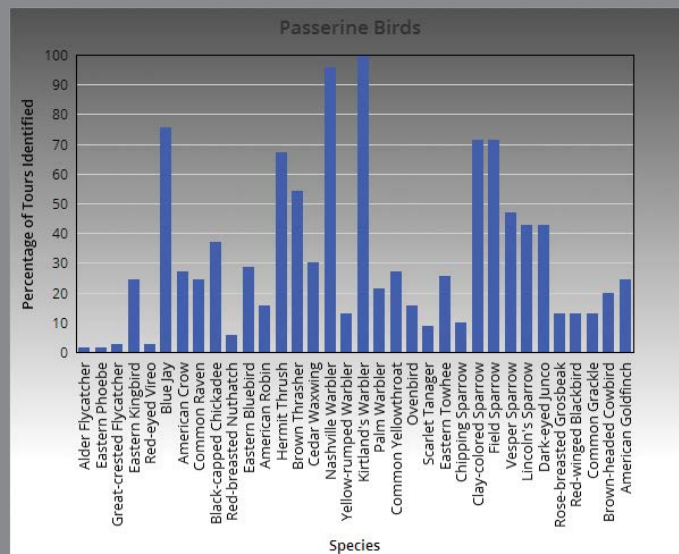
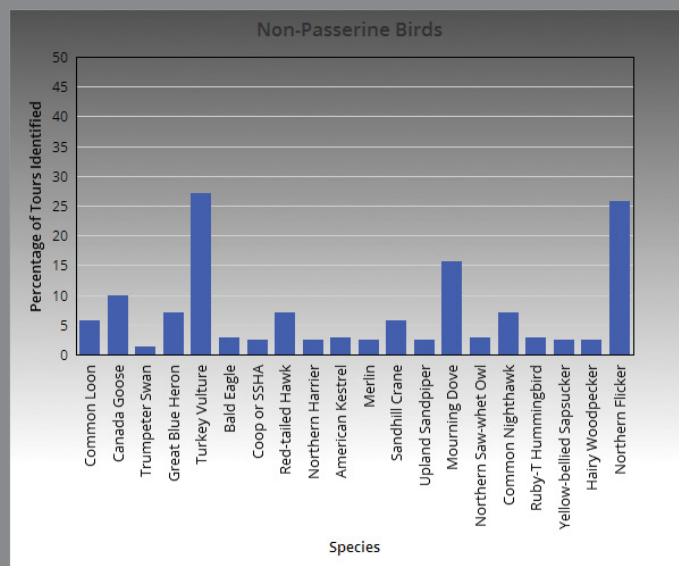
Bryant Eddy's passion for nature flourished as he grew up carefully observing the birds in his northern Michigan backyard. In 2015 he attended Alderleaf Wilderness College in Monroe, Wash., to become a professional naturalist. Bryant's vision is to help people become better stewards of the earth by sharing knowledge and appreciation of the natural world — starting with the unique avifauna of Michigan.

## Kirtland's Warbler Tours Recap

Attendance on the tours this year was excellent. A total of 850 visitors signed in from 11 different countries including Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, United Kingdom, France, Malaysia, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United States. Forty U.S. states were represented as well as Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. Just under 50 percent of birders on the tours were from Michigan and represented at least 39 counties. There were more than twice as many visitors from Washtenaw county than from any other county due to several groups from the University of Michigan and other committed birders.

While carefully looking out for Kirtland's Warblers, we also saw many other birds that benefit from the jack pine ecosystem. A total of 53 species were seen throughout the season on the tours. Upland Sandpipers were occasionally seen on the side of the road while driving to or from the site.

The Kirtland's Warbler was very cooperative, thanks to the organizations and people who have worked to recover the bird's population. We heard the Kirtland's Warbler every tour, and more than 90 percent of the time, every tour member saw the Kirtland's Warbler.



# Family-friendly Fun at CraneFest

BY LINDSAY CAIN, EDUCATION COORDINATOR



This year marks the 23rd annual Sandhill Crane and Art Festival or “CraneFest” as we affectionately like to call it. Michigan Audubon, in conjunction with the Kiwanis Club of Battle Creek, hosts this family-friendly outdoor festival on the second weekend of October each year at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area in Bellevue, Mich.

A wide range of activities await CraneFest attendees including guided nature walks, live animal and birds of prey presentations, fun and engaging educational activities for children of all ages, and a nature-themed art show with an array of vendors selling their work. A host of conservation-focused clubs and non-profit organizations are also on hand to provide information, demonstrations, and other exciting educational opportunities. Several food vendors provide a variety of delicious dining options.

and conservation projects of Michigan Audubon, especially those at our nearby Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary. Over the years, the Baker Sanctuary has grown to over 1,000 acres of conserved land for wildlife. An Oak Savanna Restoration at Baker, started in the fall of 2014, is now in its third year and is transforming this property into a haven for plants, insects, birds, and wildlife. (See *Baker Sanctuary Oak Savanna Restoration Update*, p. 6)



Sandhill Cranes, the star attraction of the event, are believed to be the oldest living bird species, having existed for more than 9 million years in their present form. Saved from the brink of extinction, cranes have become a true Michigan conservation success story. We celebrate these magnificent birds and welcome visitors from all over the Midwest and beyond to join us in witnessing the awe-inspiring Sandhill Crane migration.

From the beginning, the goal of CraneFest has been to raise awareness and appreciation of our natural heritage, and to support ongoing educational

This year's event runs Saturday and Sunday, October 14-15, from noon to dusk. While a variety of bird activity is sure to delight visitors in and around Big Marsh



Visitors gather as Sandhill Cranes begin descending on Big Lake Marsh for the evening.





Visitors enjoy a raptor presentation by Michigan Avian Experience at the 2016 CraneFest.

Lake throughout the day, migrating flocks of Sandhill Cranes generally begin their fly-in during the afternoon with the largest number of cranes appearing near dusk. Bring a lawn chair or blanket, relax and mingle with the crowd gathered on the hillside, and enjoy the incredible spectacle of crane migration as the sun begins its descent over the marsh.



CraneFest visitor surveys a variety of birds at Big Marsh Lake.

For a complete schedule of events, including information about the Friday evening Sandhill Soirée, visit [www.cranefest.org](http://www.cranefest.org). A list of vendors will also be posted and updated as available.



Lindsay Cain is Michigan Audubon's Education Coordinator. If you are interested in learning more about our events, workshops, presentations, or event sponsorship opportunities, please contact Lindsay at 517.580.7364 or [lcain@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:lcain@michiganaudubon.org).

## The Sandhill Soirée Birders' Social Returns at New Location

Join Michigan Audubon for the Sandhill Soirée Birders' Social at Darkhorse Brewing Company in Marshall, Mich., to raise funds to support Sandhill Crane conservation and kick-off CraneFest 2017.

This year's event will feature Dr. Pamela Rasmussen, of Michigan State University. Dr. Rasmussen's research focuses on the diversity, vocalizations, taxonomy, and conservation of the avifauna of southern Asia. She has recently co-curated an exhibit at the MSU Museum titled *Michigan Bird Conservation Stories: Pigeons Past to Plovers Present*. Her brief talk will highlight the species from this exhibit, including the Sandhill Crane, Piping Plover, Kirtland's Warbler, Trumpeter Swan, and the now-extinct Passenger Pigeon.



Dr. Pamela Rasmussen

The evening will get underway at 5:30 p.m. with a social hour, light hors d'oeuvres and drinks, and a silent auction. Each ticket purchased includes one drink ticket; additional drinks will be available for purchase. Our brief presentation will get underway around 6:30 p.m. Then join us at the Kiwanis Youth Conservation Area to watch the cranes as they fly in to roost for the night on Big Marsh Lake.

**Tickets are available at**  
**[www.cranefest.org](http://www.cranefest.org).**

# SANDHILL SOIRÉE

FRIDAY  
OCTOBER 13,  
2017





Dated Material



### Volunteers Needed for Chimney Roost Surveys

Volunteers are needed to survey chimney swift roosts across the state during fall migration. These surveys aim to gather information about where, when, and how many birds are roosting across Michigan. By surveying these roosts, we hope to gather information to help support conservation of critical roosting structures in Michigan. Visit <https://www.michiganaudubon.org/our-conservation-impact/chsw/> to learn more!

## Upcoming Events

### September

- 8-10 A Swift Night Out Roost Surveys | Nationwide, USA
- 12 Volunteer Birding Guide Training | Lansing, MI
- 12 Backyard Bird Habitat Workshop | Okemos, MI
- 16 Michigan Audubon Gala | Sandhill Crane Vineyards | Jackson, MI
- 29-Oct. 1 Inland Bird Banding Conference | Kalamazoo, MI

### October

- 5 Engaging Young Birders Workshop | Okemos, MI
- 13 Sandhill Soirée | Darkhorse Brewing Company | Marshall, MI
- 14-15 CraneFest | Bellevue, MI
- 21 Cranes, Colors, Cabernet, and Cider | Haehnle Sanctuary | Grass Lake, MI
- 26-30 International Bird Observatory Conference | Cape May, NJ
- 31 Fall Lights Out Ends | Nationwide, USA



Visit [www.michiganaudubon.org/calendar](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/calendar) to stay abreast of additional bird-related events.

## We welcome our newest Michigan Audubon Members

We would like to thank our newest members as well as our renewing members for your support of Michigan Audubon's efforts to protect birds and their habitat through conservation, education, and research.

Heather Allen  
Paul Bielawski  
Zachary Brown  
Robert Caywood  
Alan Damiano  
Bryant Eddy  
Melissa Eggleston  
Liduina Fedewa

Severn Hoschek  
Melissa Karazim  
Kim and Robert Kuemin  
Jon Markley  
Yolanda Mitts  
Larry Neitzert  
Teresa Osborn  
Brian Rippon

Andrew Simon  
James Spencer  
John and Linda Vidosh Zempel  
R. L. Virgil  
George White  
Nina Whitted  
Bob and Bev Zalewski

Please check the expiration date above your address to ensure that you continue to enjoy the benefits of your Michigan Audubon membership. Thank you!