

Jack Pine *Warbler*

WINTER: Alternative Energy Feature Series: Wind Energy & Birds ■ Birding the Eastern Upper Peninsula in Winter ■
Whitefish Point Bird Observatory Fall Field Summaries ■ Michigan's Growing Young Birders Network ■
Monitoring Waterbirds From Manitou Island



Jack Pine Warbler

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Cover Photo ■ Blue Jay

Photographer: Jocelyn Anderson

Jocelyn Anderson is a wildlife photographer in Southeast Michigan who is a big fan of birds. She focuses on capturing moments of wildlife, looking to showcase the beauty of the natural world. These photos range from dramatic moments of action to birds simply being. Jocelyn was the winner of the 2020 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards. Her work has been featured by the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and BBC Wildlife.

Thank you to Jocelyn for submitting this image to the 2020 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards and we look forward to seeing what photographers share in the upcoming 2021 contest. If you have photographs you would like considered for inclusion in future issues of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, please contact Communications & Marketing Coordinator Molly Keenan at mkeenana@michiganaudubon.org or (517) 580-7364.

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Point Birding Festival are
canceled for 2021. Please
visit the Michigan Audubon
online calendar for the most
up-to-date information
regarding events at
michiganaudubon.org/
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Welcome, New Members



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 4,000 acres of land within 18 sanctuaries as habitat for birds and other wildlife. More than 30 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 for more updates, and follow Michigan Audubon on social media.



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From the Executive Director

Happy New Year, Michigan Audubon friends and chapters!

The winter issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler* — that which you are holding in your hands or maybe scrolling through online — is the first issue that a great number of new Michigan Audubon members receive. In many ways, this may be our first chance to meaningfully connect with you if you are one of those new members. If so, thank you for taking the time to get to know our organization and community and for your willingness to be a part of bird conservation in Michigan. Whether you received a gift membership for the holidays, opted to join when you made a purchase at the online store, or maybe sent in a membership form from one of our sanctuary kiosks, we extend a warm welcome to you. To our renewing members, our steadfast supporters, and to those of you who made a year-end, tax-deductible donation to Michigan Audubon: **Thank you** for giving so generously!

In this issue of the JPW, we introduce part one of a four-part feature series on alternative energy in Michigan. I invite you to stay current and engaged with our conversations and updates about alternative energy in Michigan, its impacts on birds, and what we can do to help by reading our member magazine and following our blog posts and monthly e-newsletters.

One of our regular guides for Michigan Audubon's Upper Peninsula birding tours, Darrell Lawson, contributed to this issue with his article, *Birding the Eastern Upper Peninsula in Winter*, on page 4. It's a heartwarming piece that expressed so accurately to me what is special (and even addicting) about birding in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. "It was during that first winter in the Eastern U.P. that I really fell in love with birding," Darrell writes.

One facet of our education work is reflected in the growing Michigan Young Birders Network, an effort with budding energy that is contagious and inspiring. You can read more about this network and how to get an adolescent you know involved, and meet a few of the volunteers actively building this network on page 12 in this issue.

With a plethora of programs, projects, and efforts that drive and comprise our mission, Michigan Audubon continues to challenge the organization's depth and breadth of inclusivity

and diversity work. We look forward to promoting more comprehensive, effective, creative, and new ways of including and introducing people to the world of birdwatching. We believe it's a powerful pathway not only for understanding our world, but for protecting it and connecting with others who share our value of the natural world as well.



Due to continued pandemic-related restrictions, Michigan Audubon staff are adapting the work of our year ahead to better match the priorities of birds and their habitats. What does this mean for our organization's calendar? In terms of events, you can expect to see fewer large birding events promoted and offered this year and more emphasis on the advocacy, outreach, and education work related to our mission. We also have big projects on deck this year focused on our Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary, Baker Sanctuary, and Whitefish Point Bird Observatory.

While bigger, annual birding events in Michigan like Spring Fling and the Tawas Point Birding Festival are canceled for 2021, we look forward to bringing back our smaller birding trips and tours for all levels of experience in the future. (Many of Michigan Audubon's statewide chapters are already making plans for small, safe spring migration bird ID walks, so don't forget to learn more about/consider joining your local chapter!)

For the birds,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Heather Good".

Heather Good
Executive Director

Mi Bird-Friendly Communities Lunch & Learn Webinar Series

This free webinar series will feature different topics related to Michigan Audubon's Mi Bird-Friendly Communities program — a suite of urban bird conservation projects focused on reconnecting communities with birds and the environment for the benefit of all! Join us on the second Tuesday of each month at noon for a 45-minute presentation with plenty of time for questions. The series will feature various expert speakers and will be available through Zoom or as a Facebook Live stream.

Webinar dates and topics:

- Jan. 12 | Mi Bird-Friendly Communities Program Overview
- Feb. 9 | Nest Boxes — Maintenance and Monitoring
- Mar. 9 | How To Be a Purple Martin Landlord
- Apr. 13 | Bird-Window Collisions
- May 11 | Bird-Friendly Backyards Featuring Native Plants
- June 8 | Invasive Species — Identification and Removal Techniques
- July 13 | Mi Bird-Friendly Communities Program Overview
- Aug. 10 | Chimney Swift Conservation Concerns and Monitoring
- Sept. 14 | Lights Out and Global Bird Rescue Week
- Oct. 12 | Fall Garden Clean-Up
- Nov. 9 | Cats and Birds
- Dec. 14 | Mi Bird-Friendly Communities — Year in Review

We are excited about the opportunity to share our Mi Bird-Friendly Communities program with you through these free webinars. Stay tuned to our website (michiganaudubon.org), eNews, and social media for more information and to register or view these upcoming webinars.



Dark-eyed Junco. Photo by Michele Black | GBB

Meeting the Demands for Alternative Energy and Its Impact on Michigan Birds

BY HEATHER GOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

From the late 1800s until today, fossil fuels — coal, petroleum, and natural gas — have been our main sources of energy. However, in 2019, the annual energy consumption in the United States from renewable sources exceeded coal consumption for the first time since before 1885, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration's (EIA) *Monthly Energy Review*. "This outcome mainly reflects the continued decline in the amount of coal used for electricity generation over the past decade as well as growth in renewable energy, mostly from wind and solar," according to the Review.

Shortly after his election last November, President-elect Joe Biden laid out an ambitious plan for decarbonizing the U.S. economy, including a carbon-free power sector by 2035 and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. These efforts will undoubtedly entail additional, unprecedented investments in a range of "green energy" technologies and industries.

With Governor Gretchen Whitmer's Executive Directive 2019-12, Michigan joined the United States Climate Alliance, a bipartisan coalition of governors from 25 states devoted to pursuing the goals of the internationally accepted Paris Agreement. These governors banded together to sign this agreement despite the Trump Administration's withdrawal from that agreement at the time. By signing on, Michigan has committed to pursuing at least a 26–28% reduction below 2005 levels in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 to accelerate new and existing policies to reduce carbon pollution and promote clean energy deployment at the state and federal level.

This directive is part of a larger, multi-faceted plan, the "MI Healthy Climate Plan," announced on Sept. 23, 2020. "The science is clear — climate change is directly impacting our public health, environment, our economy, and our families," said Governor Whitmer. "Through comprehensive and aggressive steps, we will combat the climate crisis by formally setting and relentlessly pursuing a goal of statewide decarbonization by 2050."

Big Energy = Big Solutions...or Mainly Big Profits?

2019 was the biggest year on record for corporate procurement of wind-generated electricity in the United States. "The economics are driving this," boasted John Hensley, vice president of research and analytics for the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA). For the critical thinking individual, this claim pretty quickly begs the question — a lot of questions. Essentially, we are left to wonder, with reasonable scrutiny and suspicion, how much we can trust the big business of alternative energy. We wonder, are we really proceeding in a balanced way, one that takes into consideration the environment? Are these technologies the right fit, and is this growth happening all too quickly, and for the right reasons?

In June 2020, Goldman Sachs shared their expectation that "spending for renewable power projects will become the largest area of energy spending in 2021, surpassing upstream oil and gas for the first time in history." The multinational investment bank and financial services company also expects the clean energy sector to reach a \$16 trillion investment volume through 2030, eclipsing fossil fuels.

Wind Energy Industry Growth in Michigan

Fitting the big picture pattern, the wind energy industry in Michigan has grown tremendously in the last 10–15 years, elevating the state of Michigan to number 12 in the nation for the total number of installed wind turbines. According to the Public Service Commission, as of the end of 2020, Michigan has a total of 1,284 operational wind turbines, producing 3,102 MW of energy.

Add to that, Michigan's renewable energy mandate requires energy providers to supply 15% of electricity from renewable sources by 2022. Given that energy providers are on track to meet that goal, the rapid development of wind farms doesn't appear to be slowing down anytime soon.

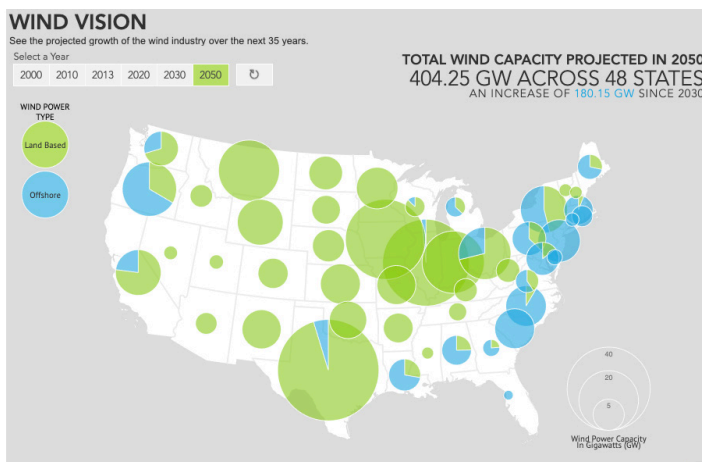
A wind farm is a development of multiple wind turbines (windmills) in one geographic area where the wind blows at least 14 mph. Depending on the geography of the location, wind farms can contain as few as five wind turbines or as many as 5,000 turbines (as is the case in California, at one of the largest industrial wind farms in the United States).

Conservation Concerns

- Wind power facilities negatively affect birds and other wildlife, especially birds of prey and bats, through direct mortality from collisions with the turbines.
- Wind power facilities can degrade or destroy habitat, cause disturbance and displacement, and disrupt important ecological links.
- The integrity of the land is dramatically altered due to the environmental impacts of turbine construction and maintenance.

There are far fewer emissions involved in wind farming as compared to burning fossil fuels. “Wind beats coal by any environmental measure, but that doesn’t mean that its impacts are negligible,” according to David Keith, the Gordon McKay Professor of Applied Physics at the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. “We must quickly transition away from fossil fuels to stop carbon emissions. In doing so, we must make choices between various low-carbon technologies, all of which have some social and environmental impacts.”

Wind energy comes with significant consequences and concerns for people and the environment. “I think it’s always valuable to talk about the balance of impacts versus the benefit of clean energy,” said Joel Merriman, director of the Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign for the American Bird Conservancy. “We need renewable energy to combat climate change, but we have to do it in a way that minimizes impacts to birds. That means avoiding development in high-risk locations, incorporating appropriate minimization measures, and mitigating for any impacts.”



The Wind Energy Resource Zone board designated Michigan’s Lower Peninsula’s eastern counties near Lake Huron and Saginaw Bay as “areas of strong sustained wind in the state,” which gave way to massive developments of industrial wind farms in the Thumb over the past 10 years. Huron County itself has the largest installed wind energy base in the Great Lakes region.

The upper Thumb region hosts a high-capacity, 140-mile electric transmission line. This project is called the Thumb Loop, capable of carrying electricity from up to 2,800 wind turbines.

Wind Energy Advocacy: What We’d Like to See and What We’re Advocating For

- Mandatory adoption of bird-smart principles for developers that are incorporated in the permitting process.
- Movement by the wind industry toward bird- and bat-friendly bladeless or enclosed-blade technologies to replace the current bladed turbines.
- Regional studies conducted that identify areas where wind energy should not be developed in Michigan due to its potential impacts on protected birds, wildlife, and habitats.
- Pre-construction risk assessments and post-construction monitoring of bird and bat fatalities conducted by independent, third-party experts using standardized methods, followed by the sharing of these results in a manner that is transparent, open to the public, and transmitted directly to regulatory agencies.
- Testing the efficacy of various mitigation techniques and collaborative work with Governor Whitmer’s task force to develop best practices and exemplary state mandates.
- Greater efforts for collaborative, on-the-ground conservation efforts for areas of particular interest (high winds) to developers (i.e., the Upper Peninsula, central-northern Lower Peninsula, and the Thumb of Michigan).

Michigan Audubon’s focus on wind energy is about being a part of informed, science-based planning and advocating for better standards and mandates at the state level. We also want to keep you — people who are invested in the well-being of birds and our greenspaces throughout the lower and upper peninsulas — updated and informed on how you can help.

In each issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler* this year, we will feature a piece connected to alternative energy in Michigan, community science and advocacy, and outreach that can help us protect our peninsulas for birds and people alike.

Stay tuned for more featured stories on this topic, including the spring 2021 feature story, *Michigan’s Wind Energy Cautionary Tales*.



Heather was a member of Michigan Audubon’s Board of Directors, studied at the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources and Environment, and volunteered with birds of prey at the Leslie Science and Nature Center as an independent rehabilitator of raptors before beginning her tenure as executive director in 2016.

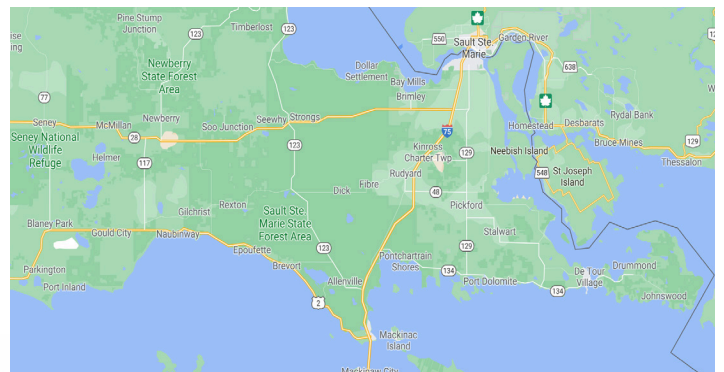
Birding the Eastern Upper Peninsula in Winter

BY DARRELL LAWSON, VICE-PRESIDENT PETOSKEY REGIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

I remember around eight years ago, when I first caught wind of this thing called birding, chasing a Eurasian Wigeon that had made its way to Nayanquing Point. I had watched the movie *Big Year* solely because of the actors in it but wondered if people really did stuff like that. A few internet searches later, I learned that yes, birding was a thing. I also learned that there was a Eurasian Wigeon a few hours' drive from my home. Despite having never heard of the species before, I picked up cheap binoculars at Walmart (not recommended) on my way down, and thanks to some helpful birders with better optics, I was able to see the bird.

That summer, I spent quite a bit of time noticing the birds around me that I never had before, even though I grew up in Northern Michigan. The sense of discovery was amazing. It seemed like every day I was finding "new" birds. But things really became interesting when I took my first winter trip to the Eastern U.P. For some reason, those birds just resonated with me — species that come to Michigan some years and skip others. Every winter would be a different experience! I loved seeing species like Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, and Purple Finch for the first time. It seemed like every trip yielded something new. And there was always the possibility for something truly exciting — a Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, or Gyrfalcon. It was during that first winter in the Eastern U.P. that I really fell in love with birding.

Eight years later, I rarely see new birds in Michigan. Instead of finding new life birds for myself on these winter trips, I am usually helping others to do so, including as a guide on the biannual Michigan Audubon winter birding tours in the Eastern U.P. I have led these trips since 2015, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they are canceled this winter. So, Michigan Audubon and I decided that I should write this guide to help those who may wish to visit the area this winter on their own. It should be well worth your time to do so — many of the species that we normally target on these trips are around in higher-than-usual numbers this year! So join me in as I "walk" you through birding the area in general and then focus on a few "can't miss" spots.



General Birding

The area I will be focusing on is south of Sault Saint Marie, west to the Rudyard area, south to Pickford, and east to the shoreline, as this is where we typically focus our efforts during the birding tours. I usually crisscross roads to see what I can find while avoiding the highways because of traffic. Many of the roads are dead ends, though, so pay attention to signs and bring a good road atlas. Also, I know it can be exciting to see new birds, but remember before stopping to be courteous to other drivers. Pull far enough off the road to not obstruct traffic, and be aware that many of the ditches can be deceptively deep when covered with snow. Getting stuck is a great way to ruin your day of birding. Indoor restroom opportunities are limited, so you may want to show some restraint with your morning coffee. And I really want to stress, please be respectful of the birds and give them space. Don't get so close as to stress them out or interfere with whatever they happen to be doing at that time.

As you are driving around, fields and sparsely wooded areas can be opportunities to find species such as Snowy Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, and Sharp-tailed Grouse. In wooded areas, look for many of the winter finches such as Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, and crossbills. Houses with feeders tend to attract many of the same



Northern Hawk Owl. Photo by Darrell Lawson



Common Redpoll. Photo by Darrell Lawson

finches but also may contain Common Redpoll and, rarely, a Hoary Redpoll. Fruit trees will attract Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, and Bohemian Waxwing. This tends to be better earlier in the season as the fruit can already be thoroughly picked through by late winter.

Rudyard Loop

This is an area just east of Rudyard demarcated by Centerline Road to the west, South Hantz Road to the east, C48/19 Mile to the north, and C48 again to the south, and is bisected by I-75. Driving this loop typically yields Snowy Owl — sometimes over a dozen. But also, be on the lookout for Rough-legged Hawk hunting over the fields or sitting on telephone poles and fence posts. Snow Bunting are reliably found near, or on top of, a home between the I-75 overpass and Hantz Road along the southern section of C48.

Pickford

The town of Pickford features many fruit trees that attract birds. In addition, there are many fields and open areas nearby. I remember once setting up my scope in an intersection just a couple of miles outside of town. With a single 360-degree sweep, I was able to count 17 Snowy Owl from that single location. It is definitely worth spending time in this area.

Dunbar Park

This location, at the mouth of the Charlotte River, can be a one-stop-shop for winter finches. The snow can get

deep, and the road into the park is usually not plowed, but there are numerous fruit trees in the park itself that are always worth checking. Early in the season, before the rivers and lakes freeze over, Tundra Swan can be seen staging by the hundreds in the distance. But the real attraction is a short walk up South Scenic Drive to the west from the park. Here, there is a home with many, many feeders. Nearly any winter finch in the area will come to these feeders. It is worth spending some time here. It is also a nice gesture to leave a small bag of sunflower seed next to the garage.

9 Mile and Nicolet

Just east of the intersection of 9 Mile and Nicolet, along the north side of 9 Mile, there is a group of feeders alongside the road. In the early morning, this can be a reliable location to see Sharp-tailed Grouse. If not present there, drive west along 9 Mile toward Ridge Road. Sharp-tailed Grouse can be frequently seen in this area, but be cautious with your identification as Ruffed Grouse frequent this area as well.

This is just a small sampling of the great locations to look for birds in the area. For more locations and information, be sure to visit northhuronbirding.com. I hope you will get the opportunity to make a trip this year and experience the magic of winter birding in the Eastern U.P. for yourself.



Darrell is a past president (and current vice-president) of the Petoskey Regional Audubon Society, co-chaired the Sunset Coast Birding Trail development team, and is a current member of the Michigan Bird Records Committee. He routinely leads field trips around Michigan.

Snowy Owl. Photo by Darrell Lawson



Reflections on the WPBO Fall Waterbird Count

BY STEVE BACKUS, WPBO 2020 FALL WATERBIRD COUNTER

Many words are used in desperate attempts to describe migration. Spectacle, miracle, phenomenon, and wonder are a few that come to mind. There's a good reason for this desperation; though our knowledge of migration is far from comprehensive, every kernel we understand challenges our imagination. When looking at a songbird who has navigated thousands of miles through a myriad of hazards, it can be easy to lose the warranted appreciation. When rivers of waterbirds stream across the sky, this story is much harder to ignore.

As the fall seasonal waterbird counter, my responsibility is to contribute the year's data set to a record kept since 1989. Through the work of dozens of observers, counters, and other contributors, we're lucky to have a robust tally of the fall migration at Whitefish Point. Referencing this information, we can see trends emerge, and that's one of the huge advantages to this census spanning the years it has. As was made evident by the shocking study showing that 3 billion birds have been lost since 1970, long-term monitoring initiatives are crucially important in influencing policy, opinion, science, culture, and awareness.

Though our final tally of 92,894 individual waterbirds was slightly above the count's average of 87,807, it's worth noting that this value is lower (8.6%) than the last decade's average. These trends are nuanced as you pick apart how they are distributed to an order, family, and species. By and large, the number of ducks we recorded was lower than average. However, many dabbling ducks have shown particular trends that tell a different story. For instance, American Wigeon were recorded in slightly below-average numbers compared with the last decade but far above-average since the beginning of the count. This suggests that this population may have grown and stabilized since the count's initiation. In the past several years,

Blue-winged Teal had been observed in concerning low numbers; yet, in this year's count they recorded in far above-average numbers. These stories play out differently from species to species, hinting at how unique these animals are despite our groupings.

It comes as no surprise that a majority of species were seen in lower numbers. There were 17 out of 25 Anseriformes (ducks, geese, swans, mergansers) below their averages. Some, such as Surf Scoter, were recorded in record low numbers far below the standard annual deviation. White-winged Scoter earned their third-lowest ranking in their history here. It is known that loons are facing declines across their range, reflected by our record low count of Common Loon. Bonaparte's Gull also set a new recorded low, and several anticipated species were absent (such as Pacific Loon). These trends and changes are one of the reasons we do this survey. When we see growths and declines, we can start to question what fuels them and work toward meaningful action.

Diversity was record-breaking: 84 waterbird species were recorded, well over the average 73. A majority of this was from a well-rounded representation of expected waterbirds, though a few vagrant rarities added to this total. I'll never forget scanning above the treetops during a slow migration day to see the distinctive silhouette of a frigatebird soaring along the bay-side shoreline. A Pied-billed Grebe greeted me on the pond one sunrise, the first fall record for this species. Arctic Tern, Marbled Godwit, Black-legged Kittiwake — all of these rare birds were notable, and the excitement they brought carried throughout the count. During an eight-hour day, a rare King Eider could take just a few seconds to dart across the horizon. After an hours-long spell of quiet, a flock of 200 Long-tailed Duck could come rolling into view. The presence of the unknown kept us sharp; if we looked away for just a moment, who knows what we could miss.



A mixed flock containing Bufflehead, Greater Scaup, and Long-tailed Duck at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. Photo by Chris Neri



Long-tailed Jaeger. Photo by Chris Neri

Including non-waterbirds, our count jumps to 103,216 individuals over 221 taxa (birds identified at the species and non-species level). Take a minute to think about that. Imagine that movement; it's wildly humbling to witness. Like a fan on the sidelines of a marathon, I feel energized when I see these birds go by. I want them to make it. I'll admit that I feel conflicted when I see an exhausted songbird bravely approach from Lake Superior, only to be swallowed whole by a resident Herring Gull. This is all part of a system much larger and complex than I can understand, I tell myself, though I feel some sadness for the deceased traveler. Watching falcons flaunt their aerial prowess as they catch migrating songbirds feels different. There's a vulgarity to being swallowed whole by a bird who seems just at home eating discarded chips and an honor to being hunted by one of the most skilled aerial predators known.

At times we talk about migration as though it is an event. A singular happening that comes and goes year after year. Birds, and life, are always on the move. This fall's birds, just as the generations before them, have passed by Whitefish Point in quantities that are challenging to imagine. This fall, I was honored to have a peek at one moment of migration, and it will stay with me forever.



The complex and amazing stories found in nature have captured Steve for as long as he can remember. His particular passion for waterbirds found a home at Whitefish Point, and he hopes to contribute toward our understanding of their place in the world.

Peace at the Point

BY KATE MALEY, WPBO 2020 FALL LEAD OWL BANDER

Eight out of ten Americans will never live in a place where they can see the Milky Way. While this is simply another way of stating that the majority of the population of the United States lives in urban centers, it also seems to represent a larger disconnect with the nocturnal world. When describing life as an owl bander, many people have told me, "You walk around the woods at night? I don't think I could do that!", which is fair. And while I may miss out on some pretty spectacular fall colors and diurnal migration, walking hundreds of miles in the dark (admittedly in circles) offers a unique perspective of the Point.

On a clear night, the night sky at Whitefish Point is nothing short of spectacular. Not only can you see the Milky Way, but also the occasional meteor or line of SpaceX's Starlink satellites as they streak across the sky (this was a new one for me). Throughout the season, the moon oscillates between being bright enough to make navigating the trails easy even without a headlamp and being so dark it is difficult to tell where the treetops end and the sky begins. Headlamps help highlight signs of wildlife — eyeshine reveals the red fox hiding in a stand of jack pines, subtle flashes of color draw attention to salamanders as they prowl the trails, and fresh tracks in the sand allude to a small American black bear that passed through earlier in the day.

continued on page 8



One of the 257 Northern Saw-whet Owl banded at WPBO in the fall of 2020. Photo by Kate Maley



Long-eared Owl. Photo by Kate Maley

continued from page 7

There are nights when the loudest sounds are made by falling leaves hitting the ground or migrating birds calling as they fly overhead in untold numbers. On those nights, you can hear the waves switch to the bay side, even before you can perceive the shift in the wind direction through the trees. At times, most noises are drowned out by a ship passing by, close enough to sound larger than life in the dark.

Then, of course, there are the owls. On quiet nights you can sometimes listen to the soft “tooting” of saw-whets or the more jarring “who cooks for you?!” of a Barred Owl passing through. If you’re lucky, you might even hear the soft shifting of bark and faint woosh of wing beats before an otherwise silent flight takes an owl deeper into the woods. As owl banders, we are fortunate enough to get a unique look at these charismatic species by collecting data on individuals and population demographics. During the fall of 2020 alone, we were able to band a total of 274 owls: 257 Northern Saw-whet Owl, eight Long-eared Owl, seven Barred Owl, and two Boreal Owl. Among the saw-whets, 11 had already been banded at another site or during a previous season at WPBO, adding to our collective understanding of migratory movements and timing.

Amid an unpredictable year, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to spend the fall walking around the woods of Whitefish Point at night. With the dark came a narrowed focus and sense of peace balanced by the excitement of spotting a new species of salamander or banding an owl. I am also grateful to all those involved in protecting that which makes Whitefish Point and WPBO so special by day — but especially by night.



Kate discovered a love of birds and fieldwork while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Since then, she has been fortunate enough to work with birds ranging from Golden-winged Warbler in her home state of Minnesota to Greater Ani in Panama.

Reports From the Field

BY CHRIS NERI, WPBO FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST

The 2020 fall field season at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO) ran from Aug. 15 through Nov. 15. During that period, the field staff recorded 115,446 individual birds of 221 species and three additional taxa. The species observed this fall included 35 species of waterfowl, 29 shorebird species, eight owl species, and nine finch species. Although it was a relatively “tame” season for vagrants by WPBO standards, we were thrilled to document the first records for frigatebird and Barn Owl at WPBO. Unfortunately, because the frigatebird was an adult male, it is unlikely that it will be possible to identify it to species (but Magnificent Frigatebird is the most likely candidate). Regardless, I’ll never forget hearing waterbird counter Steve Backus’s radio call, “Chris, there’s a frigatebird over the harbor.”

While the chance of seeing a vagrant is always a possibility at Whitefish Point, it is more often the overall migration of the more common species that makes-or-breaks a given day or even a season for the field staff. The early season is the time when we hope for the best warbler migration, but it proved to be a bit lackluster this fall, with a total of 2,033 warblers of 23 species being documented. Whereas the warbler migration was somewhat disappointing, the early season began providing some signs of the finch flight that would be one of the late season’s highlights.



It was an irruptive year for Evening Grosbeak, with 565 documented during the fall of 2020 at WPBO. Photo by Chris Neri

Conducting songbird surveys at WPBO in late fall can be quite daunting at times. The vast majority of migrant songbirds have already moved through, and weeks of harsh winter conditions are not unexpected. Weeks of walking the woods under gray skies, with no feeling in your fingers and toes, gets old quickly when the birds aren't there to occupy one's mind. Conversely, when the winter finches are present in good numbers, it is a joy to witness their migration. Last fall, we did not document a single Common Redpoll or Pine Grosbeak. Even the more expected Evening Grosbeak was virtually absent, with just five individuals documented. This fall, it was the Evening Grosbeak migration that stood out to me the most.

As a native of Southeastern Pennsylvania, my experience with Evening Grosbeak (EVGR) was very limited when I first came to WPBO in 1999. I was amazed to see flights of 50 to 100 birds on a given spring morning. I did not know it at the time, but EVGR were starting to show a serious decline in the eastern half of the U.S. around that time. Fall totals at WPBO in the 1990s ranged from a low of around 1,000 to a high of over 5,000. The highest total during my 10 falls at WPBO prior to this year was 297 in the fall of 2004. Over the last five fall seasons, EVGR numbers have ranged from the alarmingly low total of five last fall to a high of 183 in 2015.

Although the 565 Evening Grosbeak we documented at WPBO this fall is a far cry from the thousands that WPBO field staff documented just a few decades ago, it was encouraging to see them occur in their highest numbers since 2003. Their irruption this fall has been widespread, reaching as far south as Georgia and Mississippi. Seeing all the excited posts on eBird and social media has repeatedly brought a smile to my face. There is no way to avoid the fact that 2020 was a challenging year, and 2021 has not started any better. I hope that Evening Grosbeak find their way to you this winter to provide you with a little escape with their beauty and bright calls.

I struggle writing these articles after every season. There is so much more experienced during a field



A frigatebird was one of the vagrants seen at WPBO in the fall of 2020.
Photo by Chris Neri

season at WPBO than can be put into one of these articles. Looking back, not just at the fall season but all of the fieldwork conducted this year, there is simply no way to avoid the unique circumstances that 2020 presented. As the start of the spring season approached in early March, it became increasingly clear that COVID-19 was going to impact the way things were going to be conducted this year. The spring owl banding provided an overwhelming sense of normalcy as Nova Mackentley and I walked the woods and worked with the owls through the night. A routine for me after the night's banding was to go home, turn on the morning news, get distressed by what I was hearing, turn off the news, and walk up to the Point for a little birding before going to bed. It was surreal to get to the parking lot and see that waterbird counter Alison Vilag's pickup was the only vehicle in the parking lot. Admittedly, it was nice not to have a busy parking lot with car alarms going off, slamming doors, screaming kids, or barking dogs. At the same time, it evoked a strange feeling of dread and dystopia.

I want to thank everyone at Michigan Audubon on behalf of all of the 2020 WPBO field staff. The extra work they put in and the consideration that they extended to us to ensure that we felt safe while conducting our fieldwork during the pandemic was much appreciated by each one of us. I also thank my crewmates this season, Alison Vilag, Steve Backus, Kate Maley, and Eliana Fierro-Calderón, for their hard work and companionship. It was a pleasure to be part of the field staff with them. A huge thanks to the Point's first Barn Owl. It was incredibly exciting to add the tenth owl species to WPBO's checklist this fall. As always, thanks to all of you who support WPBO's long-term research. This work truly could not continue without your generosity.



Chris Neri arrived at WPBO in 1999. Chris has been fortunate to spend seasons at some of the premier raptor sites around the country, working on some great research projects, but as he reports, "nothing has captured me the way the owl migration at Whitefish Point has."

Community Spotlight: Meet the Kleins

Doug and Anne Klein, along with their daughter, Maeve, have been an active part of Michigan Audubon, sharing their love for birds through volunteering at our sanctuaries and events and even founding the Barry County Bird Club in their community.

How has birding played a role in your life?

Doug: Anne and I both grew up on the southeast side of Grand Rapids. We went to different schools, so we never met until a field trip with Grand Rapids Audubon Club in 1989. We were members of that club for decades until we moved to Hastings and the travel to meetings with young children got to be too much. We survived on feeder birding for many years until one fateful winter when we noticed we had a pair of Long-eared Owl roosting in our pines. We invited anyone and everyone to see this elusive owl, and through that venture, we met many birders from Barry County. We realized we had enough local people interested in birds that we could start a bird club in Hastings. Thus began the Barry County Bird Club in April 2014.

Maeve: I started birding in 2014 at the age of 8 and began leading Cerulean Warbler Weekend tours at 11. I also am active on iNaturalist and WhatBird helping with bird identification.

How do you contribute to the Barry County Bird Club?

Doug: We run the meetings, plus lead all of the field trips. That is all on hold for the time being. The club is supported by many loyal naturalists who provide us with ideas for interesting speakers. We now have over 200 people on our email list, and we have managed to keep our club dues-free.

Anne: I love leading field trips for the club, meeting new people, and introducing them to the joy and wonder of birds. Volunteering at Youth Day is especially fun since children are so enthusiastic. In 2019, I believe that more

than 800 kids attended, not counting accompanying adults, so that is a substantial outreach. And it is nice to listen to people's personal "bird story" when they share, whether it is a bird they saw in their yard or at a feeder, and provide feedback or answers to their bird questions. If the birding is slow, we explore other animals, insects, plants, etc. Barry County is so beautiful that we can always find some natural wonder to enjoy and appreciate on our outings.

The most gratifying thing for me about sharing birds with others is when someone looks through your spotting scope or their binoculars and sees a neat bird and says in awe, "Oh, wow!" Now you know you've reached them at a personal level.

Maeve: I am the IT help for the meetings and provide warbler ID help for field trips. I helped create the Barry County Bird Club Facebook group (new members are always welcome!) and I moderate our club email.

Ronald H. Warner Sanctuary is a special place for you. Can you share why that is and the projects you have worked on there as a volunteer?

Doug: I first visited Warner Sanctuary on a Grand Rapids Audubon field trip in 1974. I saw my lifer Red-bellied Woodpecker there. Warner Sanctuary has a mix of red pines and native hardwoods, plus a quiet lake and a couple of creeks that flow through the property. It is one of Barry County's best-kept secrets — you can bird there all day and not run into another soul. As an eBird hotspot, over 118 species of birds have been seen there. It is probably the most reliable place in the county to hear Red-shouldered Hawk. In summer, the woods feature Veery, Ovenbird, Blue-winged and Pine Warblers, Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, American Redstart, and Acadian Flycatcher.

When I noticed a deterioration of the trails and human-made infrastructure, I decided to step in and apply my skills as a carpenter and woodcutter to make the sanctuary



more user-friendly. There are two boardwalks through wetlands on the lake border and creek floodplain that have been refurbished. The existing bridge over Glass Creek was straightened as well. A new trail was added to the west half of the property recently, along with two new bridges and two new benches for visitors to use. I also kept the trails free of deadfall trees and did some string-trimming a couple of times to knock back the ever-encroaching brush and invasives. I added a couple of signs for safety and trail navigation, plus lowered the existing informational kiosk to a more usable height. Last summer, we covered protruding roots in the parking area's driveway with some much-needed gravel.

Maeve, as one of our youngest Cerulean Warbler Weekend guides, you've been an excellent addition to the Michigan Audubon community! How do you think we can better encourage young adults like you to get involved with bird conservation?

Maeve: Thank you! I think you need to first introduce young adults to birds and birding. Show them the beauty of the natural world — the excitement of seeing a male Blackburnian Warbler in the sun, the beauty of a carpet of blooming trillium, the majesty of a Short-eared Owl hunting over snow-covered fields. These experiences make you slow down and appreciate the moment. It is a worldwide scavenger hunt! Emphasize that all habitat conservation is important because the natural world is all interconnected. When I started birding, a big draw for me was putting our checklists into eBird — supporting conservation through citizen science! Media outreach is a big plus, too, and continuing to offer opportunities such as your Michigan Young Birders Camp.

What do you think is one of the most critical bird conservation issues right now?

Doug: I think getting a handle on climate change and arresting our carbon dioxide and methane emissions is crucial. To that end, we added a 10.5-KW photovoltaic solar array to our barn this past summer, and we are considering leasing an electric car.

Anne: Two things come to mind in bird conservation. First, introducing people to birds and birding and hopefully having them become interested in bird survival. I am sure you are familiar with the expression, "You won't love what you don't know." Reaching out to the younger generation and planting the seeds early is also a good strategy.

Second, loss of habitat is another important bird conservation issue. We are disheartened when we see another local farm field being tilled for better drainage. This helps the farmer but doesn't help migrating birds like shorebirds have places to feed during spring migration. It is also necessary to reduce the use of chemicals and pesticides, which can adversely affect beneficial insects, which feed birds. It is encouraging to see how frequently Bald Eagle are seen in Michigan since we got rid of DDT in the 1970s.

You can read more about the Kleins and find links to more resources for birding in Barry County in the extended online version of this article at michiganaudubon.org/learn/the-jack-pine-warbler.

Ronald H. Warner Sanctuary is located at 2500 Erway Rd., Hastings, MI 49058.

Fantasy Birding

BY LINDSAY CAIN, EDUCATION COORDINATOR

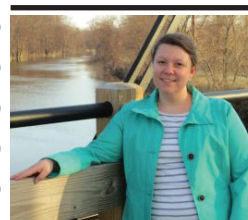
Fantasy sports have never been my thing. While I understand the basic concept, I don't really know how they work, and I've never seen the appeal. I'm not sure that anyone who knows me well would believe me if I told them I would take up a fantasy venture. But that's just what I'm planning to do — 2021 will be my year of fantasy birding.

Fantasy birding began in 2019 as a game for "armchair naturalists of all ages and interest levels," as the website expounds. Participants can choose from various games, but the gist is that fantasy birders plan their birding trips by choosing a hotspot for a specific date, and then the program uses eBird data to populate the participant's checklist. You can use historical data, current weather predictions, and more to help you choose the ideal birding spot for "seeing" the most species each day.

I've been interested in doing a virtual Big Year since late 2019 when a friend of mine told me that she and her husband were considering doing one themselves. However, the whole process felt a little intimidating to me, so I started slowly by participating in a virtual Big Day. I created my free account, joined a game, selected my route, and waited for the Big Day to arrive. In total, I reigned in 59 species — not too fruitful but more than I saw in my backyard!

What my experiment really drove home, however, is that there's nothing to lose by fantasy birding. It's the perfect opportunity to learn more about bird ID and bird patterns while removing the constraints of time, money, and other accessibility issues. I can explore birding hotspots from the comfort of my own home and with my bird-loving three-year-old on my lap.

I'm looking forward to my continued journey in the fantasy birding arena. Because I live and work in Michigan, I've decided to do a Michigan Big Year, so each of my hotspots will be in Michigan and could feature birds recorded by one of you! Please follow my virtual Big Year journey through monthly updates on the Michigan Audubon blog or start your fantasy birding adventure and look for me on the scoreboards. You can find me under the username "lcain" with a Turkey Vulture as my avatar.



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.

Looking Forward To Helping MYBN Grow

BY JESSICA DECKER, MYBN CONTRIBUTOR



Young Birders Network

Very few things have impacted my life as much as birds have. What started as casually watching songbirds at bird feeders has grown into a passion that is now the driving force behind my future education and career plans. However, as much as I have loved birding over the years, opportunities to connect

with people my age who share that passion have proven to be scarce. That's why I was so excited

when I found out that the Michigan Young Birders Network (MYBN) was being given new life. Even though my time as a "young birder" is almost over, I'm excited to spend what time I have left helping this amazing community grow and establish itself.

While some of our platforms have only been up for a few months, I've already met some incredible birders my age I would never have known existed otherwise. Ever since we connected, we've been sharing our past and recent birding experiences and helping each other grow as birders in general. It's been wonderful having a group of friends who are just as eager to talk about birds as I am. As of yet, the MYBN has been an incredibly positive part of my life, full of supportive and compassionate people that came at just the right time.

Though we've just gotten started, many of us have begun brainstorming big plans for the future. While the nature of 2020 has stalled many of these, I have no doubt we will push through and make them happen when the time is right. The day we can all go birding together in person is something I'll continue to look forward to through the tough times. Until then, I know most of us will keep pushing to expand our membership by introducing more Michigan teens to the fun that comes with birding. After all, I've realized over the years that the birds themselves are only part of what makes the activity so unique. Meeting people and sharing stories and experiences is another big part that deserves just as much attention. Hopefully, the MYBN can address this portion of birding in a way that teens like me have never been exposed to before and make the community into something even more special than it already is.



Jessica started birding when she was 11 after seeing a Red-bellied Woodpecker at a feeder in her backyard, and she has been hooked ever since! The 17-year-old senior at Ferndale High School will be studying Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at Michigan Technological University next fall.

The Michigan Young Birders Network (MYBN) is a statewide network that functions as a free, virtual networking group for individuals ages 13-18 interested in birds and who may consider themselves to be birders (but this is not required). The MYBN offers a sense of belonging and community, learning opportunities, and mentorship, all related to birds and all provided for free and within a virtual capacity!

MYBN grew from the Michigan Young Birders Camp and replaced the former Michigan Audubon Young Birders Club. Young birders from around the state, many of whom have attended previous camp sessions, are taking part in creating and sustaining this network — and you're invited to be a part of it!

Our young birders are busy creating content to be shared in 2021 through social media, an e-newsletter, and other platforms for outreach and sharing (i.e., podcasts, videos, etc.). Virtual events, talks, workshops, and meet-ups are all possible activities for MYBN members!

MYBN leaders and young birders hope to see this network grow over the next year and hope you can help us attain our goal of reaching 30 additional adolescents from around the state of Michigan to become regular participants in the program.

MYBN is active on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. You can also join the Discord conversation or sign up for the e-newsletter through the website. Monthly virtual meetings will take place on the first Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m.

Visit michiganaudubon.org/learn/young-birders for more information about how to join and follow the network.

Additional MYBN Contributors



Evan Reister, a 16-year-old from Traverse City, is a serious bird and wildlife photographer. Often you will see him army crawling through a field trying to get a picture of a sparrow or wading through ponds to get photos of Wood Duck. He plans to turn his love for birds into a career in the future.



Karinne Tennenbaum is a junior at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor. She enjoys heading out on walks around her city and taking photographs of the local species. Seeking a community of other young birders at her high school, she founded the Ornithological Society of Pioneer and created the podcast "Taking Flight."

Monitoring Waterbirds from Manitou Island

BY ALISON VILAG

This story is an excerpt from Alison's full article describing her participation in a new waterbird count last fall. Last year, Joseph Youngman of Copper Country Audubon had an idea: to deploy simultaneous, standardized counts during October 2020 from Manitou Island (offshore the tip of the Keweenaw) and Au Sable Point (in Pictured Rocks west of Grand Marais) while WPBO's count was also in session. The goal was to develop a month's snapshot of flightlines and species composition in regard to waterbird migration at these sites, and this would be on behalf of Copper Country Audubon, which has provided over \$70,000 for Lake Superior migratory studies since 2010. Tim Baerwald and Alison were the executors swapping stations two weeks into the project.

Manitou Island lies about three miles offshore the Keweenaw. It's large — roughly a thousand acres — and covered in dense boreal forest. Mammal diversity is low, with snowshoe hares (abundant) the largest species we noted; we had no human visitors. There, we stayed in a 150-year-old lighthouse that had no heat, no running water, and no electricity. What it did have was mice — triple digits of them, actually. And, in the scramble to catch the boat, we'd forgotten to pack mousetraps...even so, we loved Manitou. There, life was reduced to simple survival rhythms: fetching water and keeping warm, and occasionally fishing for sustenance. Existence was uncomplicated but intentional.

Manitou's weather made typical WPBO conditions seem bucolic. Gale warnings were the standard forecast, and this stalled migration for much of our time there. Several days, I struggled to tally even just 100 migrating waterbirds, which I hadn't expected — October is the month when Superior's highest-volume flights occur. At night, I'd bed down (inside a tent, inside the lighthouse — it was the only way to prevent 3 a.m. mouse jaunts across my face). I'd imagine legions of ducks piling up somewhere to Manitou's northwest, waiting for the weather to break. Then, I'd be awakened by various parts of the lighthouse rattling in the wind.

When I woke on Oct. 13, I'd seen just 4,875 waterbirds the entire stint. This morning — the last before our departure — it was finally calm. The sky lightened, revealing the most intense flight I've ever counted. [My partner] Tripp brought me coffee about a half-hour in and stayed for most of the day; he spotted flocks, which I then deciphered as best I could. Most were *Aythya* (scaup and Redhead), and *Aythya* identification is challenging — differences are subtle, and the birds travel in multi-species masses aptly described by *Seawatching* as “prone to disintegrate into chaos.” Attempting to keep up was mind-numbing, and I never got around to drinking the coffee Tripp brought. The day's tally was 13,339 — and I know I was missing birds. Tim, counting at Au Sable, had a great flight this day as well, logging around 12,000, while Whitefish Point tallied around 7,000.

The morning after this incredible flight, we waited on the dock for Captain Travis. The wind was building again, and our scheduled pick-up time came, then went. A Short-eared Owl was coming off the lake, hitting first land after so many miles with just water beneath — always poignant to see. But I was uneasy. Tripp turned on the radio to hail Captain, and we caught the NOAA forecast, “...by Wednesday night, seas building to 11 feet...” It was Wednesday morning. So, when Captain Travis rounded the island a few minutes later, we were quite relieved. To experience Lake Superior waterbird migration on a remote island was to experience waterbird migration in a further dimension. Weather systems dictated our comings and goings in the same manner they did the birds I was there to count; the degree of separation between us lessened.

You can read Alison's full article, peruse count data, and more at michiganaudubon.org/learn/the-jack-pine-warbler.



The pursuit of birds has taken Alison to exotic places and gigs closer afield her Great Lakes upbringing including Michigan Audubon's Kirtland's Warbler tours. She has a strong affinity for Michigan's Upper Peninsula and, in particular, Whitefish Point.





Dated Material

Connecting birds and people for the benefit of both through conservation, education, and research efforts in the state of Michigan.



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.

Jeremy Afton	Angela & Anthony	Therese Jastrow	Stephen Mock	Elisabeth Rusch
Jocelyn Anderson	Dombrowski	Peggy Jensen	Thomas Munger	Louise Sagaert
Bonnie Anthony	John Elzinga	William Johnson	Dennis & Judy	Helen Salan
John	Scott Evans	Michelle Jones	Murphy	Judy Sarosik
Archambeault	Joe & Ann	Charles Kahle	Barbara Murrell	Joanne Sasinowski
John Archiable	Fitzpatrick	Paula Klenk	Rosa Musket	Thomas Sayers
Diane Ashera	Mary Ann Fleming	Melanie Klenk	Irvin Nichols	Nancy Schanz
Christine & Kevin	Katrina Folsom	Arienne Klinester	Melissa Nichols	Jeffrey Schmidt &
Atkinson	Geri Freedman	Gayle Kusch	Linda Nicles	Sandra Wong
Jean Balch	Laurel Freshour	Jackie Ladwein	Leslie Nilsson	Luanne Schwank
Jason Ballew	Suzanne Frisk	Dawn	Kimberly Nowack	Mark D. Sevald
Collette Bauman	Katherine Gabler	Langdon-Paff	Brian O'Keefe	Tim Sheridan
Stanley Beattie	Doloris Gajewski	Kathy Lareau	Paul O'Keefe & Liz	Jim Shields
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Michele Berry	Michael Golliver	Michael Layne &	Janet Olson	Joanne Smith
Mary Bidus	Alice Goodsell	Laura Zigmant	Brad Oltersdorf	Janice Smith
Gerald & Michelle	Elaine Green	Melinda LePere &	Michael Onyon	Dennis Southey
Borowicz	Susanne Greenlee	Phil Schloop	Raymond Ortiz	Susan Spaete
Ronca Boyd	Richard Greenwald	Mary Jo Letner	Linda Parker	Sharon Steiger
H.F. Brainard	Gretchen Grefe	Michael Lombardo	Carla Pawlik	Dana Stetson
Carol E Brand	Virginia Gustafson	Herman Luitink	Shirley & Albert	Mark Suchyta
Paul Brayman &	Kurt & Elizabeth	Ian MacInnes	Perkins	John Szilagyi
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Family	Chris Hubbarth	Monica Meyer &	Norman Riester	Ken Wolf
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Bill Deephouse	Darrell Jackson	Nancy Misner	Richard Rinck	Gary Ziegler
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