

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

SPRING: Wind Energy and Birds in Michigan: The Montcalm Wind Project ■ Avian Botulism: One Volunteer's Perspective ■ Protecting Whitefish Point ■ Community Spotlight: Rick & Penny Briscoe ■ #BlackBirdersWeek ■ SR20 Update ■ Registration Open for 2021 Michigan Young Birders Camp & Kirtland's Warbler Tours



# Jack Pine Warbler

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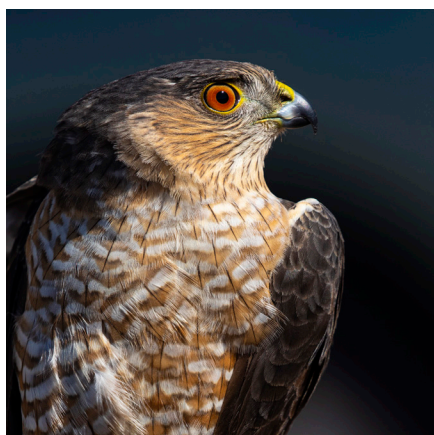
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## Cover Photo ■ Sharp-shinned Hawk

Photographer: Scott Castelein

Northern Michigan photographer and videographer Scott Castelein discovered birding in 2019 while visiting family in South Dakota and first witnessed the abundance of wildlife in even the most seemingly desolate places. Since then, he has pursued birds throughout Michigan, South Dakota, and Texas. He has also recently produced a video about Whitefish Point's waterbird migration for Michigan Audubon (we can't wait to share it with you!). It seems for every interesting and new bird he finds, there is usually a greater story or even a new friend made along the way. He continues to find new ways to bring his passions of photography and birding together to dive deeper into the world

of conservation photography. Follow him on Instagram @scottcastelein, Facebook at Scott Castelein Photography, or his website scottcastelein.com.

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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](http://MichiganAudubon.org) for more updates, and follow Michigan Audubon on social media.



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# From the Executive Director

Dear Michigan Audubon friends,

**Adaptability:** Many of us have developed much more of this skill in the past year than we thought ourselves capable of. The same is likely true for our native birds and pollinators as they face continued threats to their survival throughout North America. There is certainly no shortage of work for the birds we love and rely upon. The term adaptability aptly describes Michigan Audubon's efforts as our team continues to work, whether remotely or in the field, to maintain, deepen, and expand the work of our mission while adapting to the needs of birds in today's world.

Despite tremendous adaptation and flexibility over this past year and setbacks to environmental policies, I've noticed new spaces, fresh opportunities, and changes signaling collective progress in birding and conservation spheres alike. As a larger, more resilient, proactive community grows, we are able to be more productive in protecting birds with a greater reach, a bigger impact, and a reinforced voice for ecological values in our state's legislation that affects birds. A brief update on the Sandhill Crane proposed hunting season and game species designation can be found on page 12 of this issue.

Currently, our devoted spring field staff is monitoring avian migration at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory in Paradise, Mich. We are so grateful for their continued adaptability as they keep our banding and count programs strong and steady. As a reminder, you can check out the field staff's sightings (with live updates) at [wpbo.org](http://wpbo.org). If you have a soft spot for WPBO, please consider donating to keep this program functioning year-round! Sarah Pooler, our development manager, can be reached at [spooler@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:spooler@michiganaudubon.org) and would be happy to talk with you about ways you can donate to WPBO or a program, project, or bird sanctuary of your choice.

In this issue, we feature the second of four articles focused on highlighting wind energy developments in our state. This article shares details of a 50,000-acre wind farm development proposal in Montcalm County, a project we have been both watching and working with as it progresses in the northern Lower Peninsula. Michigan Audubon's intersection and input with wind energy developers is focused on determining how we can best support the implementation of better siting practices that take into account the needs of migratory and resident birds, including habitat fragmentation. Stay tuned for the next piece, an update on the Garden Wind Farm, the Upper Peninsula's first operational wind farm, in Delta County.

Speaking of the U.P., should you happen to visit this summer, we regret to share the update that our Owl's Roost Gift Shop will remain closed at Whitefish Point due to COVID-19 limitations. Please read further about visiting WPBO on pages 6–7. We appreciate your help spreading the word on how and why we are calling on visitors at Whitefish Point to be better stewards of this special place! Whitefish Point remains open during daylight hours for birding, and we look forward to hosting our annual Birdathon fundraiser for WPBO this May.

Our Cerulean Warbler Weekend, based at our Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary in Hastings, is a small, lovely birding event that offers an opportunity to see this little bird of the big woods. As we adapt to this year's needs, we are happy to announce that a limited number of Cerulean Warbler guided tours will be offered instead. In other event news, we are working again with Hartwick Pines State Park to offer

Kirtland's Warbler tours to the public. For more on those tours, see page 9. Visit our calendar at [michiganaudubon.org/calendar](http://michiganaudubon.org/calendar) for updated registration information on all events.

Our other feature piece relates to the ongoing avian botulism pandemic in Michigan. Dr. Mary Ellen Newport, an evolutionary biologist and instructor of ecology at Interlochen Arts Academy, volunteers for the National Park Service monitoring waterfowl on Lake Michigan's shoreline. Dr. Newport shares her experience monitoring on pages 4–5.

The community spotlight in this issue is on Penny and Rick Briscoe, two individuals who are incredibly committed to the conservation of Purple Martins. These folks have given so much personal investment toward educating others to be compassionate, informed, and successful "landlords" for Purple Martins. Our community spotlight is a place where we highlight our supporters, network, and volunteers at work for birds...and thank them for all they do! Thank you, Penny and Rick, for making such an impact for Purple Martins in Michigan.

If you're looking for ways to volunteer locally and you aren't already a member of your local Michigan Audubon chapter, consider checking with a local chapter for volunteer opportunities. Local natural areas or parks departments likely need assistance, too, with efforts such as invasive plant species removal — a service that really pays off for biodiversity! Lastly, a gentle reminder that Michigan Audubon offers free, downloadable PDFs that can help you design a native landscape for birds and pollinators in your backyard at [michiganaudubon.org](http://michiganaudubon.org). However you spend your spring this year, we hope you stay connected to us and to the restorative, inspiring world of birds outside our doors in the Great Lakes State.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for being a part of our community. Membership to Michigan Audubon is one way that people give back to and support birds and the habitats they depend on in our state. Thank you for continuing to be a supporter and a friend to our work and to Michigan birds. We couldn't do it without you!

Warm regards,



Heather Good  
Executive Director



# Wind Energy and Birds in Michigan: The Montcalm Wind Project

BY HEATHER GOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Photo by Bildagentur Zoonar

**T**he Montcalm Wind project is a 50,000-acre wind farm development owned by Apex Clean Energy, an independent renewable energy company founded in 2009 and based in Charlottesville, Va. With dozens of renewable energy projects in progress around the U.S., Apex is one of the fastest-growing companies in the renewable energy industry. The company's project in Montcalm County is one that they will sell to a major energy company — similar to another of Apex Clean Energy's projects in Michigan, the Isabella Wind project in Isabella County, which was sold to DTE and is now operational.

## Project Planning Updates

As of December 2020, Apex Clean Energy reportedly had signed more than 100 leases with residents of 10 townships within Montcalm County, putting them nearly halfway to their goal. These 50,000 acres for the project will house approximately 75 wind turbines.

The Montcalm Wind project is currently in tier 3, a stage that assesses the proposed project's suitability for its geographic area — including considerations to wildlife habitat and migratory pathways. Tier 3 is also the stage where environmental review and other considerations related to wildlife (such as habitat fragmentation concerns) and other environmental reviews are completed as part of best practices. The company has been open and willing to engage with wildlife biologists and organizations like Michigan Audubon and American Bird Conservancy — something we as a conservation organization consider real progress in the world of protecting birds.

Because the permitting process is lengthy at the township, state, and federal levels for developers, the Montcalm Wind project isn't expected to come to fruition for another few years.

## Community Meeting

In late February of 2021, Apex Clean Energy held a public meeting on the Montcalm Wind project, sharing its hopes of generating community engagement and support for the project and presenting the energy development in a positive light for county residents and landowners. Citing the benefits of wind over petroleum-based energy, Apex also touted rural community development advantages and their commitment to “not be disruptive to the community.” The company also shared with meeting-goers their interest in integrating the development's turbines with existing farm practices to minimize the “not in my backyard” concerns from residents. Many residents, however, remain concerned and skeptical about the long-term effects associated with renewable developments of this size.

## Community Concerns

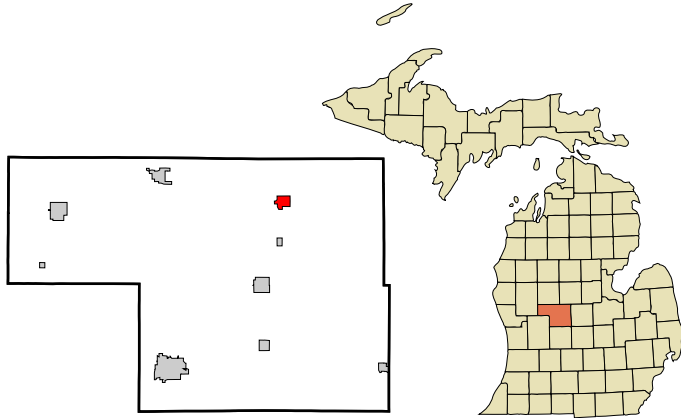
Beginning in 2017, counties in the Thumb — another region of the Lower Peninsula prime for wind energy generation — began rejecting proposals for new wind developments. To many, it's no surprise why: Over the last 15 years, wind turbines have been constructed in saturated pockets across the Thumb region. In a qualitative study conducted on these perceptions of Michigan residents, researchers aimed to “examine residents' perceptions of personal costs and benefits in terms of social, environmental, or economic features that influence support of or resistance to wind farm development in four rural communities in eastern Michigan” (2010). Their findings also unveiled the following common issues reported from residents living near wind turbines in the Thumb region:

- Increased price of electricity with wind energy technology in place.
- Noise- and/or vibration-related disturbances from turbine rotation.
- Uncertainty surrounding the long-term effects of wind turbines on public health and the environment.

## Why Montcalm County?

Renewable energy development companies assess potential sites for a multitude of characteristics that make the site, to their knowledge, most conducive to producing energy. According to Apex Clean Energy, Montcalm County is a qualifying candidate for a project this size because it offers:

- Sufficient wind resource.
- Open farm ground.
- Access to transmission.
- Sandy soil and pivot irrigation, both of which are suitable for turbines.



### Considerations for Birds and Native Wildlife

A recent National Wind Coordinating Committee analysis of peer-reviewed research found evidence of bird and bat deaths from collisions with wind turbines due to changes in air pressure caused by the spinning turbines, and habitat disruption. From existing research, we understand that many adverse wildlife impacts can be mitigated through better siting of wind turbines and that the technology of wind energy is in a state of constant flux and innovation.

Michigan Audubon is committed to offering consultation with developers to proactively protect areas of key habitat for migratory and resident birds. We are also available to consult and advise on ecological and/or ornithological concerns or considerations with developers.

Apex has employed third-party biologists to survey avian use at various sites within the project's geographic scope. Environmental assessments underway in Montcalm County for this project include the following:

- Wetland delineations.
- Surveying for avian use (i.e., eagles, raptor nests, etc.).
- Monitoring specific bat species.

Wildlife biologists have found that bats are most active when wind speeds are low. Using this information, the Bats and Wind Energy Cooperative concluded that “keeping wind turbines motionless during times of low

wind speeds could reduce bat deaths by more than half without significantly affecting power production” (NWCC 2010).

### Ways To Learn More

It's helpful to learn about local zoning laws in your county. If you're a property owner, you can talk with your local township board officials to learn what, if any, ordinances exist for solar and wind projects.

If you're interested in this specific project and want to attend Apex Clean Energy's future public meetings, you can sign up for updates on their website, [apexcleanenergy.com](http://apexcleanenergy.com).

Visit [montcalmwind.com](http://montcalmwind.com) or [facebook.com/MontcalmWind](https://facebook.com/MontcalmWind) for more details about the Montcalm Wind project.



Wind turbines over a soybean field. Photo by Carol M. Highsmith

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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.

# Avian Botulism: One Volunteer's Perspective

BY MARY ELLEN NEWPORT, PH.D.

Every week from June through November, I walk a length of beach on Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SLBE) that starts at the mouth of the Platte River and runs southwesterly along the shoreline as part of an avian monitoring program.

My transect can be amusingly challenging to get to. The southern access is via a seasonal road that is occasionally passable in my Prius but often has deep potholes. The northern route requires that I cross the Platte River at the mouth. I wade, ford, kayak, and canoe across the river depending upon how deep, wild, and cold it is and who else may be along for the walk. Some years, the mouth has been up to my armpits, but sediment shifts have made it knee-deep in some places the last two years. In October and November, it is safer to kayak across, regardless of depth.

What inspires me to put forth such efforts? I'm looking for birds that are affected by avian botulism. This paralytic disease, caused by the botulinum toxin, commonly results in death for birds (especially waterfowl) and is of growing concern for avian populations in Michigan. There are several different types of botulism. Types C and E can kill waterfowl and fish, and the latter is more prevalent in the Great Lakes.

Avian botulism showed up on our shores due to a long sequence of events that started with the introduction of quagga and zebra mussels. Both invasive mussel species have been introduced into the Great Lakes in ballast water in shipping vessels. Zebra mussels were displaced by quagga mussels, which thrive on the muddy lakebed, in the 2000s, and it is said that you could walk across Lake Michigan without leaving a carpet of quagga mussels.

Quagga mussels are incredibly effective at cleaning the water of plankton (their food). They filter the water to such an extent that they undermine the entire food chain for native and introduced fish species, such as Chinook salmon. Clearing the water column has resulted in the brilliant blue look of Lake Michigan, a color considered beautiful to the casual observer but also an unfortunate sign for the ecosystem. In 2017, Lake Michigan was declared brighter and clearer than Lake Superior. The downside of crystal-clear Lake Michigan is that more sunlight gets through the water column, and native aquatic vegetation overgrows in the lake bed.

Aquatic plants such as *Chara* spp. and *Cladophora* spp. naturally contain the microorganisms that produce botulinum toxin. As the overgrown plants grow and then die in the fall, they wash up on our shores just as fall migrants are moving along Lake Michigan coastlines. Migrating birds feed off the little arthropods in the vegetation, which are themselves accumulating the toxin in their bodies.

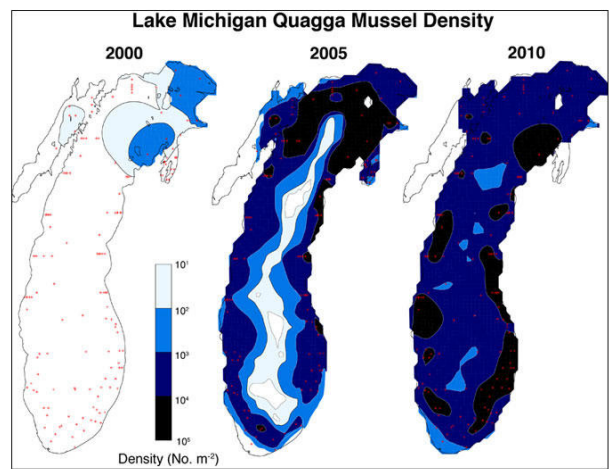
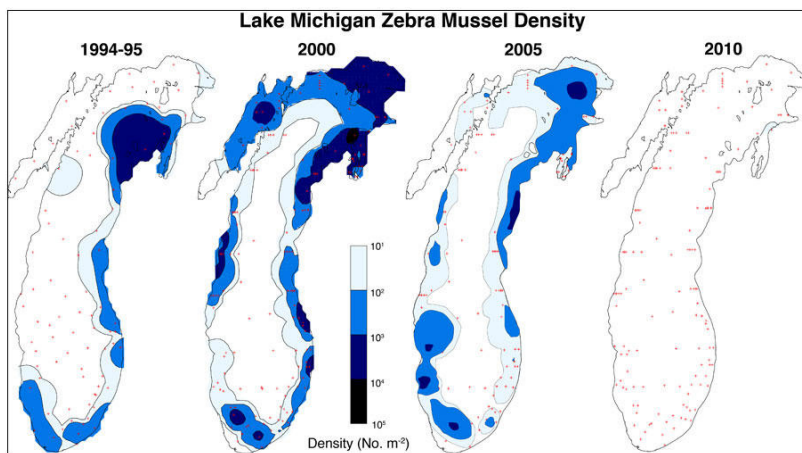
Sick birds that are poisoned by botulism exhibit characteristics that can be disheartening to witness. They can't fly, and when they swim, their necks droop and their wings ineffectively paddle through the water. These birds either drown and wash up or simply die onshore. It is important to bury the birds so they do not infect other scavengers such as gulls, eagles, or coyotes and to prevent flies from laying eggs on the carcasses. Contaminated maggots can also infect our migrating birds.

When I find a dead bird, I record the location using GPS coordinates and bury it. If a bird is "fresh-dead," I carefully bag it up and deliver it to a freezer at a nearby Sleeping Bear Dunes campground. Recently deceased birds can be necropsied and tested for botulism and other avian maladies. Birds we collect are sent to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisc. We are not permitted to collect moribund birds — those showing signs of sickness but yet to be deceased. A call to a supervisor is made when I observe one, so they can look for the bird the next day.

After collecting data for over a decade, here's what we know: not much. One variable of interest is the number of round gobies found on the beach. The round goby is an invasive fish species that has also been introduced from ballast water. The good news is that round gobies eat quagga mussels (they are the main predator). The bad news is that fish-eating birds, like loons and mergansers, will eat contaminated gobies.

We also see a correlation between bird mortality and temperature. High summer temperatures allow *Chara* spp. and *Cladophora* spp. to grow abundantly





Charts by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

underwater, creating more habitat for botulinum-toxin-producing bacteria.

Many volunteers that monitor for avian botulism have a strong commitment to educating the public about this work. Because we carry a shovel and a backpack, vacationers often wonder if we are digging for clams! I enjoy talking to curious folks about the project — and we have postcard-sized information sheets for those who want to dig deeper — but much of the bird mortality takes place after the summer crowds have disappeared from the lakeshore.



Student volunteers help with avian botulism monitoring at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

In non-pandemic times, I'm able to bring my ecology students from the Interlochen Arts Academy along on the walk. We stop at the SLBE visitor center in Empire, which has an excellent topographic map of the National Lakeshore (and SLBE swag, of course!). We pick up a hot chocolate at Grocer's Daughter Chocolate and head for the beach. Teachers ask the students to perform community service as part of our program, and I think it is important to model commitment and consistency to our students.

I have chosen not to include pictures of dead birds with this article because I find them quite disturbing. Fortunately for me, I don't experience high mortality rates while monitoring my transect, even in the warmest years; I believe wave action pushes dead and drowning birds farther north for my "Bot Squad" colleagues to find.

Most weeks, I find only peace, quiet, and joy on a beautiful beach and have been able to add birds to my life list while volunteering: Red-throated Loon and White-winged Scoter among them. I get to document many living birds — rafts of mergansers, Caspian Terns mixed in with Ring-billed Gulls, and, in most years, Piping Plovers — while I traverse my transect.

This volunteer project can be difficult and some people may find monitoring for dead or sick birds to be too morbid for them, but I encourage everyone to put their passion for birds to work and find a conservation or research effort that they can take part in.

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Learn more about avian botulism and how you can help at:

**Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council**  
watershedcouncil.org

**Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore**  
nps.gov/slbe

**Michigan Sea Grant**  
michiganseagrant.org

**Michigan DNR**  
[michigan.gov/documents/dnr/Botulism\\_Manual\\_2012\\_390795\\_7.pdf](http://michigan.gov/documents/dnr/Botulism_Manual_2012_390795_7.pdf)

To report a sick or dead bird, you can fill out the Eyes in the Field observation form by the Michigan DNR or call the Wildlife Disease Laboratory at 517-336-5030.



Mary Ellen Newport, Ph.D., is an ecology instructor and the director of R.B. Annis Department of Math & Science at Interlochen Arts Academy. Dr. Newport is an evolutionary biologist with an interest in conservation biology. Her doctoral and postdoctoral work was in the areas of population and quantitative genetics. She is a volunteer for Michigan's birds, working with the "Bot Squad" of the National Park Service to monitor botulism toxicity in migrating waterfowl. As an experienced educator and scientist on the Squad, Dr. Newport's valuable volunteer work also lends her the opportunity to educate the public about the long chain of events triggered by the introduction of invasive species and what we can do to help.



**R**esponsible recreation benefits us all. What can we do, as a community, to reduce our impact while continuing to enjoy and protect the flora and fauna of Whitefish Point? Read this short piece to learn how you can help us minimize our impact on the natural wonders that make this region so beautiful.

In addition to a national historic site, Whitefish Point is an invaluable stopover site for birds migrating to and from Canada. Each year, thousands of raptors, passerines, and waterbirds funnel past this point of land that juts into Lake Superior, giving this region its reputation for spectacular birding (and research potential) thanks to high concentrations of birds.

Whitefish Point Bird Observatory was founded in 1979 to document and monitor migratory patterns of birds. Data collected from avian monitoring efforts over the past few decades led to the site's recognition as a Globally Important Bird Area. The site is world-renowned for the number of owl species that migrate past the Point, as well as its long-standing owl banding program.

Whitefish Point's natural features include gravel beaches, sandy beach dunes, and stunted jack pine-dominated forest.

With increasing numbers of visitors (in beautiful Michigan summers especially), the collective landowners of Whitefish Point are asking for your help to encourage respectful visitation practices at this special place.

## Visiting Guidelines

- **Plan your visit and be prepared.** Look into weather, be prepared for mosquitoes (as a rule), and learn about restrictions, rules, and regulations before visiting.
- **Visit during daylight hours only;** parking is permitted in designated spots from dawn to dusk, year-round.
- **Stick to designated trails.** Please respect seasonal restrictions in sensitive habitats and avoid climbing on dunes.
- **Respect wildlife.** Outdoor recreation activities, even birding, can pose threats and/or cause harm to wildlife and habitat. Observe wildlife from a distance, using binoculars whenever possible, and do not follow, approach, or feed wildlife under any circumstances. Michigan Audubon promotes ethical birding standards as outlined by the American Birding Association.
- **Keep dogs on a leash.** Pets are allowed on leashes at Whitefish Point (except for the federally endangered Piping Plover nesting area of the beach).
- **Clear up your trash and leave no trace.**
- **Use appropriate restroom facilities.** Restroom facilities at Whitefish Point are open from May through October and are located in the Shipwreck Museum Gift Shop building.
- **Share responsible birding and outdoor recreation tips with friends and family.**



## Permitted Activities

Birding, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife observation, photography, mushroom hunting, and fruit picking are examples of common, permitted activities at Whitefish Point.

Over the years, small footpaths have been carved into the landscape. While foot paths may allow birders to get a closer look, the dune habitat of Whitefish Point is very fragile and easily damaged. Visitors are asked to remain on current, marked trails and to avoid climbing the dunes and doing further damage to the habitat.

## Piping Plovers

A large portion of the beach at Whitefish Point is designated as critical habitat for the Piping Plover, an endangered shorebird species. A pair of Piping Plovers returned to Whitefish Point in 2009 and have been nesting there each summer for 12 years. While this is a great accomplishment for a vulnerable species, off-leash dogs remain a significant concern. A Piping Plover monitor team oversees this site throughout the breeding season (summer months). These birds remain incredibly sensitive and vulnerable to visitors who may inadvertently disrupt those that are nesting. Please obey all signs and respect any beach closures to protect nesting Piping Plovers.

## Prohibited Activities

- Camping
- Fires
- Flying drones
- Operating off-road vehicles, including snowmobiles
- Hunting, recreational trapping, or fur harvesting
- Commercial rock collecting, such as paid Yooperlites tours



Piping Plover chick at WPBO. Photo by Laura Wong

## “No Drone Zone” Policy

For safety and security reasons, the use of drones anywhere on Whitefish Point property is prohibited. We invite you to take photos and videos, but please leave your drone at home or in your vehicle! Thank you for respecting the landowners’ “No Drone Zone” policy!

## Rock Collecting\*

Michigan has a long history of rock collecting along its shorelines. The Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society wishes to continue supporting opportunities for visitors to collect stones in accordance with state regulations (limit of 25 lbs per person per year) for personal use along beach areas owned by the Historical Society (above the ordinary high-water mark) during daylight hours only. Rock and driftwood collecting are not allowed on the Seney National Wildlife Refuge property of Whitefish Point.

## \*Yooperlites

The landowners of the Point continue to receive reports of trespassing as commercial rock collecting activities related to the Yooperlites trend in the U.P. As a reminder for visitors and tourists, Yooperlites tours are not permitted at Whitefish Point, and violators are subject to fines. WPBO is open during daylight times only, and trespassing is prohibited at night. Please notify SNWR Refuge Manager Sara Siekierski of any violations by phone at 906-586-9851 ext. 11 or via email at [sara\\_siekierski@fws.gov](mailto:sara_siekierski@fws.gov).



Rocks on Lake Superior's shore. Photo by Julie Falk

Jack Pine Warbler



# Please Don't Love the Point to Death: An Earnest Plea for Visitors To Tread Lightly on Whitefish Point

BY BRIDGET NODURFT, WHITEFISH POINT PRESERVATION SOCIETY

**M**y dear friend, Lynne, has deep, multigenerational ties to Whitefish Point. Over the decades, she has watched the Point change from a truly remote and wild place to a destination thronged by tourists in the peak season. She is fearful that “the Point will be loved to death.”

I, too, watched the Point change as its uniqueness was coveted for commercial purposes and passionately defended by bird enthusiasts and environmentalists. That the Piping Plover reign over the tip of the Point that was once coveted for a campground seems almost miraculous. I will never forget the thrill of hearing the piping of plovers carry over the water when they returned to the Point.

Probably since the first Native Americans camped on the shores of Whitefish Point, it has captured the heart of anyone who visits. It offers spectacular sights from kettling hawks to a gale-frenzied Lake Superior crashing against cobblestone beaches. I understand why rockhounds, boat nerds, maritime history buffs, stargazers, researchers, generic tourists, and birders flock to Whitefish Point (pun intended).

Many who visit the Point likely do not fully realize that its fragile ecosystem is a big part of what draws them there. So, if you come to Whitefish Point, park your vehicle in an assigned space, stay on the trails, stay off the dunes, let the rocks lie and the plants grow, leave your drone in the car, know that the mosquitoes and the flies belong there, take your trash with you, enjoy the hard work that went into preserving the historic light station, and cherish the birds. Be gentle. And please, don't love the Point to death.

*Bridget Nodurft is a long-time advocate and volunteer for Whitefish Point and a Whitefish Point Preservation Society member.*



Lynne's mother at Whitefish Point in 1939.

## Ways To Support Whitefish Point Bird Observatory



- **Become a member of Michigan Audubon.** Membership is a great way to stay tuned in to all the happenings at WPBO. You will receive our quarterly member magazine, the *Jack Pine Warbler*, which highlights Whitefish Point stories. You'll enjoy featured updates from our waterbird and raptor counts and owl banding program, written by our team.
- **Visit the WPBO store online.** While the Owl's Roost Gift Shop will be closed through the 2021 field season at Whitefish Point, we invite you to check out our updated inventory at [michiganaudubon.org/about-us/bookstore](https://michiganaudubon.org/about-us/bookstore), where you'll find virtually everything offered in-person at our gift shop — shipped to you!
- **Symbolically adopt an owl.** Visit [wpbo.org](https://wpbo.org) to learn more about how you can symbolically adopt an owl and make a gift to support WPBO at the same time! This makes a great gift for bird lovers of all ages!
- **Sponsor the research.** Each day of avian monitoring efforts at Whitefish Point comes with a price tag, and throughout three seasons of monitoring, you can boost our research substantially with a designated gift.
- **Share your experience.** Our work to fund and support this site and program is fueled by the feedback, photos, and stories we hear from Whitefish Point visitors.
- **Give to our endowment.** You can help ensure WPBO's lasting impact by investing in its long-term future. Consider becoming a part of our Legacy Circle by including WPBO in your estate plan. You can also make a designated gift to WPBO in honor or memory of someone. Contact Development Manager Sarah Pooler to learn more about how you can help us keep this avian monitoring site and treasured, endangered habitat protected and supported into the future.

# Kirtland's Warbler Tours

MAY 28 – JUNE 27 | HARTWICK PINES STATE PARK

**M**ichigan Audubon is happy to announce that guided Kirtland's Warbler tours will again be offered at Hartwick Pines State Park May 28 through June 27.

**Registration:** Pre-registration is required, and tours are expected to fill up quickly. Tour sizes are limited to 20 people. We invite you to stay tuned to michiganaudubon.org and our monthly e-newsletter for the tour registration link when it becomes available.

**Dates and Times of Tours:** Tours will occur from May 28 through June 27 on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. On Fridays, tours are at 7 a.m., and two tour times are offered on Saturdays and Sundays at 7 a.m. and 11 a.m.

**Tour Location:** Tour attendees meet in the parking lot of the Hartwick Pines Visitor Center. Hartwick Pines is located in Grayling, Mich., and is one of the largest state parks in the Lower Peninsula. The park features 49 acres of old-growth pine forest and 21 miles of trails.

**Cost:** There is no cost for the KIWA guided tours this year. A Recreation Passport is required to enter Hartwick Pines State Park, which can be obtained at michigan.gov/recreationpassport.

**Health Precautions:** Tour participants are required to wear a mask and practice social distancing while on the tour, whether indoors or outdoors. If you have a fever, respiratory symptoms, or are not feeling well, please stay home.

**Questions:** Email Craig Kasmer (Hartwick Pines State Park) at [kasmerc@michigan.gov](mailto:kasmerc@michigan.gov) or Michigan Audubon at [events@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:events@michiganaudubon.org) for more information.

## Guidelines for Looking for the Kirtland's Warbler on Your Own

Are there ways you can view a Kirtland's Warbler on your own? Of course! In fact, many birders report sightings of this bird to the eBird app, which gives other birders direct locations to check out for viewing potential this summer.

## Birding for KIWAs

This recently delisted, vulnerable songbird and its endangered, native habitat need to be treated with care and respect. Kirtland's Warblers nest in jack pine forest stands on the sandy grounds of northern Michigan. They prefer trees that are 5–20 feet tall and at least six years old. The birds use lower branches for nest cover, creating very specific age and height requirements for the trees. Because of these requirements, large swaths of jack pine need to be maintained to fall within the Kirtland's Warbler's specifications.

## Look Out Below!

Kirtland's Warbler nests are extremely vulnerable to being trampled upon accidentally, so look where you step! Anyone visiting the Kirtland's Warbler's breeding grounds should remain on pre-existing trails or two-track roads while birding. Stepping into the jack pine stands should be avoided, as it disturbs nests and nesting sites.

Visitors hoping to see or photograph Kirtland's Warblers should follow the American Birding Association's Code of Birding Ethics in their birding etiquette, and stay on those trails! Give the bird ample space when viewing and be a conscientious observer.

## Little Bird, Big History

The Kirtland's Warbler is an extraordinary bird, representing an important and powerful conservation success story right in Michigan. Once listed as a federally endangered species, this bird has rebounded in large thanks to many people, groups, and successful conservation management strategies.



Kirtland's Warbler.  
Photo by Cathy Forrest

## #BlackBirdersWeek: May 30 to June 5

The inaugural Black Birders Week took place in 2020 and quickly became a viral movement. This now-annual event addresses the challenges Black birdwatchers face, such as underrepresentation and overt racism, while shedding light on how justice and equity play a part in the conservation field and recreational birding.

Each day of Black Birders Week features a different theme and Twitter hashtag that promote diversity in birdwatching while celebrating Black culture. The founders envisioned that this event could be a springboard to shape a more diverse, inclusive future for birding, conservation, and the natural sciences.

You can learn more details about the week's events at [blackafinstem.com](http://blackafinstem.com).

"The birds and the outdoors are for all of us to enjoy. Don't let anybody make you think otherwise, and don't let anyone deny you the tremendous joy, wonder, and sense of well-being that being outdoors and looking at and listening to birds can bring." ~ Christian Cooper



# Community Spotlight: Rick & Penny Briscoe

**P**enny and Rick Briscoe have been sharing their love for Purple Martins through their constant care at their colonies and converting their properties into bird-friendly habitats for decades — all while volunteering for Michigan Audubon and spreading their enthusiasm for aerial insectivores.

**Tell us about yourselves — where are you from and how did you get into bird conservation?**

**Penny:** I am a lifetime Michigan resident — I grew up in a relatively country-like setting just outside of Rochester and always had birds and other Michigan wildlife around. Although I was not exposed to "birding," per se, I learned to identify and appreciate the more typical species.

My parents took us on many road trips all over the U.S., and they always involved outdoor experiences, and we always camped. I benefited from my mother's curiosity for the natural places we visited and my father's willingness to drive the family station wagon all over the country, loaded with camping gear and his wife and six children. After I married Rick, we raised two boys and carried on the tradition of camping with them.

Every year I learn more about birds and the environment, and I became a Master Naturalist through Michigan State Extension Services a few years back.

**You are active Purple Martin landlords and have thriving colonies at two properties. How long have you been doing this, and what initially inspired you to put up housing for Purple Martins?**

**Penny:** Our first colony began with a Christmas present to me of a Purple Martin house in 1985. I remembered seeing the birds as a child when visiting my uncle's cottage on Saginaw Bay. We were blessed with Purple Martins that very first year and have had them ever since. The colony is now much expanded, and we have three poles with gourd racks that provide gourds for 28 pairs. We are usually close to full.

My intense interest in helping this bird through colony management really began in 2010 when cold, rainy weather struck one July while we were traveling. Most of our colony's chicks perished due to a lack of bugs being available. At the time, I did not know about managing the colony and discovered the dead nestlings only after taking the housing down to clean it that September. I was shocked by what I found and vowed never to let this happen at my colony again.

**Rick:** This incident inspired her to become passionate about significantly impacting the future of these amazing birds. Since that time, we — Penny mainly — have truly managed our colony to maximize the positive outcome of the nesting activity each year. In 2015, Penny found a perfect 5-acre property along the St. Joseph River where she could start another colony. It took four years to attract birds, but we now have a small but well-established colony on that property.

**Penny:** We purchased the property to maintain a bird/nature habitat. Many people have been surprised that we would buy property for birding and naturalization. Still, I remind them that it is not any different than purchasing property for hunting, which many people are known to do.

**You've also built and installed Chimney Swift nesting towers. Rick, as chief builder, why did you become interested in doing this and have you seen any Chimney Swifts yet?**

**Rick:** Three years ago, as Michigan Audubon began focusing on Purple Martins and Chimney Swifts, I got inspired to build a Chimney Swift tower as a birthday



Penny and Rick Briscoe have assisted Michigan Audubon with the installation of numerous Purple Martin houses since 2017, helping the Mi Bird-Friendly Communities initiative grow.

gift to Penny. The first one was quite a challenge, and I think I spent nearly 200 hours building and installing it on the property. I have since become much more adept at this project and was honored to assist a school group and Michigan Audubon with their builds. Last fall, we saw a small group of Chimney Swifts in our tower area, but I am not sure that any have used it yet. I will climb to the top this spring to see if there is any evidence of nesting.

### **How are you involved in the community regarding environmental topics or bird-related activities?**

**Penny:** I have given numerous presentations over the last ten years about Purple Martins, whose numbers have been declining significantly since at least the 1960s, and hosted multiple field trips to our Barton Lake colony. I am listed on the Purple Martin Conservation Association website as a mentor for this species and am quite busy in the summer fielding questions over the telephone and through email, and I have made many home visits to help people position their housing. I continue to seek out ways to expand the knowledge of others so they will appreciate this species, especially by involving children, including my grandchildren, in the management of the colonies. We have also had Rich and Brenda Keith, from the Kalamazoo Nature Center, band the roughly 100 Purple Martin chicks at our Barton Lake colony, for the last three years.

One of my main goals is to encourage people to put up more housing and teach them how to manage it. As a result of the increased publicity for these birds because of programs like Michigan Audubon's Mi Bird-Friendly Communities initiative, I have been pleased that more housing is being erected and I get reports of more Michigan colonies being established.

### **What do you see as the most important issue of bird conservation?**

**Rick:** I think the most pressing need for bird conservation is habitat conservation. Humans have encroached on so much of the natural habitat of birds that they are struggling to adjust.

**Penny:** Habitat preservation is absolutely imperative. There are so many environmental problems out there, but with no habitat, there can be no nesting. Because of this I advocate being supportive of legislation and efforts to preserve land in its natural state and that people learn all they can about improving the habitat in their own backyards and change their thinking about having everything "tidy."

### **What advice do you have for someone who wants to be involved with bird conservation but doesn't know where to start?**

**Penny:** Grass does nothing for the birds, so if possible develop areas in your yard that can be planted with native trees, bushes, and flowers. If people own larger properties, they can slowly convert their areas to natives, little by little, and find places to allow for brush piles! Again, don't be too tidy. I personally have learned to put up with less "perfection" in the garden because I have embraced the unparalleled beauty of birds of many species coming to our property. Take a Master Naturalist class if you are a lay person like me and need a kick start. And remember



Purple Martins at the Briscoes' colony on Barton Lake.

that for the most part, native insects are good. If there are no insects, there will be no birds around!

**Rick:** An approach for individuals could be to provide supplemental food, water, and housing. It is important to do some research or seek expert advice on how to best do this. It is also critical to remember that you are doing this for the birds, not for you. By that I mean that feeding and housing should be placed where it is best for the birds, not for human convenience. Start simple and enjoy success, but watch out as you can easily become hooked and will find yourself devoting many enjoyable hours on behalf of the birds.

**Thank you, Penny and Rick, for all that you do for the birds!**

## **In Memory of Eileen Scamehorn**

AUGUST 23, 1936 – FEBRUARY 8, 2021



Eileen Scamehorn passed away on Feb. 8, 2021, at her home in Kalamazoo, Mich. Eileen worked for a number of years as an elementary school teacher in Michigan and California and later worked for Michigan Audubon as an office manager, retiring from the organization in 2002. Eileen was a dedicated birdwatcher and thoroughly enjoyed being out in nature, storytelling, and reading. Eileen's family has designated

Michigan Audubon as one of the nonprofit organization recipients for donations in memory of Eileen.

# Registration Open for Michigan Young Birders Camp

**W**e are so excited for the revamped 2021 Michigan Young Birders Camp! This virtual experience for 13- to 18-year-olds meets on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for the last three weeks of July with independent learning opportunities in between. Our goal is to minimize our time in front of a computer while maximizing the time we spend together to provide relevant and engaging information.

Camp sessions are held for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, with optional evening sessions and occasional time for group projects. Each day focuses on a different theme related to birds and features a variety of guest speakers. Independent activities are assigned to campers to help continue our work when we aren't together.

This virtual camp experience is open to 20 enthusiastic campers, and tuition is \$175 per participant. Campers will be mailed a packet of resources, reference materials, and other goodies before the beginning of camp. Registration is open through June 15 or until filled. Registration information is available through the Michigan Audubon website.

Camp will meet on July 13, 14, 20, 21, 27, and 28. We hope to have campers join us for all days and sessions, but we will make accommodations for absences.

Please contact Lindsay Cain at [lcain@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:lcain@michiganaudubon.org) if you have any questions or if you're having difficulty registering.



## SR 20: An Update on Proposed Sandhill Crane Hunt in Michigan

**S**enate Resolution 20, a proposal to designate the Sandhill Crane a game species and establish a hunting season in Michigan, was again heard by the Michigan Senate Committee on Natural Resources in early 2021. The committee refrained from pushing the resolution through at their March 3 meeting due to discrepancies in some of the data provided, but ultimately approved it at their March 17 meeting for it to be reviewed by the Michigan Natural Resources Commission (NRC). If the Commission decides to approve the resolution, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be the next legislative body to review and advise on the implementation of this resolution in the future.

### What's Next?

At the time of this publication, the specific date of when the legislation will be discussed by the NRC had not yet been determined. We will notify our supporters of any helpful action that can be taken on behalf of Sandhill Cranes as well as updates to this issue when additional details are shared by the Commission.

Michigan Audubon's staff and volunteers, including wildlife biologists and ornithologists, will work directly with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to communicate essential considerations for this proposal from a natural history perspective.

**Thank you!** Michigan Audubon would like to thank everyone who voiced their concerns, again, with the hope of protecting both resident and migrant Sandhill Cranes in our state at such a vulnerable time in history. It is our intention to appeal to the governor for more ethical, ecologically sound management of natural resources and wildlife.

**How to learn more and stay tuned:** Visit [michiganaudubon.org/advocacy](http://michiganaudubon.org/advocacy) for more articles, links, and resources related to advocating for the Sandhill Crane in Michigan and learn more about how you can give back to birds. To ensure you're following the latest news from Michigan Audubon, sign up for our eNews at [michiganaudubon.org](http://michiganaudubon.org).



Sandhill Cranes.  
Photo by L. Pagel

# Volunteer at Bird Sanctuaries

It's feeling a lot like spring! We can officially enjoy the warmth and longer days and start to plan to give back what we can to the Michigan Audubon bird sanctuaries in the form of on-the-ground work.

Each year, Michigan Audubon staff lead volunteers in engaging outdoor activities, ranging from pulling invasive weeds like garlic mustard or dame's rocket to monitoring nest boxes or cutting down invasive woody shrubs like autumn olive. Volunteers also help out with much-needed sanctuary stewardship tasks, such as maintaining clear and safe trails and refurbishing structures such as boardwalks, parking areas, and signage.

Would you like to join us this year? Here's a brief list of volunteer events for our signature sanctuaries.

## Capital City Bird Sanctuary

Location: 6001 Delta River Dr., Lansing, MI 48906

Dates: April 1–Oct. 31, Wednesdays at 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

April 22, 4:30–6:30 p.m. | Celebrate Earth Day by pulling garlic mustard and helping with trash pickup!

## Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary

Location: Seymour Road (across from intersection with Fairlane Drive), Pleasant Lake, MI 49272

Dates: Weekly volunteer work crew meet throughout the year (days and times vary).

## Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary

Location: 3560 Havens Rd., Hastings, MI 49058

Dates (all scheduled dates are from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.):

Tuesday, April 6 & 17, May 1, 5, 12, 15, & 19, June 2 & 12

## Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary

Location: 21145 15 Mile Rd., Bellevue, MI 49021 (Meadows and Marshland Trail parking area)

Dates (all scheduled dates are from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.):

April 19 & 29, May 20, June 15, Aug. 3

You can find more details about each workday, including what activity will be the focus for the day and additional volunteer events at other sanctuaries, by visiting [michiganaudubon.org/calendar](http://michiganaudubon.org/calendar).

**COVID-19 update:** We will continue to follow all risk-reducing guidelines and policies from the Michigan governor's office. We are limiting the number of participants allowed at each volunteer event, and RSVPs will be required. Outdoor social distancing will be practiced, as well as mask-wearing when social distancing is not possible. Participants are encouraged to bring their work gloves.

Please RSVP for workdays to Conservation Program Coordinator Linnea Rowse at [lrowse@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:lrowse@michiganaudubon.org).

We look forward to seeing you at our sanctuaries!

Chestnut-sided Warbler.  
Photo by J.A. Mikulich  
2020 Honorable Mention

## Accepting Submissions for 2021 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards

Each year, we look forward to the amazing photography submitted to this contest featuring the birds we all love! Not only can your photographs share the beauty of the avian world, they can also help raise awareness about birds and the habitats they depend on in the state of Michigan.

The competition features three categories this year including:

- *Jack Pine Warbler* Cover Photo — the winner's photograph will be featured on the cover of our quarterly member magazine.
- Youth — open to those who are 13 to 17 years of age.
- Whitefish Point Bird Observatory — celebrate the Point by submitting your photos of the wildlife, habitat, and people that make the place so special to each of us.

Over the years, Michigan Audubon has featured the work of a host of amazing photographers from across the Great Lakes and abroad. With our photography awards, Michigan Audubon continues our commitment to photographic excellence with this publication and extends it to our educational outreach materials such as brochures, websites, social media, and more.

Winners of each category, as well as three honorable mentions, will be announced on July 1, 2021.

**You must enter your submissions to our 2021 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards by June 15, 2021.** To enter, please fill out our online form at [michiganaudubon.org](http://michiganaudubon.org). If you have questions, please email Communications & Marketing Coordinator Molly Keenan at [mkeen@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mkeen@michiganaudubon.org).



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.

Danny Adams  
Michael & Katrina  
Adrian  
Lloyd Bailey  
Katherine Bowman  
Londa Bradley  
Tami Brinkel  
Maria Bruno  
Matthew Bueby  
Scott Castelein  
Leanne Chadwick  
Sue Cornell  
Jim Dietrich  
Cindy Dobrez  
Tim Donnelly  
Lisa Dunn  
James Eder  
Deborah Ezzo  
Robert Frownfelter  
Eve Fuller  
Pat Gildea  
Heidi Gunderson  
Jason Hamel  
Derek Haroldson  
Ilona Harris  
Sharon Homeyer  
Lori Hostetler  
Daria Hyde &  
Virginia Hambric  
Linda Johnson  
Tyler Joswick

Angelina Kelly  
Kyle & Bob Kirkby  
Susanne Kurtz  
Paula W LaClaire  
Jim Leitch  
Jonathan Letko  
Wez Ligon  
Carol Lively  
Christopher &  
Shannon Marold  
James & Debra  
McCann  
Janice McDonald  
Silvia McFarland  
Meriel Meehan  
Martha Mohler &  
Andrey Yeatts  
Amir Naddaf &  
Jessica  
Anderson  
Rachel Nizinski  
Gregory Norwood  
Carl Noyes  
Pamela Opolsky  
Margarete  
Orlik-Walsh  
Janice Orlando Robert  
Patterson  
Donald & Laura  
Pebley  
Theresa Piepszak

Sarah Pinch  
Gerald Pink  
Marybeth Pritschet  
Ashlynn Pryal  
Dave Prychitko  
Thomas Reichard  
JoanEllen Rich  
Beth Robinson  
Tonya Rund &  
Jane Otrhalek  
Mary J Rupert  
Ryne Rutherford  
Garth Sabo  
Jyoti Sahni  
Joan Sampieri  
Charles Schlinger  
Cynthia  
Sherman-Jones  
David Skidmore  
Mary Timmer  
Angel Torres  
Sara A Tozer  
Rebecca Van Dyke  
Hans Voss  
Lucille Voss  
Erin Wall  
Bonnie Wheeler  
Samantha Wolfe  
Benjamin Edward  
Yeasting

**Please check the expiration date above your address to ensure that you continue to enjoy the benefits of your Michigan Audubon membership.** If you have any questions about your membership status, please contact Communications & Marketing Coordinator Molly Keenan at [mkeenana@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mkeenana@michiganaudubon.org) or (517) 580-7364. Thank you!

