

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

WINTER: Kirtland's Warbler Now Featured on MI Nongame Fund License Plate ■ Keep the U.P. Wild Coalition  
Whitefish Point Bird Observatory Fall Reports: Owl Banding, Field Ornithologist, & Waterbird Count ■ 2022 Young Birders Camp  
Peregrine Falcons in Michigan ■ Community Spotlight: Alana Christ ■ Cerulean & Kirtland's Warbler Tours



# Jack Pine Warbler

## CONTACT US

**By mail:**  
2310 Science Parkway, Suite 200  
Okemos, MI 48864

**By phone:**  
517-580-7364  
Mon.-Fri. 9AM-5PM

## STAFF

**Heather Good**  
Executive Director  
hgood@michiganaudubon.org

**Lindsay Cain**  
Education Coordinator  
lcain@michiganaudubon.org

**Liz Throckmorton**  
Operations Manager  
ethrockmorton@michiganaudubon.org

**Molly Keenan**  
Communications & Marketing Coordinator  
mkeenan@michiganaudubon.org

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Natasha Koss (chair), Anne Brasie (vice chair), Samuel Burckhardt (secretary), Rich Bailhe (treasurer), Mike Bishop, Katrina Folsom, Heidi Grether, Rosann Kovalcik

## PRODUCTION

**Molly Keenan**  
Communications & Marketing Coordinator  
mkeenan@michiganaudubon.org

## COPY EDITOR

**Liz Throckmorton**  
Operations Manager  
ethrockmorton@michiganaudubon.org

## ADVERTISING

Guidelines available on request.

## PRINTING

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

RiverRun Press  
600 Shoppers Lane  
Parchment, MI 49004  
www.riverrunpress.com



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

Member of  
**EarthShare**  
Michigan



## Cover Photo ■ White-breasted Nuthatch Photographer: Emily Tornga

Emily Tornga captured this photo of a White-breasted Nuthatch from one of her favorite birding spots right out her back door, a place she calls "The Peck Deck." Her love for birds started when she and her husband moved to Michigan nine years ago. She works as an infection preventionist and molecular microbiologist at the University of Michigan Health-West. She founded the Sparrow Appreciation Society in 2020, a group that strives to change the public's perspective on an often overlooked family of birds. They have raised over \$1,700 for conservation programs since their inception. You can see Emily's photos on Instagram at @the\_peck\_deck or @sparrow\_appreciation\_society.

Thank you to Emily Tornga for submitting this image to the 2021 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards. 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 mkeenan@michiganaudubon.org or (517) 580-7364.

# Contents

## Features

2-3  
Kirtland's Warbler Now  
Featured on MI Nongame  
Fund License Plate

4-5  
Keep the U.P. Wild Coalition

6-7  
Peregrine Falcons in  
Michigan

## Columns

8  
Reflecting on the 2021 Fall  
Owl Banding Season

9  
WPBO Fall Field  
Ornithologist Summary

10-11  
WPBO's 32nd Fall  
Waterbird Count

12-13  
Community Spotlight:  
Alana Christ, Capital City  
Bird Sanctuary Resident  
Manager

## Departments

1  
From the Executive Director

5  
Michigan Young Birders  
Camp

13  
Cerulean and Kirtland's  
Warbler Tours

14  
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.





# From the Executive Director

Happy New Year, Michigan Audubon members, chapters, and friends!

In this winter 2022 issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, we share with you a number of updates related to birds in Michigan. We feature a story about the new specialty license plate available to Michigan drivers beginning in January. This specialty license plate features the recently delisted Kirtland's Warbler, a famous species in our state with a rich history and story to tell. This plate can be purchased through the Michigan Secretary of State for \$35, with \$25 of that fee going to the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. Because this is the only fund our state's DNR has designated for nongame wildlife, it makes a difference for our state's birds and ecosystems.

Speaking of the rich ecology of Michigan, another feature in this issue spotlights a campaign to designate part of the Upper Peninsula as a wilderness area. This ambitious, impressive work to establish a wilderness area in the U.P. is certainly worth learning about, sharing, and supporting.

In Michigan Audubon event news, we regret that we won't be logistically able to hold our Spring Fling event at WPBO this year. Typically, this celebration of spring migration at the Point would take place the last weekend in April. We encourage our chapters to arrange carpools and trips to Whitefish Point Bird Observatory during the field season and to reach out to us for tips on how to plan a small group visit to the Point.

There is much happening at Whitefish Point, which as a property is owned jointly by Michigan Audubon, the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Seney National Wildlife Refuge). One change visitors in spring and summer 2022 will

notice is that the parking lot is being redone by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum. We encourage you to check their website before you visit, particularly if you're planning a birding adventure!



While our Owl's Roost Gift Shop remains closed as a retail space, we continue to offer WPBO and Michigan Audubon merchandise through our online store. That is open 24/7, of course, and the space at the Owl's Roost will continue serving our owl banding program and will occasionally be open to the public for outreach, education, and providing information to visitors, particularly in the summer months.

The Community Spotlight in this issue features Alana Chriest, our resident manager at Capital City Bird Sanctuary (CCBS) in Lansing. Alana has brought great insight, energy, and community-based strategies to her work at CCBS. This 63-acre sanctuary is a great spot for birding and is open to the public from dawn to dusk. We look forward to continuing to spotlight the people and places that make a difference for birds in Michigan.

Sincerely,

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

Heather Good  
Executive Director



Snow Bunting.  
Photo by John Fortener



# Kirtland's Warbler Now Featured on MI Nongame Fund License Plate

BY HEATHER GOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In January 2022, drivers with vehicles registered in Michigan can purchase a wildlife habitat license plate featuring a new species. The species selected by the DNR to represent nongame wildlife in Michigan on the habitat plate this time? The Kirtland's Warbler, that gray and yellow, medium-sized warbler that gets so much press — and for a good reason.

Removed from the federal endangered species list in October 2019, the Kirtland's Warbler's conservation success story is no small feat. The state's selection of this species on the nongame wildlife plate is a testament to its symbolic, history-rich story of bouncing back.

The Kirtland's Warbler is a long-standing symbol of conservation unique to Michigan in many ways. It was through the strategic stewardship of the Michigan DNR, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that a network of nonprofit organizations and private citizens was created to essentially prevent the Kirtland's Warbler's extinction. From 400 to 4,000 individuals, it took a true avian preservation village to pursue the KIWA's recovery.



We've learned a lot from this single species, perhaps most remarkably the importance of human partnerships and participation in the conservation process in order to ensure it is successful and sustainable. The work of conserving birds certainly transcends political and geographical boundaries when we think about their nesting versus breeding grounds and how each of those habitats may be impacted, threatened, or diminishing. In its illustrative story, the Kirtland's Warbler demonstrates what can happen when we work internationally on collaborative, innovative, multi-faceted solutions to native species recovery and stability. This rings especially true as we mitigate the effects of climate change and digest content about the state of the world's birds and the staggering statistics about habitat loss. This license plate is one small step of progress and change that is also a well-earned celebration.

The selection of the Kirtland's Warbler for this purpose has geographical relevance to the state, as this small warbler nests in northern Michigan's jack pine forests. It is estimated that now, over 95% of the Kirtland's Warbler population nests in five counties of Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula. Small populations of these birds can also be found in the U.P., Wisconsin, and Ontario. The Kirtland's Warbler winters in The Bahamas, a country that was a vital ingredient and active participant in the conservation work that earned this bird its status to date.

This specialty plate costs \$35, with \$25 of proceeds supporting Michigan's Nongame Fish and Wildlife

Kirtland's Warbler.  
Photo by Sherman Garnett







## Habitat Matters.

Trust Fund. Since its inception, the wildlife habitat license plate has raised over \$3.9 million for this fund, which is used solely for the research and management of nongame fish and wildlife as well as for designated endangered animal and plant species in the state of Michigan.

*Nongame species are wildlife species that are not usually "taken" for sport, fur, or other forms of human consumption.*

The Common Loon, another beloved avian species to many, was the first species featured on Michigan's nongame license plate when it became available in 2006. In December 2017, the nongame plate featured an elk, purportedly to mark the 2018 celebration of 100 years of elk presence in our state.

Michigan Audubon and the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance encourage every Michigan driver to purchase the plate and support our state's capacity for nongame wildlife conservation.



Michigan Audubon has contributed to Kirtland's Warbler conservation, collaboration, tours, and management in many ways throughout history, which makes this event of relevance

to a great many volunteers, members, donors, tour guides, and former board members who helped make this happen. If you have had a hand in the conservation, education, and research to support the Kirtland's Warbler, we thank you!

Kirtland's Warblers nest on the ground under the overlapping branches of young jack pine trees. Historically, the warbler's breeding habitat was created by wildfire sweeping across the landscape, burning mature trees, and opening new areas for young trees to grow. But with more humans living near jack pine habitat starting in the early 20th century, fires became viewed as a threat and were extinguished. With young jack pine habitat becoming increasingly rare, the warbler went into a long, slow population decline until the 1980s, when humans began to harvest large areas of mature forests and replant them with young trees.

The Kirtland's Warbler is just one of the species that benefits from management of the jack pine ecosystem. Game species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and snowshoe hare use the young jack pine habitat extensively. Jack pine management also helps to support the threatened Hill's thistle (a plant) and the secretive locust (an insect).



Heather Good has been the executive director of Michigan Audubon since 2016 and focused on environmental policy in her Environmental Studies education at Western Michigan University. She works with Michigan Audubon's chapters, local groups, legislators, and individual volunteers to advocate for the conservation and best practices and policies for birds and their habitats in the state of Michigan.



# Keep the U.P. Wild Coalition

Working Together to Designate Four New Wilderness Areas in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

As Michigan nature enthusiasts well know, the state's Upper Peninsula is a rich, varied wonderland for outdoor recreation opportunities — and birding opportunities in the U.P. are no exception. Whitefish Point Bird Observatory in Paradise is a representation of just that, as more than 340 avian species have been recorded at this monitoring station on the shore of Lake Superior.

The growing, local outdoor recreation world and economy do come with a fair share of side effects and impacts, from human disturbance to habitat fragmentation and loss. The surge in visitors to the Upper Peninsula over the last few years is credited as inspiring this idea of preserving parts of the U.P. and designating them as wilderness areas, and acted as a final push to form a coalition.

## What is Keep the U.P. Wild?

Keep the U.P. Wild is a growing coalition of more than 125 Michigan environmental, outdoor recreation, academic, and nonprofit organizations, institutions, and businesses working to advance new wilderness areas in the U.P.

Michigan Audubon joined the coalition early on, as these proposed additions of new wilderness areas mean a lot for preserving biodiversity in the U.P., which correlates directly to our mission and work of bird conservation. Our hope in featuring this work in the *Jack Pine Warbler* is to share this news with our chapters, members, and community so that we can build public awareness, support, and achieve success in preserving habitat protection at this level.

Pursuing the designation of multiple wilderness areas and seeking the nation's greatest natural resources protection is no small or simple feat. It's a process requiring a diverse, talented pool of committed people and organizations to work together strategically to secure these protections.

## The Definition of Wilderness

The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as **“an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”**

The term wilderness has long referred to terrestrial ecosystems, such as forests, although marine wilderness continues to grow as an area of interest. The Wilderness Act helped inform policies and designations with its determination that

“wilderness or wildlands (usually in the plural), are natural environments on Earth that have not been significantly modified by human activity or any non-urbanized land not under extensive agricultural cultivation.”

“Wilderness areas offer a refuge to those of us exhausted by our modern lives. They inspire broader conservation efforts that can preserve or restore other natural places.”

~ Kitty Oppliger  
Keweenaw Youth for Climate Action

## Federal Wilderness Areas in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

Currently, there are three areas in the western U.P. that have been successfully designated as wilderness areas. Those three areas are Sylvania, McCormick, and the Sturgeon River Gorge. The Ehlco area, Trap Hills, Norwich Plains, and Sturgeon River Gorge additions — that is, those that the coalition is proposing for designation — would create a nearly contiguous national wilderness area of well over 40,000 acres.

## How To Join or Support the Coalition

If you are an individual and want to show your support for designating these important areas in the U.P. as wilderness, you can sign a petition, download stickers and signs, and learn more about getting involved at [keeptheupwild.com](http://keeptheupwild.com). If you represent a business, institution, or organization and want to get involved or sign on to the coalition, please contact Tyler Barron at [tbarron@elpc.org](mailto:tbarron@elpc.org). We encourage chapters of Michigan Audubon to show their support for habitat protection in our state by signing on to this coalition and helping to keep our Upper Peninsula wild! Let's hold on to and cherish Michigan's last real wild places and make this legislation an easy decision that will benefit generations to come.

Learn more about each of the four designated areas and support the coalition's work at [keeptheupwild.com](http://keeptheupwild.com).

**KEEP THE U.P. WILD**





THE TRAP HILLS

LOCATION: Ontonagon County, southwest of Rockland, Mich., about 20 miles southeast of the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park  
AREA PROPOSED: 25,000 acres



THE EHLCO AREA

LOCATION: Ontonagon County, immediately south of the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park  
AREA PROPOSED: 16,000 acres



NORWICH PLAINS

LOCATION: Ottawa National Forest, immediately northeast of Bergland, Mich.  
AREA PROPOSED: 8,000 acres



STURGEON RIVER GORGE ADDITION

LOCATION: Ottawa National Forest, adjacent to the southwest corner of the existing Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness  
AREA PROPOSED: 2,000 acres

Images courtesy of Keep the U.P. Wild.

# MICHIGAN YOUNG BIRDERS CAMP

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS!



## Michigan Young Birders Camp June 26–July 1, 2022 | Alma, MI

After two years of offering a virtual camp experience, Michigan Audubon is happy to announce that we're moving back to an in-person Michigan Young Birders Camp for 2022! We are so pleased to continue connecting young people with the diverse bird communities of the Great Lakes region for the fifth year. Michigan Audubon hopes to reach more young birders, ages 13–18, during this week of exciting avian knowledge and adventures in conservation!

The 2022 Michigan Young Birders Camp will be held June 26–July 1 at Alma College. From Alma, participants will travel around the state, visiting different habitats and important bird areas to enhance and support their learning throughout the week. We'll discuss bird conservation topics and bird identification tips and techniques, and listen to a variety of guest speakers on topics related to birds.

The 2022 camp experience will cost \$500 per camper. This includes lodging, food, transportation during camp, camp materials, and camper swag. A limited number of need-based scholarships are available and space is limited. **Camper applications are accepted until May 1 or until spaces are filled.**

Out of a concern for safety, we will follow appropriate, current public health protocols. All those involved with the in-person activities of camp must be fully vaccinated. Masks, social distancing, and extra cleaning will be utilized as necessary, along with additional state-recommended cleaning accommodations for overnight camps.

Visit [michiganaudubon.org/learn/young-birders/](https://michiganaudubon.org/learn/young-birders/) for link to register. Please contact us with any questions at [events@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:events@michiganaudubon.org).



# Peregrine Falcons in Michigan

BY HEATHER GOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**G**lobally speaking, the Peregrine Falcon is an exceptionally widespread species. Its broad range reflects the translated meaning of the word *peregrinus* in Latin, or “wanderer.” Outside of the breeding season, the peregrine is quite the far-ranging traveler, earning them notoriety as one of the most well-known birds of prey in the world.

Adapting to urban as well as wild areas, breeding pairs of peregrines in Michigan have been successful. They have learned to adapt their nests to human constructs (buildings, bridges, smokestacks, radio and clock towers, and the like). Surveyors of this species scan these sites for perching peregrines searching for food. The easy-to-spot, diurnal peregrine is a treat for birdwatchers.

## Identifying a Peregrine Falcon

- With a wingspan of 41 inches and about the size of a crow, the peregrine is a relatively large falcon.
- Females are larger than males; both have a blue-grey back, barred white underparts, and an almost black head. Juveniles are heavily marked, with vertical streaks instead of horizontal bars on the breast<sup>1</sup>.
- The barring of the peregrine feather pattern makes for visual similarities to Merlins.

## The Status of “The Wanderer” in the Great Lakes State

In Michigan, the Peregrine Falcon remains on the state endangered species list, which affords them additional legal protections beyond the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The Peregrine Falcon is not, at present, a federally listed endangered species, and its global rank is considered secure<sup>2</sup>.

Peregrine Falcons are migratory birds, but many will overwinter in Michigan cities if they have an ample population of Rock Pigeons to sustain them through the season.

## Surveying for Peregrine Falcons

A big push was made by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reestablish the Peregrine Falcon population in Michigan after it was listed on the state’s endangered species list, and the agency continues to monitor this bird of prey statewide.

Surveying for peregrines involves visually scanning for individuals during the daytime from the fourth week of March to the fourth week of August annually. For birders, the best way to contribute to monitoring is to participate in local and regional migration counts and breeding bird surveys, and to enter their sightings into eBird.





In addition to increased monitoring efforts, which have been largely collaborative in nature with other groups and individuals like citizen scientists, Audubon chapters, and other nonprofit organizations, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources also established (and reached) their goal to maintain a population of at least 10 nesting pairs of Peregrine Falcons in Michigan.

With this goal met, monitoring continues, as does the outreach and education efforts required to better share with people how they can help us better understand, appreciate, and conserve the Peregrine Falcon.

## Conservation Concerns for the Peregrine Falcon

In the 1960s, we saw the Peregrine Falcon population reach a critical low. It's no doubt that the alarms sounded for improved legislation and protection to prevent this species from extinction. Conservation and legislative efforts have helped these birds recover, which is a success for birds, people, the ecosystem, and our monitoring systems.

However, the peregrine is still frequently sought after and illegally killed, in addition to the continual risks and pressures to adapt to climate change effects, habitat loss, and the myriad impacts of human disturbance.

- Illegal killing of peregrines to prevent predation on game birds and racing pigeons.
- The impact of pesticides in the food chain, which bioaccumulate (amplify) in birds of prey like the peregrine.
- The taking of eggs and chicks of peregrines worldwide for collections and falconry purposes.

## Protecting Peregrines: Citizen Science Helps

Populations of the Peregrine Falcon have been reestablished in areas where the species had disappeared after the pesticide DDT caused breeding failures. You can help the Peregrine Falcon by making bird-friendly lifestyle choices, such as not using pesticides, buying organic whenever possible, and abstaining from the use of rodenticides (rat and mouse poisons) in your home and property. You can also help the peregrine monitoring effort with eBird. By sharing your sighting with the eBird community, you help us better protect this captivating species.

### References

<sup>1</sup><https://mnfi.anr.msu.edu/species/description/10952/Falco-peregrinus>

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Peregrine\\_Falcon/id#](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Peregrine_Falcon/id#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://support.ebird.org/en/support/solutions/articles/48001158707-get-started-with-ebird>



Peregrine Falcon photo by Stan Keiser | APA

## Getting Started With eBird<sup>3</sup>

**Create a free account:** Your account will work with other Cornell Lab projects!

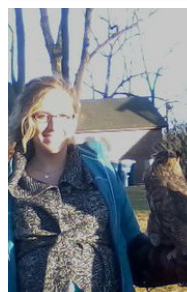
**Take the eBird essentials course:** This free, self-paced course covers the basics for you.

**Submit birding checklists:** This can be done through the ebird.org website or by using the eBird mobile app.

**Explore sightings anywhere:** Check out species maps and hotspots observations, get rare or target species alerts, and more.

**Follow eBird best practices:** From submitting complete lists to the accuracy of location, there are several things you can do to make your data more valuable.

Learn more about these steps at [support.ebird.org](https://support.ebird.org).



Heather's love for birds began with woodpeckers in childhood. She worked for a wild bird supply store during her undergraduate years; studied Environment & Sustainability Studies at Western Michigan University; and worked with birds of prey at Portland Audubon's Wildlife Care Center, as an independent rehabilitator of birds of prey in southeast Michigan, and as a volunteer for the Leslie Science and Nature Center's education bird program from 2009 to 2015. She became Michigan Audubon's executive director in 2016 and is passionate about sharing and conserving birds of prey.



# Reflecting on the 2021 Fall Owl Migration Season

BY TIM BAERWALD AND J. BYRON DE-YAMPERT, 2021 FALL OWL BANDERS

November is here, and it is officially the end of the 28th season of fall banding at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. As the curtain closes on another successful autumn owl migration, we wanted to take a moment to reflect on our time spent occupying the Point during those long autumn nights.

This season we were able to band a total of 103 owls. It wasn't a record low, but it was significantly lower than what we expected when we started in mid-September. For reference, the average fall owl banding season at Whitefish Point nets 163 Northern Saw-whet Owls (NSWO) alone. The vast majority of our captured owls were NSWOs, coming in at 94 owls. The remaining nine owls consisted of six Long-eared Owls (LEOW) and three Barred Owls (BDO). Unfortunately, no Boreal Owls (BOOW) graced us with their presence this banding season.

We recaptured three NSWOs, in addition to the 94 owls mentioned above, that had been previously banded. Two of the three were banded here during previous seasons at Whitefish Point. One of those was banded by a good friend almost exactly two years to the day of its recapture. The remaining recapture was an owl banded at the station in Cedar Grove, Wisc. It's always a treat to recapture an owl banded by someone you know. Sometimes on slow nights, we found ourselves pondering the journeys these owls ventured on — where in the continent they first hatched, if and where they bred, what sorts of trials and tribulations they experienced since they were initially captured.

One may think that walking the same trail 15 times a night every night for a month and a half would become boring and repetitive, yet we failed to find that the case. Each net check provided a chance to become familiar with the local fauna that shared our moss-lined trails through the jack pines and reindeer lichen. Eyeshine from mammals such as mink and white-tailed deer would catch our attention as our headlamp's beam pierced the creeping darkness that enveloped the Point after sunset. We often found ourselves struggling to balance the desire to gaze up at the brilliance of the Milky Way along with the necessity to watch out for equally gorgeous blue-spotted salamanders meandering across the path.

We couldn't summarize the fall banding season without addressing the weather. Anyone familiar with this area of Michigan knows to expect plenty of wind and rain when autumn arrives. The wild winds of November famously sank the Edmund Fitzgerald in 1975, after all. This year was no exception, although the presence of southerly winds during the first two weeks of October gave us unseasonably warm nights. We took those warm nights for granted, frequently pining for their return when the temperatures finally dropped.

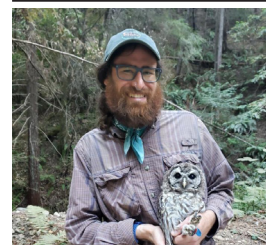
By the time you're reading this, the remaining leaves will have fallen and snow will blanket the Point in its characteristic white fluff. A quiet peace will encompass the net lanes until owl banding resumes in the spring. We would like to thank all that have contributed their time, energy, and resources to making the Point the special place it continues to be. Many people keep this area close to their hearts, and after spending the autumn here, it's obvious why.



Barred Owl banded in fall 2021.



Tim Baerwald has been working as an avian field tech for 10+ years on projects across the country ranging from shorebird banding to raptor counting.



Byron de-Yampert is a Michigan native who has worked on multiple field projects since graduating from Michigan State University a decade ago. He has spent several years banding Spotted Owls for demography projects run by UW-Madison and UC-Davis. He recently finished assisting a graduate student capturing juvenile Barred Owls for a project analyzing Barred Owl dispersals in northern California.

A Northern Saw-whet Owl banded during the 2021 fall season at WPBO.



# WPBO Fall Field Ornithologist Summary

BY CHRIS NERI, 2021 FALL FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST

The fall field season at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO) ran from Aug. 15 to Nov. 15. This fall, we regularly experienced uncommonly long periods of southerly winds and unseasonably warm temperatures, which are not ideal conditions for southward migration. Despite experiencing significant lulls in migrations during many of those periods, it proved to be a relatively productive season. Heading into this fall's field season, I couldn't help feeling a bit anxious about the passerine migration. This spring's passerine migration was underwhelming, not only at WPBO but along the entire Lake Superior shoreline. Although there were no songbird species that occurred in particularly larger numbers this fall, it was somewhat reassuring to see passerine numbers bounce back to more typical numbers this season. During the three-month season, the fall field staff documented a total of 132,482 birds of 224 species and 37 taxa. Included in the species documented this fall were 22 species of warblers, 14 sparrow species, and 17 species of raptors.

Among this season's highlights in regard to rarities were sightings of Sprague's Pipit and two Ash-throated Flycatchers. The Sprague's Pipit was present Nov. 6-8 and represented Michigan's sixth record for this species, and amazingly Whitefish Point's third record. The two Ash-throated Flycatchers represent the third and fourth records for WPBO. A Black Vulture on Sept. 1 was the fourth record for the Point. Other vagrant highlights included four Harris's Sparrows, two Townsend's Solitaires, and a Western Kingbird. Readers familiar with the spring raptor migration at WPBO may be surprised to hear that the only bird that produced a first record for the fall season at WPBO was a Golden Eagle on Aug. 29. Golden Eagles are regular migrants here in the spring, but there were no records of them here in the fall prior to this season. This is a



Ash-throated Flycatcher. Photo by Chris Neri

great example of how geography funnels this species to the Point during their northward journey in the spring, whereas the lake serves as a barrier to them on their southward migration in the fall.

As usual, the waterbird count is responsible for most of the birds recorded this fall. It was a pleasure to work with Fall Waterbird Counter Mario Balitbit. Not only did he do a great job with the waterbird count, but he also birded the Point on the majority of his days off. Fall Lead Owl Bander Tim Baerwald also put in a significant amount of time birding in the morning, contributing to this season's success. Also accounting for this season's success was the inexplicably low number of mosquitoes. Not having to unzip my bug shirt every time I needed to use my binoculars and the lack of maddening buzzing in my ears made birding the Point much more enjoyable and effective than it has been for several years in the fall. Thanks to all this season's visitors and all of you who provide financial support to keep WPBO's long-term research possible.



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."



Sprague's Pipit. Photo by Chris Neri



# WPBO's 32nd Fall Waterbird Count

BY MARIO BALITBIT, 2021 FALL WATERBIRD COUNTER

Starting the fall of 2021 waterbird count at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO), I felt similar to how many migration counters and researchers feel across the country — filled with excitement and eager anticipation for what will appear along the horizon. Certain conditions often challenge this mindset, but this fleeting doubt quickly subsides when the arrival of a bird appears on the scene. This fall count brought mild weather, which can be a double-edged sword by producing poor migration conditions.

Having now spent my first season in the Upper Peninsula, I feel honored to have contributed to the 32nd annual fall waterbird count. My background in studying birds primarily comes from California. There are apparent differences between these two regions, but one crucial similarity shared between both areas is the dedicated observers. During poor weather, I can shelter in the shack, but many birders endure the relentless rain and cold in the hope of experiencing something grand. Putting in the grind, combined with curiosity and passion for collecting this data, is a significant foundation that assists in the acts of management and conservation for wildlife.

As for being in the field, the first few weeks were the warmest, allowing for comfortable fieldwork at the waterbird shack. Dabbling ducks like the Blue-winged Teal and hundreds of Red-necked Grebes made the majority of early migration. In contrast, other early migrants consisted of 17 species of shorebirds, including post-breeding Piping Plovers and our only Red Knot of the season. Having the opportunity to observe the near-threatened Buff-breasted Sandpiper closely, an elegant Arctic breeder migrating to South America, was one of my top experiences this fall. Other early migrants

consisted of several Caspian Terns, a single Black Tern, and the highest count of Common Terns for the season. Shortly after the significant movement of terns, our most anticipated sighting of a jaeger appeared between the swells.

Once we were in September, it was clear the full force of migration was in motion. Three days of this month broke over a thousand individuals, which provided peak migrations for Canada Geese, Gadwalls, Northern Shovelers, Sandhill Cranes, Black Terns, jaegers, and many of the shorebird species. For the month, our most notable waterbird sightings were a couple of Sabine's Gulls, all three jaeger species, a pair of early Harlequin Ducks, and three separate Sora sightings. Another spectacular spectacle this fall was the mass existence of *Pluvialis* plovers (Black-bellied Plover and American Golden-Plover) on Sept. 5. Also, Sandhill Cranes made the highest count on record in a single day (Sept. 24). There were several memorable jaeger showings this year. My personal favorite was on Sept. 21 when Fall Field Ornithologist Chris Neri spotted a closer jaeger hazing a Herring Gull (one of the largest gulls on the scene). At first glance, it appeared to look like an adult Parasitic Jaeger by plumage (seen earlier in the day), but as it banked, the “spoons” on the rectrices were a dead giveaway that this was an adult Pomarine Jaeger in all its glory. The jaeger scene was a bit unreal, leading to the highest detection rate of any fall.

Most of October was dominated by waterfowl, but also encountered were large numbers of loons, our high count of Bonaparte's Gulls, and Forster's Terns. The first couple of weeks of October provided a fair movement of Red-throated and Common Loons. During our peak flight of Common Loons (Sept. 14), an immature Pacific





Loon was spotted amongst a group of loons that formed the trifecta of expected loon species. Quickly following the mass appearance of loons were outstanding numbers of *Aythya*, such as both scaup species, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and a single Canvasback. The week of Sept. 15-21 was also peak flight for American Wigeon, Mallards, American Black Ducks, all three scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, and Red-breasted Mergansers. We saw many of our final appearances of shorebirds during early October, but later migrants such as White-rumped Sandpiper and Dunlin flocks were encountered. We even had an unexpected detection, then later appearance, of an American Woodcock winnowing over the treeline. The final week of October brought some often underappreciated activity of gulls to the Point. There were multiple sightings of juvenile Black-legged Kittiwakes, typically known as a pelagic species, while a Lesser Black-backed Gull and an Iceland Gull were seen near the harbor.

November was kind to this California kid, which allowed us to peel a few layers to bask in the patchy sun before the next frost. After drinking a tall glass of iced tea (just kidding, it was still too cold for that nonsense), we encountered the peak flight for Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, and Hooded Mergansers. One of the most notable waterbirds spotted this month was a Red Phalarope dodging between waves exceeding three feet in height, practicing its vigilance before having to cross the open ocean where it will spend most of its winter.

At the end of it all, the number of waterbirds counted was 93,515 individuals, which is above the average since 1989 but less than the last decade's average by 5.8%. These totals are arbitrary and should be broken down to lower taxa levels (order, family, genus, species) before coming to any conclusions. For example, waterfowl alone (geese, swans, and ducks) made ~70% of the total waterbirds counted this season. Of the total waterbirds, diving ducks made ~59% (~80% of the total waterfowl), but it should be noted that Long-tailed Ducks alone made ~26% of the total waterbirds counted. Long-tailed Ducks this season are above the cumulative average since 1989 but below average within the past decade by 4%. These trends are a rudimentary breakdown of what we report each season, but there are 32 years of census data available for a more comprehensive analysis. Moving forward, I will provide general trends and highlights for specific groups.

Of the 81 waterbird species, several were documented with record-breaking highest abundance for the count: Wood Duck, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Hooded Merganser, Sandhill Crane, Black-bellied Plover, Solitary Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, and Wilson's Snipe. Others faced some of the lowest on record, the most notable being Red-necked Grebe and Canada Goose. But, based on eBird data and local speculation, Red-necked Grebe peak migration may have occurred before the fall count.



Common Goldeneye. Photo by Mario Balitbit

While our primary focus is to count waterbirds, we record every bird species detected, bringing our season total to 119,430 individuals and 211 species. The general trend of landbird migration was that early-season had an influx of warblers and diurnal raptors. Mid-season brought a mini fallout of sparrows and concluded with a bountiful count of finches. Notable sightings this season were a Black Vulture on Sept. 1, a Western Kingbird in mid-September, a couple of Townsend's Solitaires late in the season, and a LeConte's Sparrow skulking along the dune grass on Oct. 1. Probably the most memorable bird of the season was the Sprague's Pipit. This bird evaded us for a day before a group double-downed and paraded around the Point to eventually produce some stunning photos of the species. This represents the sixth state record, third count record, and first record since 1995!

The sightings at WPBO this fall are some of the most joyous memories I have experienced: hearing the flight calls of Sprague's Pipit, experiencing the mass flight of jaegers, sifting through the gull flocks, watching thousands of finches overhead. At times it was difficult to comprehend the volume of birds moving within the day. In my eyes, any form of migration, whether it be invertebrate, mammal, or fish, is considered the highest tier of the world's natural wonders.

I want to give a special shoutout to Adam Byrne, Alec Olivier, Leonard Graf, Rhoda Johnson, and Tim Baerwald for covering the count this season. Of course, I can't give thanks enough to Chris Neri and Nova Mackentley for keeping my spirits high throughout the season. I'm glad winter didn't arrive until after I left.



Mario discovered his love for birds at an early age while volunteering in wildlife rehabilitation and birding across California. His drive to understand the avian world has opened opportunities to share with others through environmental education, touring, and photography. During these early experiences, he completed his B.S. at Humboldt State University as a wildlife and conservation management major. Now he is a wildlife biologist, moving where the birds and opportunities take him. You can find Mario partaking in long-term bird projects such as bird banding, pelagic leading, and other avian-related work.



# Community Spotlight: Alana Chriest

CAPITAL CITY BIRD SANCTUARY RESIDENT MANAGER

**M** meet Alana Chriest, resident manager of Michigan Audubon's Capital City Bird Sanctuary (CCBS), located in Delta Township, near Lansing.

Alana began her tenure at CCBS as co-resident manager with Linnea Rowse (who also served as Michigan Audubon's conservation program coordinator), and she continues serving this role at the sanctuary today. Alana is a doctoral candidate in environment and natural resources at The Ohio State University, conducting research on new and beginning farmers in the U.S. She holds an M.S. in food systems from the University of Vermont, is on the Eastside Lansing Food Co-op's board, and teaches environmental studies and sociology at Washtenaw Community College and Delta College, respectively. Alana grew up in a small town at the foothills of the Cascade mountains in Washington and has lived in Alaska, Wyoming, New York, Vermont, and Ohio before permanently moving to Lansing in 2018.

**Q: Alana, can you tell us what you've come to appreciate about this particular bird sanctuary of ours?**

**A:** In regards to habitat, Capital City Bird Sanctuary (CCBS) has a pine grove, mixed forest, riparian habitat along the Grand River, and an excellent meadowland and wetland micro-ecosystem in the middle of the sanctuary. For people, CCBS is unique in that the proximity to higher-density population areas provides the sanctuary with more opportunities for birding, volunteering, and conservation education than more rural and remote sanctuaries. I love that this sanctuary is across the street from Hawk Meadow Park, managed by Delta Township, making the area one big "hub" for conservation that people in the Greater Lansing area can enjoy. Networking with local residents and collaboration with the township makes CCBS a flagship Michigan Audubon sanctuary.

**Q: What would you like visitors to Capital City Bird Sanctuary to know?**

**A:** The sanctuary has almost two miles of trails that go through each of the unique areas of the sanctuary. If you want a longer hike, you can head to Hawk Meadow Park across the street, expanding the trail system to over six miles! Please note that no dogs or bikes are allowed at CCBS. The trails are easy, with a few boardwalks to help cross wet areas making the trail very family friendly. CCBS has a small mowed area near the gardens with a picnic table for lovely warm-weather picnics to make an outing of your visit. There are numbered bluebird nest boxes from which we track and collect yearly data, as well as a few Wood Duck boxes. You can take notice of the farmstead relic as the standing yet defunct windmill on the east side of the field reminds us that habitat restoration is not only possible but also successful when communities and organizations come together to improve environmental quality. Projects for 2022 include planting the community garden, removing invasive species, and petitioning Eaton County to install a crosswalk on Delta River Drive between Hawk Meadow's parking area and CCBS. Additional parking is available at the cemetery bordering the west side of CCBS, where visitors can use the trail entrance that goes through the pine grove.

**Q: When is the best time to visit CCBS?**

**A:** I love spring as the best time to visit CCBS. May and June are when I have been able to spot migrating birds, nesting bluebirds, and a mating pair of Sandhill Cranes that have returned for two years in a row. I also like the sanctuary in winter when there are Brown Creepers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and about a dozen other resident birds in plain view. I am not an expert birder, so walking CCBS in late autumn and winter boosts my confidence in bird identification as the sanctuary is always teeming with our winter resident birds. In winter, I have also spotted waterfowl along the Grand River section of the trails. The sanctuary is especially pretty after a good snowfall when I get my snowshoes and take a cold, peaceful walk.

**Q: Can you tell us about the community garden at CCBS? What do you know about how it came to be and what you've been building there over the past two years?**

**A:** When Linnea and I became resident managers in the summer of 2019, the community garden was neglected. We decided to revive it! Not knowing what the soil health and water sources were like, we prepped for a pilot program

Top: Alana and volunteers weeding the native garden at CCBS.

Middle: Alana birding at Ludington State Park.

Left: Alana talking to a volunteer at the CCBS community garden.





community garden. Initially, we had five households (including our own) gardening in the spring of 2020. I planted about half the plot with an experimental “three sisters” approach using sweet corn, squash, and beans, but the raccoons started pulling the corn stalks down, thus exposing the beans to too much sunlight and highlighting the squash plants that the woodchucks then consumed. Other gardeners had similar troubles, and the season ended with just two households pulling a meager harvest come autumn of 2019. In addition to critters, the lack of a reliable water source and garden infrastructure led us to dedicate 2021 as a rebuilding year. Over the winter and early spring months of 2022, we will be installing a high-capacity rainwater collection system, matted and mulched pathways to suppress weeds, and framed plots for micro-fencing, so the woodchucks and raccoons are less likely to destroy the crops. We also hope to set up a farmstand to sell produce across from the park where Michigan Audubon can promote events, activities, campaigns, and the organization’s overall mission.

**Q: Is there anything else you’d like to share or promote about your work, experience, perspective, or what you bring to the community in your role?**

**A:** What I bring to CCBS is an interdisciplinary agroecological approach to maximizing both wildlife and human benefits. My decades of experience and studies in environmentalism and food systems have led me to firmly

believe the nexus of conservation lies in simultaneously preserving habitat that currently exists while restoring damaged habitat to provide sound ecology and ecosystem services to the common good. I take a philosophical approach and sociological framework to build systems, both self-sustaining and human-managed. When these systems achieve maximum benefits for both humans and birds, we can avoid the false dichotomy of development vs. preservation. By showing people that CCBS can provide excellent habitat, produce food, and provide recreation, we avoid confrontational dialects that divide perspectives. When benefits are shown for the greater good of all life, it can inspire others, especially landowners, to consider turning their land into wildlife sanctuaries with a focus on bird species.

*Capital City Bird Sanctuary is located on the banks of the Grand River and across Delta River Drive from Hawk Meadow Park (6160 Delta River Dr., Lansing, MI 48906), which was also donated by Michigan Audubon benefactor Carl Haussman. The 1.8 miles of trails may be enjoyed daily from dawn to dusk.*



## Cerulean Warbler Tours May 9–22 | Hastings, MI

Michigan Audubon is delighted to announce that we are offering Cerulean Warbler guided tours this spring! Experienced local guides will lead this caravan tour to several Cerulean Warbler nesting territories within the Barry State Game Area, where you may see numerous other deciduous forest species as well.

**When:** Tours will be offered daily at 8 a.m., May 9–22.

**Where:** All tours will meet at the Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary and will be led by local, experienced guides. The Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary is located at 3560 Havens Rd., Hastings, MI 49058.

**How to register:** Pre-registration is required. Registration will open on Feb. 14.

**Cost:** Tours cost \$10/person.

Tour sizes will be limited to 15 people or less. All tour participants are expected to follow current COVID-19 guidelines.

## Kirtland's Warbler Tours May 28–June 30 | Grayling, MI

Michigan Audubon, in collaboration with Hartwick Pines State Park, will be offering Kirtland’s Warbler Tours in 2022.

**When:** Tours will be offered daily at 7 a.m. with an additional 11 a.m. tour on Saturdays and Sundays, May 28–June 30.

**Where:** All tours will meet at the Hartwick Pines Visitor Center in Grayling. A recreation passport is required for entry to the park.

**How to register:** Pre-registration is required. Registration will open in mid-February.

**Cost:** Tours cost \$10/person.

Tour sizes will be limited to 20 people or less. All tour participants are expected to follow current COVID-19 guidelines.

**If you have questions regarding tours, please contact us at [events@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:events@michiganaudubon.org) or 517-580-7364.**





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.

Jeanne Anderson  
Abigail Archey  
Cheryl & Tim Arter  
Stephen Baldwin  
Mark Barrone  
Thomas R. Bausman  
Geoffrey Beck  
David Berquist  
Lynn M Blue  
D. Bradley & B. Krasner  
Camryn Brent  
Gregg Brent  
Mary Burkhardt  
Matt Bushart  
Paula Butler  
Carla Carleton  
Richard Carlson  
Sue Casey  
Jan Cerro  
Dave Clark  
Laura Cleveland

Richard Cobb  
Doug Connor  
Barbara Cowley-Durst  
Bill Damon  
Jane Davidson  
Philip Davis  
Mindy Denninger  
Laurie Dennis  
John Dickson  
Kathryn Dilley  
Marilyn H. Duncan  
Judith Eberle  
Jean Eckerberg  
Karen Edgley  
Bennett Elwood  
Thomas Evans  
Donald G. Farnum  
Paula Fenstermaker  
Jill Fischer  
Donald Gagacki  
Peter Gaines

Christopher Gerling  
Amy Gibbs  
Carol Grainger  
Denise & Tim Grundler  
Kristin Hagberg  
Janet Hampton  
Rachel Hanson-Hervey  
Gary Hornfeld  
John & Kathy Imboden  
Ruth Jackson  
Brian Jones  
Candace Kaminsky  
Anne Klute  
Janice Knight  
Richard Koelzer  
Justin Labadie  
Linda Lamerato  
Philip D. Matz  
Linda McAffrey  
Derrick McCarthy  
Barbara McGivern

Nancy McKenna  
Pamela Meadows  
Susan Michaels  
Ian Minter  
Paul Morrison  
Sita Nilekani  
Mary Novak  
Susan Olcott  
Debra Pajula  
Jeremy Pardo  
Lane Powell  
Harold Prince  
Thomas Reinbold  
Walter Rudzniski  
Ronald N. Sakowski  
Mary L. Sanderson  
Roxie Schell  
Susan Schneider  
Deborah Schnepf  
Elizabeth Schultz  
Sunny Shankar

Vicki Smith  
Worley Smith  
Julie Steinberg Marton  
Nancy Stier  
Marcia Stucki  
Joan Swanson  
Frank Swart  
Mary & Peter Swearngen  
Sharon Toms  
Judith Valente  
Mark Van Gorder  
Daniel Walma  
Carol Westfall  
Whalen Family  
Priscilla Whiteford  
Loren & Nancy Wier  
Felicia Wirgau  
Sharon Wright  
John Zang  
Terry Zanger  
Colleen Zematis

**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 (517) 580-7364 or [mkeenam@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mkeenam@michiganaudubon.org). Thank you!



Hoary Redpoll  
Photo by Christine Andrews

### Save the Dates!

Great Backyard Bird Count | February 18-21  
WPBO Spring Raptor Count | March 15–May 31  
WPBO Spring Owl Banding | March 15–May 31  
WPBO Spring Waterbird Count | April 15–May 31  
Cerulean Warbler Tours | May 9–22  
Tawas Point Migration | May 13–15  
Kirtland's Warbler Tours | May 28–June 30