

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

FALL: Why Band Birds? ■ Signature Sanctuaries ■ Motus Towers ■ Great Lakes Young Birders Camp a Success ■ Summer Owl Banding at WPBO ■ Kirtland's Warbler Tour Season ■ Smartphone App Aids in Duckling Rescue





# Jack Pine Warbler

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**Cover Photo ■ Sandhill Crane**  
Photographer: Dan Lory

Efforts to designate Sandhill Crane as a game species in Michigan were thwarted this spring, effectively dismissing the chance for a recreational hunting season of these birds in the near future.

Midwesterner Dan Lory, snapped the photo of this pair along the Jordan River Valley Trail near Alba, Mich. Dan feels watching birds puts a sharp edge on his awareness of self in nature, while softening the rough edges of daily life in the city.

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 [mkeen@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mkeen@michiganaudubon.org) or (517) 580-7364.

# Contents

## Features

2-3

### Bird Banding:

*An integral tool for studying birds*

4-5

### Michigan Audubon's Signature Sanctuaries

6-7

### Motus Towers Enhance Migration Research

13

### Smartphone App Aids in Duckling Rescue

## Columns

8-9

### Great Lakes Young Birders Camp a Success

10

### Summer Owl Banding at WPBO

12

### Kirtland's Warbler Tour Season

## Departments

1

### Executive Director Letter

7

### Bird by Bird

14

### New Members

14

### Save These Dates



## MICHIGAN AUDUBON CONNECTS BIRDS AND PEOPLE FOR THE BENEFIT OF BOTH ...

... through conservation, education, and research efforts in the state of Michigan. Formed and incorporated in 1904, it is Michigan's oldest conservation organization. Michigan Audubon supports bird surveys throughout the state, publishes survey data, provides educational opportunities, and preserves nearly 5,000 acres of land within 19 sanctuaries as habitat for birds and other wildlife. 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 MichiganAudubon on social media*





# From the Executive Director

## Michigan Audubon's Signature Sanctuaries

Michigan Audubon was founded in 1904 – that's one year prior to the founding of National Audubon Society and nearly fifty years prior to the Nature Conservancy. This illustrates just how few land conservancies and conservation groups existed in the early 1900s. Michigan and the United States as a whole didn't have a plethora of land conservancies in operation to aid in the preservation and protection of native habitat.

Our organization started out in response to a great need for conservation in our state and – through the purchasing of parcels of land and the receipt of donated preserves – we became the first non-profit organization preserving native land in our state. Over the course of decades, Michigan Audubon's protected lands grew to a list now consists of 18 sites; sites we refer to as "bird sanctuaries."

As programs, projects, conservation needs, and the landscape of nonprofit organizations specializing in land preservation grew, Michigan Audubon expanded its mission to include three pillars: conservation, education, and research. As an expression of our conservation work, in 2016, we named a small number of our 18 sites "signature sanctuaries."

These sites were selected for their location, potential, and need for more intensive work in terms of on-the-ground conservation, invasive species management, habitat support, growth, and accessibility. These particular sanctuaries are the most well utilized sites by the public, which increases opportunities for us to

offer educational programs, bird walks, citizen science opportunities, stewardship workdays, and various proactive expressions of connecting birds and people for the benefit of both.

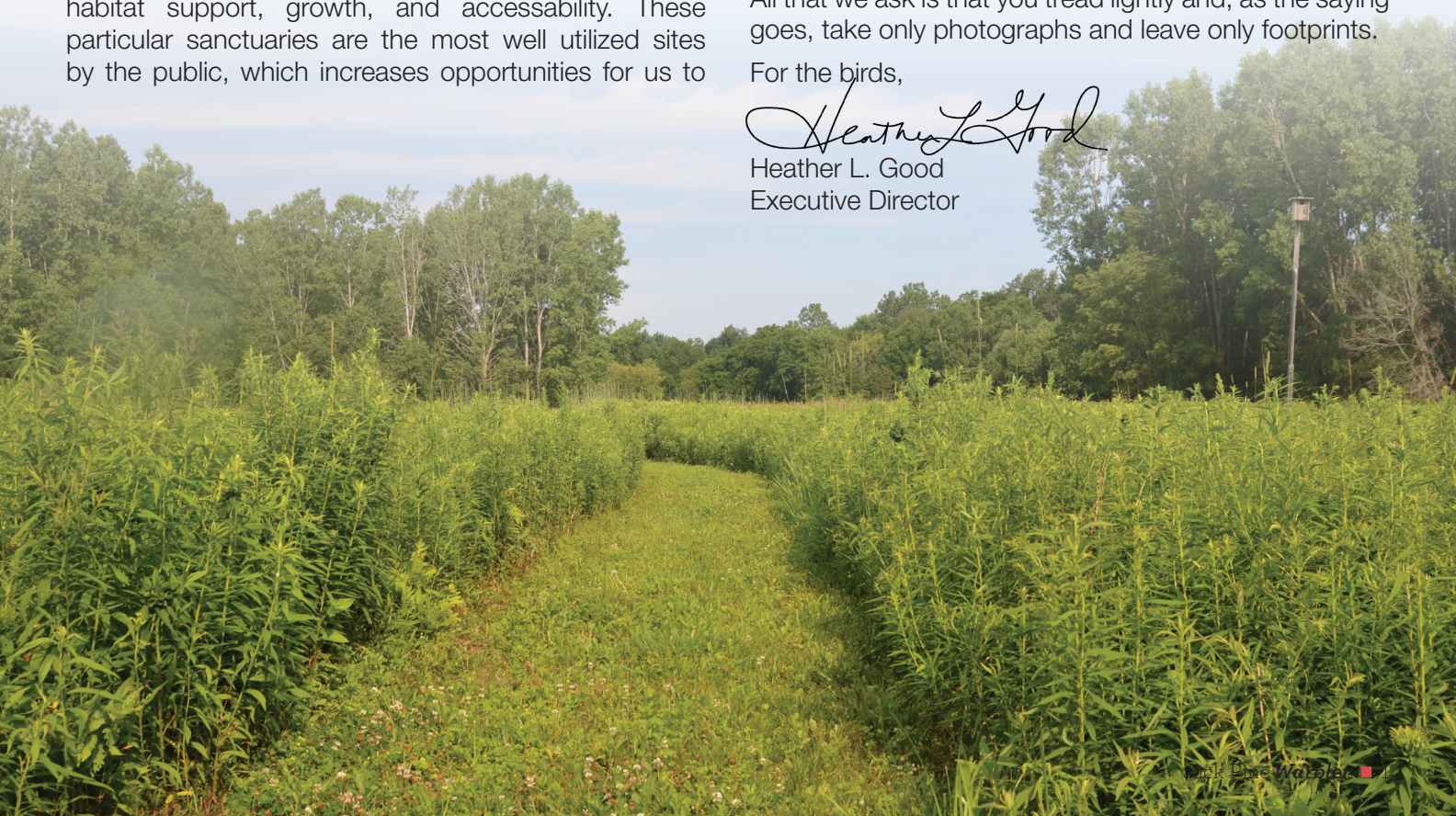
In this issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, Conservation Program Coordinator Linnea Rowse expands upon our signature sanctuaries to offer a better understanding of what and where these sites are and what we are doing to manage, promote, and care for them as important sites for birds and people. We often rely on our local chapters – many of which began as sanctuary management groups – to maintain our sanctuaries, as we can't do it all and we can't do it alone. This has long been the case with the beautiful, outstanding Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary and the long-standing support and dedication of the Jackson Audubon Society. We wouldn't be who or what we are without our chapters, and you'll see the proof in the pudding when you visit one of our signature sanctuaries.

I encourage you to include our sanctuaries on your visiting list as you bird, hike, or sit in nature throughout our great state; they are managed ecologically with habitat needs in mind of native plants, birds, and wildlife. All that we ask is that you tread lightly and, as the saying goes, take only photographs and leave only footprints.

For the birds,



Heather L. Good  
Executive Director





# Bird Banding

## An integral tool for studying birds

BY KIRBY ADAMS

The oldest Herring Gull ever recorded was an individual spotted in Michigan that was over 29 years old. A Piping Plover recently made the journey from the mouth of the Platte River in Sleeping Bear Dunes to Cumberland Island in Georgia in less than three full days. Thrushes and warblers eat lots of fruit during fall migration, and the dominance of exotic invasive shrubs in some areas impacts their nutrition.



Richard Keith inspects a Purple Martin chick before banding it.

Those are fascinating facts as anecdotes for conversation and as data for conservation, but how have we managed to gather these data from birds that don't file flight plans and are reluctant to reveal their age? The answer is bird banding, the process of capturing birds and fitting them with identifying markers, often bands worn on the legs. It's a scientific practice that's been going on in North America for more than a century, with several active banding stations and frequent temporary banding studies conducted here in Michigan.

How do you get a band on a bird's leg? The bird must

Unique banding tags allow identification of individual birds.

be captured first. With smaller birds, this is usually done with mist nets, very fine mesh nets that are virtually invisible and designed to gently and safely entangle a bird that flies into them. Nets are strategically positioned, usually before dawn, and once the birds start flying, some inevitably end up in the nets. Technicians check each net at regular intervals to ensure birds aren't left in the net for long. Then each bird is measured and weighed. A small feather may be sampled for DNA analysis. A band issued by the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory is affixed to the leg with a special tool, and the bird is released.



Richard Keith bands a Purple Martin chick.

Larger birds and waterfowl are usually trapped with cages. The Piping Plover chicks are just captured manually or fitted in the lab after being incubated and hatched, and hummingbirds, which require special training and permits because of their delicate size, are usually captured by hand after being confined in a cage around a feeder.

Bands on songbirds are typically metal and have a number code on them. When the bird is recaptured later, the banders can quickly know when and where it was originally banded, what its vital stats were, and all of the data for any other times it was recaptured as well. Shorebirds like the Piping Plovers often have color-coded bands in which the combination and placement of colors on each leg provides a unique signature for that individual. The colored bands are also visible enough to be seen easily in the field or with a photograph, meaning the birds can be tracked without ever being touched again.





Conservation Program Coordinator Linnea Rowse gives onlookers a closer look at feathers while banding.

If you find a dead bird with a band, or photograph one well enough to read the numbers, you can report it to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory at [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov). You'll even get a certificate for your contribution to science! Ornithologists love getting these kinds of data. Endangered species biologists, in particular, are always exceptionally excited to hear about a sighting of one of "their" birds on migration or wintering somewhere tropical. You may even find something truly stunning. It was a birder from Chicago who found the world's oldest known Herring Gull in Michigan after noticing a band in a photo he took.

The obvious question looming over the practice of banding birds is whether it causes undue stress to the birds. There's no arguing that the bird endures some stress when captured and banded, but there's no good evidence that bands cause any long-term health or behavioral issues for birds.

It's important to remember that a federal permit is required to band birds and anyone doing it needs to be well trained. A band applied improperly can lead to the loss of a foot or worse. A bird removed from a mist net carelessly can also suffer feather, wing, or foot damage. Visiting a banding station will reveal technicians who put bird safety above everything else. That is literally the first item in the bander's code of ethics, followed shortly



An example of color-coded bands on a Piping Plover at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. © Chris Neri

thereafter by "continually assess your own to ensure that is beyond reproach." Mishaps happen, of course, but they are rare. I've seen an entire study shut down for a day of retraining when one bird was injured by a misaligned trap. The image of banders being reckless wide-eyed ornithology students who just want to hold birds couldn't be further from the truth. Certainly, holding a bird in your hand is a wonderful experience, but most banders I've met love the release the most. You open your hand and the bird realizes it's free to go about its business, flying up to a nearby branch. It will typically preen a bit, and then, as confirmation things were done correctly, it usually goes back to eating and behaving as if nothing had just happened.

Someday we might be able to apply nano-transmitters to birds without having to capture them, and that will be a great innovation. Every field biologist is welcoming of, and looking for, advances in technique that both increase data collection ability and decrease impact on the study subjects. But until that level of technology becomes available and affordable, bird banding, combined with field observation, is the best thing we have to gather data. And while it's being practiced in several spots around the state, birders are missing out on an enlightening opportunity by not visiting a banding station that accepts visitors.

For more information, please visit the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory at [www.usgs.gov/centers/pwrc/science/bird-banding-laboratory](http://www.usgs.gov/centers/pwrc/science/bird-banding-laboratory).



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



# Signature Sanctuaries Offer Something Special

BY LINNEA ROWSE, CONSERVATION PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Since 1941, Michigan Audubon has been stewarding a network of bird sanctuaries throughout Michigan. These set-aside areas provide much-needed habitat for Michigan's birds and wildlife, as well as providing places for people to visit and connect with nature. Michigan Audubon's 18 bird sanctuaries comprise more than 3,500 acres combined, protecting rivers, lakes, marshes, bogs, fens, grasslands, hardwoods, and northern conifer forests. Here, we highlight our Signature Sanctuaries, those of which have high conservation value and also offer the most public accessibility.



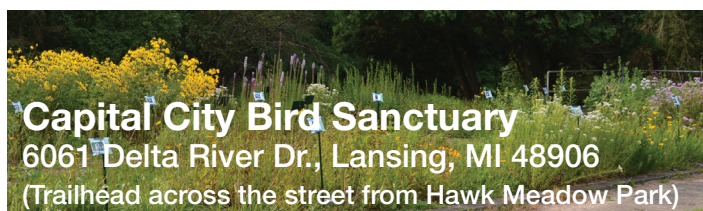
**Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary**  
21145 15 Mile Rd., Bellevue, MI 49021

Located in Calhoun County and encompassing 980 acres, the Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary is perhaps best known as a hotspot for Sandhill Crane every fall. With its 200-acre Big Marsh Lake and restored wetlands, this sanctuary supports thousands of migrating cranes every September through early November. The Baker Sanctuary also includes important habitats such as oak openings, floodplain forest, a tamarack swamp that hosted nesting Bald Eagle, and more. Recent habitat projects have focused on restoring grassland habitat through invasive plant control and with management techniques including prescribed burns. Recently, Trumpeter Swan have successfully nested on a pond viewable from the Baker trail system.



**Best time to visit:** Fall, into early November for crane viewing.

**Amenities:** Parking | Trails | No bathroom



**Capital City Bird Sanctuary**  
6061 Delta River Dr., Lansing, MI 48906  
(Trailhead across the street from Hawk Meadow Park)

Capital City Bird Sanctuary, in Delta Township near Lansing, is a 63-acre haven for wildlife. Along the Grand River, you will find a trail system that wanders through restored native grassland, wooded areas, floodplain forest, and shrublands. Capital City Bird Sanctuary also has lovely native wildflower gardens for birds and pollinators. Recently installed Purple Martin



housing (one at CCBS and a second across the road at Hawk Meadow Park) will hopefully soon draw in our Purple Martin friends. A Chimney Swift tower was also recently installed, which will provide nesting habitat for swifts, another aerial insectivore species that has been in steep population decline since the mid-1960s. Ongoing habitat restoration at CCBS includes control of reed canary grass, re-seeding of native grasses and wildflowers in the meadow, and control of invasive woody shrubs.



**Best time to visit:** Spring through fall to listen for and view breeding birds and visit native plant gardens.

**Amenities:** Trails | Bathroom and parking is available at Hawk Meadow Park



**Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary**  
3560 Havens Rd., Hastings, MI 49058

In June, Cerulean Warbler Weekend draws visitors to Otis with guided walks to seek out breeding forest birds on the sanctuary and caravan tours to nearby Barry State Game Area to search for Cerulean Warbler and Henslow's Sparrow. Habitat at Otis includes rolling grassland meadows, mature forest, marshland, kettle hole marshes, and more. Recently, a Purple Martin house was installed near Otis headquarters, with hopes to attract a new colony of martins. Notable bird species include Pileated Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bald Eagle, and more. The Eastern massasauga rattlesnake, a federally threatened species listed under the Endangered Species Act, is also being protected at Otis through habitat restoration work. This work includes invasive plant removal and control, re-seeding native grasses and wildflowers, and restoring the contiguity and extent of grassland by removal of trees and hedgerows which bisect grassland fields.



**Best time to visit:** May to early June to listen for and view breeding birds.

**Amenities:** Parking | Trails | No bathroom

**Other nearby sanctuaries:** *Ronald H. Warner Sanctuary, 700 Erway Rd., Hastings, MI 49058*



(approximate) Also adjacent to the Barry State Game Area, Warner features bird species such as Cerulean Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue-winged Warbler, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. This sanctuary is also very diverse botanically, with a number of threatened and endangered plant species within its old-growth wooded areas.



At 1,008 acres, this is the largest Michigan Audubon sanctuary. With the expansive wetlands of Mud Lake Marsh, thousands of Sandhill Crane flock here to rest and refuel



during their fall migration. Restoration of Haehnle's fen habitat has been ongoing for a couple of seasons – targeting a dense patch of European buckthorn that has overtaken the entire fen. Progress has been substantial and the fen is becoming visible again. Oak opening habitat restoration has been led by a crew of dedicated volunteers, resulting in oak forest regeneration. Native grassland restoration has also been a priority at Haehnle, with re-seeding native grasses, wildflowers, and legumes in order to support pollinators, insects, birds, and other wildlife. Monarch butterflies are specifically targeted with their host plants, milkweeds, and nectar-providing wildflowers with various species providing blooms and nectar throughout the spring, summer, and fall. A recently added 25-acre property (the Smith Property) at Haehnle will protect additional shoreline, wetlands, and regulate the water level of Eagle Lake, and seven acres of contiguous grassland were added to existing sanctuary grassland.

**Best time to visit:** Fall for viewing of Sandhill Crane and other fall migrants.



**Amenities:** Parking | Trails | No bathroom

**Other nearby sanctuaries:** *Kate Palmer Sanctuary, 1960 O'Brien Road, Jackson, MI 49201 (approximate)* The best time to visit is in late April to early May, as this sanctuary encompasses a richly diverse woodland area with beautiful spring wildflowers. This sanctuary is also one of the last places in Michigan where one may find shingle oak trees. *Voorhees Brothers Wildlife Sanctuary, 19500 24 Mile Rd., Albion, MI 49224* This sanctuary is mostly a beech-maple woodlot, with delightful spring wildflowers, and is home to forest birds such as Red-eyed Vireo, woodpeckers, and Acadian Flycatchers.

## Ongoing Conservation Priorities and Restoration

Grassland restoration has been a priority at several of the bird sanctuaries, to restore large, contiguous native grasslands for birds such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and American Kestrel, as well as other wildlife including Eastern massasauga rattlesnake. Wetland restoration has created and maintained quality habitat for Sandhill Crane and secretive nesting marsh birds.

Invasive species removal has been and will continue to be an important part of all habitat restoration projects.

Financial and logistical support from our partners – private organizations, state, and federal agencies – has made restoration efforts possible at Michigan Audubon sanctuaries.

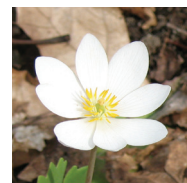
### Additional conservation work on the sanctuaries:

- Habitat restoration and invasive species control through volunteer workdays at sanctuaries provide much-needed time and attention to sanctuary maintenance and restoration projects;
- Education through events and learning opportunities such as nature walks, volunteer days, and workshops;
- Regular nest box monitoring during breeding season of a variety of cavity-nesting birds such as Black-capped Chickadee, Eastern Bluebird, Wood Duck, House Wren, and American Kestrel, all with nest box residences along the trails;
- Native plant gardens that attract many more insects than non-native plants and thereby provide ample food for birds, support pollinators, and inspire others to create at-home backyard bird gardens.

### Get involved!

Sanctuary steward volunteers provide much-needed help in maintaining our sanctuaries, and typical volunteer tasks may include trail maintenance, controlling invasive plants, monitoring or surveying birds, plants, or insects, and fundraising. We would love your help!

If you are interested in volunteering or visiting our bird sanctuaries, visit [www.michiganaudubon.org](http://www.michiganaudubon.org) and reach out to us for more information!



Linnea Rowse is Michigan Audubon's Conservation Program Coordinator. An avid birder who grew up in Minnesota, Linnea looks forward to becoming a part of the conservation community in Michigan. You can contact her at [lrowse@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:lrowse@michiganaudubon.org).



# Motus Towers Enhance Migration Research

BY BILL KRASEAN

Every spring some 450 bird species pass through Michigan on their way north for the summer. Many pause on their journey to breed and some merely use the state as a stop-over site to rest and add calories.

The passing parade of birds has long fascinated researchers as they study bird habits, health and needs by capturing and placing tiny metal bands on their legs. Recapturing individuals in the fall parade of birds has been a useful tool in monitoring the breeding and migratory habits of the various species.

This is more than a curiosity among bird buffs. Monitoring the health of bird species is a major way to monitor the health of the planet. The National Audubon Society notes that in the age of rapid climate change and changes in our natural landscape due to human activity, birds can be vital environmental indicators, telling us about the health of our ecosystems.

And while banding has been important, serendipity has played a major role in collecting information on birds — either by recapturing in bird banding nets to collect data on those that were previously banded or by examining those killed by cars or cats.

One of the many global researchers in these studies is Richard Keith, banding coordinator at the Kalamazoo Nature Center and operator/director of the Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory (KVBO).

Over more than three decades he and the KVBO have put the tiny metal bands on the legs for some 500,000 birds as part of that effort to monitor the health and life cycles of those 450 bird species that spend part or full time in Michigan. On his property alone in rural Portage and Vicksburg, Keith and the KVBO have banded nearly 200 bird species.

Given the limits of data available through banding, researchers have created a novel and ever-expanding project to monitor migratory birds. Rapidly spreading across the globe, Motus Wildlife Tracking System (Motus is Latin for movement) is a pioneering program of Bird Studies Canada (BSC), in partnership with collaborating researchers and organizations.

Motus utilizes miniaturized radio transmitters weighing less than 0.3 grams, which can be unobtrusively fitted onto the backs of birds, including those as small as warblers.

The transmitters, called tags, emit a short burst or pulse every 5–30 seconds, each with a unique numerical pattern.

These pulses are then picked up by automated very high frequency (VHF) receivers, usually mounted on towers, which can automatically detect and record signals from the tags at distances of up to 15 km.

As birds or other animals in the Motus project — bats and some large insects — pass within range of any receiver in the network, information is automatically recorded in the BSC's central database in Ontario and shared with other researchers. Keith said that each tag has a unique signature used to extract a massive level of detail about movement and behavior — such as how far the bird or other animal has traveled and how long they may pause in this part of the migration.

Thousands of tags can be simultaneously deployed and tracked within the system, which, as of June comprised nearly 350 receiving stations. Resembling oversized television aerials, the receivers can be fixed to existing structures such as towers or lighthouses, on trees, or on stand-alone poles that are around 30 feet in height.

The receivers can also be located out to sea; some receivers have already been placed on offshore oil and gas platforms in coastal Nova Scotia, Canada.

A number of Motus towers are already established on the east side of Michigan and along the southern side of Lake Erie — a popular migratory stop-over for hundreds of species.

Keith's local goal is to establish a line of towers across the southern portion of Michigan with the support of the Audubon Society of Kalamazoo.

Three towers have already been set up locally — one at his Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory and one each at Fort Custer and the Kalamazoo Nature Center.

“Traditional efforts to understand bird species populations has focused on breeding and wintering,” Keith said. “But that is a limited portion of a bird's life and vulnerabilities. They also spend a lot of time going to and fro in one area and migrating.”

Three years ago, while at an Eastern Bird Banders Association conference in Maryland, he heard about the Motus project and was instantly hooked. “I never dreamed that we could have that much knowledge on bird migration,” he said.

Knowledge, he said, that will help researchers understand how conservation efforts impact vulnerable groups such as neotropical migrants, grassland birds and freshwater marsh birds.





Installation of a Motus tower at Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory.

Photos by Bill Krasean

Currently, through efforts by the Kalamazoo Nature Center and the Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory, Kalamazoo County is “pretty-well covered” for collecting Motus information, he said.

Still, Keith is currently working on additional tower sites. John Ball Zoo in Grand Rapids, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, and Michigan Audubon have joined as partners in the Southern Michigan Motus Array.

“We can always use more sites,” he said.

While bird banding is a full-time job, Keith has no complaints. “Why take time off when I am doing what I love?” he said. Virtually every day, and especially from

Aug. 25 to Oct. 31, Keith captures birds and collects the information he needs to continue the banding research before sending them on their way.

For more information on Motus towers, visit [motus.org](http://motus.org).



Bill Krasean is a retired newspaper reporter who worked for nearly 30 years for the Kalamazoo Gazette, the last 20 covering science, health, and environmental issues.



## Bird by Bird Takes Off This Fall

As part of a continued focus on expanding youth education, Michigan Audubon selected the Bird by Bird program to integrate into a select number of classrooms this fall. Bird by Bird, a school program that works to bring birds to classrooms and classrooms to birds, was started in Idaho by a Michigan native. The program partners a classroom with a knowledgeable facilitator who visits once a month to give a lesson on a bird-related topic, helping students to learn about bird identification, bird conservation, habitat, and what it means to take care of native bird populations in Michigan.

How does the program work? First, interested teachers apply to be part of the program, pledging a commitment to incorporate birds into their lesson plans and to help facilitate the program in their classrooms. A feeding station is established on school grounds, a station the students are responsible for taking care of as they move through the school year and make observations about the birds that visit. The school year wraps up with a class project that

culminates what students have learned and how they can give back to birds through conservation efforts, feeding, nest box monitoring, citizen science, and the like. We are eager to see how the students’ knowledge and interests change by exposure to birds and all this program has to offer!



# Find Your Flock at the Great Lakes Young Birders

**M**ichigan Audubon, along with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Alma College, and Chippewa Nature Center, was proud to host the inaugural Great Lakes Young Birders Camp June 24-28. Thirteen campers, ranging from ages 13-18, travelled from throughout the state to add to their life lists, expand and share their birding skills and knowledge, and learn more about birds and conservation.

**Day One: Welcome** The camp began with bird-themed icebreakers and a lesson in birding etiquette. While the campers seemed a little hesitant at first, they eventually realized they had found a group of like-minded people with a love of birds that were their age range, a rarity to all of them.

**Day Two: Basic Bird Biology** Campers spent the morning banding with Mike Bishop of Alma College at Forest Hill Nature Area. With birds in hand, they were able to see field marks up close and learn about the different parts and structures of birds, as well as gain proficiency in bird identification. An afternoon trip to the Michigan State University Museum featured a behind-the-scenes look at their extensive collection of bird specimens and the ongoing avian exhibits.

**Day Three: Habitat and Ecology** The day commenced with a hike at Chippewa Nature Center with Jeanne Henderson, where everyone learned about the history of the site, the different habitats present, and invasive species management. It was a bountiful morning for birds, with a whopping 48 species being seen or heard. From there campers travelled to Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge to learn about wetland habitat management and restoration from the refuge managers. A colony of nesting Black Tern was a lifer for many campers and staff alike!

**Day Four: Bird Conservation** Campers awakened early



Campers enjoying the birds at Chippewa Nature Center.

for a trek up to Hartwick Pines State Park with hopes of catching a glimpse of a Kirtland's Warbler. While on a tour, they learned about the history of Kirtland's Warbler conservation efforts and the unique qualities of the jack pine ecosystem. To their delight, everyone had a great look at both male and female warblers. Before leaving the park, Kim Piccolo of the US Forest Service spoke about species-specific land management practices and shared various career paths for those interested in wildlife biology. During the return to Alma College, campers visited Wildlife Recovery Association, an avian rehabilitation center. Learning about the rehabilitation process and seeing rehab birds up close was a highlight for many campers. Several remarked that they felt like they were at Hogwarts in the Snowy Owl rehabilitation pen.

**Day Five: Putting it all Together** On the final day of camp, everyone returned to Forest Hill Nature Area to put their new skills to work and help band more birds. Following a successful morning of birding, Katie Koch of US Fish and Wildlife Service shared tips on how campers can live a bird-friendly lifestyle when they return home. Once back to campus, campers were joined by their families for a meal and "paper plate ceremony" where counselors, staff, and campers presented customized paper plate awards to highlight a strength or funny moment each person will be remembered by — "Giggling Goose," "Lady Hawk," and "The Bird Whisperer" to name just a few.

The week was an abundance of activities with so many highlights along the way — a discussion about eBird led by a camper, a raptor identification skills presentation from expert Josh Haas, and a nice dinner at a local farm-to-table restaurant that prioritizes sustainable food on its menu among them.

The experience was rewarding for campers and staff alike. A special thank you to our sponsors: Wild Bird Centers and Chippewa Valley Audubon; and our partners: Alma College, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Chippewa Nature Center.

The planning committee is looking forward to making next year's Great Lakes Young Birders Camp an even bigger success!

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



# Camp

BY LINDSAY CAIN, EDUCATION COORDINATOR

*I loved camp and never thought that I would meet other friends that loved and knew about birds like me! I thought going out into the field was very educational and made me feel like a biologist. I would participate in this camp again! ~ Lydia W.*

*I learned so much about why conserving birds is important, and the experience was incredible. Holding wild birds and getting the chance to learn different ways to identify them was so cool. I will definitely go next year! ~ Natalie W.*

*This camp was definitely the highlight of my summer! Having the opportunity to meet new people just like me and share my experiences with kids my age was so exciting and astonishing! ~ Ethan U.*

*The Great Lakes Young Birders Camp is a great opportunity for one to experience good birding, while also learning a great amount about birds, nature career paths, and making young birder friends. At camp you get to experience banding, educational presentations, and of course birding. Personally, I had a great time at this camp. ~ Travis K.*



Joe Rogers of Wildlife Recovery Association lets campers get an up-close look at a Peregrine Falcon.



Dr. Pam Rasmussen showcases the bird specimen collection at the MSU Museum.



Campers take photos of a leucistic bird that was banded before it is released.



Campers hit the trails for some birding at Chippewa Nature Center.



Campers, counselors, and leaders celebrate a week of birding together on the last day of camp.



Once the necessary data is recorded and the band has been placed, campers release a bird at Forest Hill Nature Area.

A camper reads the mist net for banding birds in the early morning hours at Forest Hill Nature Area.



# SUMMER OWL BANDING

BY CHRIS NERI, WPBO LEAD OWL BANDER

The summer of 2018 marked the thirteenth year of Whitefish Point Bird Observatory's (WPBO) summer owl research. The season ran from July 1 to Aug. 25 and we were able to band on 49 of the 56 nights during this period. We banded a total of 135 owls and captured five that had been previously banded. The 135 owls we banded were comprised of 104 Northern Saw-whets and 31 Long-eareds, all five of the previously banded owls were Saw-whets. Of the 104 Northern Saw-whet Owls (NSWO), 33 were adults and 71 were juveniles. It is the juvenile NSWO that are the main focus of the summer owl research. It is also the juvenile NSWO that make up the bulk of the owls we have banded in this project. We have now banded 3,799 owls in July and August since starting this project in 2006. Of these, 2,940 (77%) have been juvenile NSWO, so naturally the number of owls we band in a given summer is largely dependent on where NSWO are in their reproductive cycle.

Saw-whets are on a 4- to 5-year breeding cycle that is associated with their main prey item, which is mice. When the prey population booms, NSWO are naturally able to produce a lot of young. When it crashes, they produce fewer young. Last summer their reproduction peaked and we banded 426 juveniles. As was the case in the summers that followed the two previous peaks we have experienced, breeding success immediately crashed

this year following last year's peak. The two previous peaks occurred in 2007 and 2012, and were followed immediately by crashes in the summers of 2008 and 2013 when 60 and 59 juveniles respectively. So, while the down years are always disappointing, especially coming off the peak years, at least we were prepared for it. The juvenile numbers then effectively build up every year until they reach their next peak. The one exception to this trend was the summer of 2015, when the juveniles suddenly dropped to their lowest total of 50 very unexpectedly right in the middle of the breeding cycle, then bounced right back to expected numbers in 2016. Hopefully we won't experience another hiccup like we did in 2015 as the NSWO breeding success starts to climb back up to the next peak.

We continue to be very pleased with the Long-eared Owl (LEOW) results in the summer since we made some changes in 2015. Last summer we banded 103 LEOW, which shocked even us. We had only banded a combined total of 52 in the previous 11 summers. So, while their numbers were down from last summer, we still consider the 31 banded this summer very successful. While the summer numbers aren't as high as the spring's, the last two summers have each produced more LEOW than have ever been banded in a fall season at WPBO. The fact that the more LEOW can be banded here in the



The main focus of WPBO's summer owl research, a juvenile Northern Saw-whet Owl. © Chris Neri



An eight-year-old Northern Saw-whet Owl that was originally banded at WPBO on her second spring migration in March 2012 made a return visit to the Point this summer. © Chris Neri





summer than in the fall is baffling. Another aspect of the summer that is surprising, is the high percentage of adult NSWOW recaptures we get. Five (13%) of the 38 adult NSWOW captured this season were already banded, that is high compared to what we get in spring or fall. The most exciting of these was one that was banded here by owl bander Nova Mackentley in March of 2012. We know from the original banding data that she hatched in 2010 and was 8 years old when we saw her again this summer!

So, although it was a down season, it was expected to be so and the 71 juvenile NSWOW is actually the highest total for a down year and we continue to see a high rate of recaptures in the adults that we catch in the summer. The 31 LEOW banded shows continued success in the changes we made in 2015. I was also lucky enough to have Ryan Steiner as my banding partner again this summer. Ryan also did the summer banding in 2015 and there was something very special about seeing him banding with a wedding band on this season. In 2015, his then girlfriend

Eliana visited for a few nights. Eliana is a biologist from Colombia and she and Ryan met on a field job in Borneo. Between net checks during her visit in 2015, she and Ryan walked out to the shore of Lake Superior where he proposed to her. You never know what the owl banders are up to in the middle of the night! It's very cool that Whitefish Point has a part in their very interesting story. As always, we thank all of you who support WPBO's long-term owl research through your financial support. It very simply would not be possible without your generosity.



Chris Neri arrived at WPBO in 1999. Chris had 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."



# 2018 Kirtland's Warbler Tour Season:

## A tour guide's perspective

BY JIM DAWE

It's 6:20 a.m. as I roll into the parking lot of the Hartwick Pines State Park visitor center near Grayling. I step out of the car and into the early morning sounds of the forest around me – Red-eyed Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Scarlet Tanagers, Black-throated Green Warblers, and several others species fill the air with song. As I unlock the front door of the visitor center I notice that a Blackburnian Warbler has joined the chorus and a Barred Owl is now hooting in the distance. I take a deep breath, smell the cool, fresh morning air, and enter the building.

I turn on the lights, gather up my supplies, sit down behind the desk, and wait. Tour participants begin to arrive almost immediately. Some walk right up to the desk to pay their fees and chat about the tour, but most are drawn to the window feeders and the birds (especially the Evening Grosbeaks) that are now arriving in force. Eventually 18 people sign in for the tour – a little above average for this year. The participants range widely in age and experience – some are world-class birders, many are



Nearly 600 people came from around the world to join a Kirtland's Warbler tour in hopes of getting a glimpse of the songbird.

beginners, and a few are nonbirders here simply out of curiosity. This year, about half of the 587 tour participants were Michiganders, but the rest came from all over the world. Tour participants represented 33 different U.S. states, and 19 participants were international visitors from as far away as Mumbai, India. But regardless of where they come from, all share one thing in common – the hope of seeing a Kirtland's Warbler.

At 7 a.m. I lead the participants into the classroom and introduce myself (retired biology teacher, local resident, long-time birder) and start the video detailing the plight, ecology, and habitat management of the Kirtland's Warbler. When the video is finished I update everyone about the bird's current status and the pros and cons concerning its upcoming endangered species delisting. This generates a lively discussion concerning future funding, new KIWA management practices, the decline of cowbird parasitism, the great Mack Lake fire...and then I draw everyone's attention back to this morning's tour. Maps to the tour site are handed out, the convoy organized, and soon the participants are all in their cars, lined up and ready to go.

Our destination is Hay Marsh Creek Trail, a sandy two-track that runs through an extensive KIWA habitat that lies on either side of Chase Bridge Road in southeast Crawford County. The drive takes a half-hour and when we arrive our party assembles

at the trail entrance. I present the KIWA habitat "rules" – no stepping off the trail road, no playbacks, no "pishing" – and we're off.

The group proceeds quietly down the trail. I begin teaching – the jack pines here are 10 years old, the course sand beneath us is hundreds of feet deep, the warblers build their nests on the ground, males sing to protect their paternity, we're hearing a Hermit Thrush, that was a Nashville Warbler, these are birdfoot violets – and then we hear our first Kirtland's Warbler. The bird is near but invisible within the dense pines. We spread out along the trail; the bird moves, and moves again. A few catch glimpses; I reassure the group that we will ALL get good looks.

Suddenly, it pops up on the top branch of a pin cherry no more than 10 meters in, singing its heart out. People freeze, binoculars rise, many are on it in seconds. But just as suddenly it drops and disappears. The disappointment is palpable – some did not get good looks, some no looks at all. "Patience," I say. "They're not shy, they're bold and cheeky little birds. Besides, this guy's on territory, he's not going anywhere." Abruptly, he's singing again, closer than before; everyone's looking, listening...then he pops up, this time at the top of a jack pine right next to the trail. No one misses him this time – there's oohing, aahing, cameras clicking. The bird flutters, turns, and goes on singing. I get him in my spotting scope for those who want an even better look; wide-open grins and high-fives abound. And the little fella keeps right on singing. The gentleman to my right, a retired doctor from Tulsa, turns to me, smiles, and says, "I spent a thousand dollars to get this bird, and it's worth every penny!"

The warbler eventually moves off, but the tension has lifted. We got our Kirtland's Warbler, and we got him well. We continue down the trail, and over the next hour get great looks at three more males and even a female. Folks relax, chat, show each other their photos, and start ambling back towards their vehicles, parting with smiles and handshakes. There are no lifers for me today, of course, but I was able to help a great many others get theirs. And once again I realize that I really love this job. I knew it would be interesting, but I didn't expect it to be so fun and rewarding as well; two of the most fulfilling endeavors of my life have been teaching and birding, and as the Kirtland's Warbler tour guide, I get to do both.



Jim Dawe is a retired biology teacher, avid birder, and former member of the Michigan Bird Records Committee. He lives with his wife Linda in a big house in the middle of the woods south of Mio, Mich., where he tends his perennial gardens, reads, draws, plays music, and entertains his grandchildren.



# Smartphone App Aids in Duckling Rescue

BY WILLIAM RAPAI

If you Google “duck rescue storm drain” the search engine will return a seemingly endless list of stories and videos of firefighters and good Samaritans across North America getting down and dirty in a (mostly) successful effort to save Mallard ducklings that have fallen into storm sewers and other drains.

For the most part, a duckling rescue involves removing a storm grate and scooping the ducks from the bottom of the drain by hand or with a bucket, net or rake while the mother paces nervously nearby. Occasionally, a rescuer will risk their health by entering the storm drain to scoop the ducklings out by hand. One rescue, on June 4, 2018, in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich., put a high-tech twist on a duckling rescue that is the 21st century version of a firefighter rescuing a cat from a tree.

The Mallard is a widespread duck species and it is common to find it nesting in urban areas. Females may go up to a half-mile from a body of water to find what they believe is a suitably safe location to lay eggs and incubate. What is safe to a female Mallard might appear to be crazy to a human. Mallard nests have been found on the bottom of rowboats, in planters on back porches and patios, and in vegetation strips in parking lots. They have also been found in trees and on rooftops, which is confounding to us humans because the newborn ducks are unable to fly.

Even though a female Mallard might find a nesting location she deems safe, the urban area is still full of dangers for her and her brood. There are dogs and cats to avoid. When the adult female leads her ducklings to water, they all too often need to cross a major road. And then there are storm sewers, which have grate openings too small to swallow an adult Mallard but large enough to allow newly hatched ducklings to fall through.

In the Grosse Pointe Farms rescue, six ducklings fell down a storm sewer in the parking lot of a large Episcopal church. It's the same location where city firefighters and police officers struggled to rescue a different brood two years previous. The 2018 rescue, however, had a twist: the ducklings were rescued with the help of a smartphone app.

From an office inside the church, an employee helplessly watched the female Mallard crossing the sewer grate and ducklings, following close behind, fall through. She immediately called the City of Grosse Pointe Farms for help. The first officer on the scene heard the ducks calling from the sewer and removed the 50-pound grate and entered down a built-in ladder. Unfortunately, as soon as the ducklings saw the human at the top of the sewer, five of the six scurried down an attached drainpipe; he was able to grab only one duckling and return it to the surface. With two other first responders now on the scene, they quickly concluded that containing the ducks in this one pipe was their only chance to rescue them; if they escaped into other pipes it was likely they would be lost for good.

Luckily, a manhole some 30 yards away gave officers access to the other end of the pipe. Working with other officers and a worker from the city's Department of Public Works the 250-pound cover was removed and Lt. Holly Krizmanich climbed down and covered that end of the pipe with a net.

The officers first tried luring the ducklings out with crackers. When that didn't work, the officers tried herding the ducklings down the pipe and into a net by tapping a shovel against the sewer wall to make a loud noise. When that was judged unsuccessful, they asked the fire department to spray water from a fire truck down the pipe in hopes moving the ducklings with the force of the water. Unfortunately, that did not work either.

At this point the officers had been on the scene for an hour and were reaching their wit's end. That's when Grosse Pointe Farms Public Safety Officer Frank Zielinski remembered the bird call app on his smartphone. On the previous day he and his young daughter used the app to attract birds to their yard. Zielinski downloaded the call of a female Mallard then held the phone above the sewer to make it appear that mother duck was calling her young from street level above. Down in the sewer, there was just enough room for the officer to stand to one side of the drainpipe's exit so that the ducklings could not see his feet and detect his presence.

It worked! About a minute after Zielinski started the recording, four ducks came swimming out of the pipe and were scooped up and returned to the surface by Lt. Krizmanich. That left one stubborn/exceedingly wise duckling still in the pipe. Seeing how the recorded Mallard sound worked, one of the officers on the surface tried mimicking the whistling sound that was being made by the nearby mother Mallard. That whistle was enough to lure the last one out of hiding and into the hands of the waiting officer.

The last time mother Mallard and her ducklings were seen, they were headed for Lake St. Clair.

The officers, meanwhile, shook hands and departed the area with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Technology is a helpful tool in our lives, but a personal sense of a job well done? There's no app for that.



William Rapai is chair of the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance. He is also the author of *The Kirtland's Warbler; The Story of a Bird's Fight Against Extinction and the People Who Saved It*, published in 2013 by University of Michigan Press.





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.

Barbara Anderson	Carol Martin
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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!

## Save These Dates!

### 2018 Events

CraneFest | Oct. 13-14  
WPBO Fall Owl Banding | Sept. 15–Oct. 31  
WPBO Fall Waterbird Count | Aug. 15–Nov. 15  
120th Christmas Bird Count | Dec. 14–Jan. 5, 2019

### 2019 Winter & Spring Events

Winter Birding in the Eastern UP | Jan. 19–20  
Winter Birding in the Eastern UP | Feb. 9–10  
Great Backyard Bird Count | Feb. 15–18  
WPBO Spring Hawk Count | Mar. 15–May 31  
WPBO Spring Owl Banding | Mar. 15–May 31  
WPBO Spring Waterbird Count | Apr. 15–May 31  
Michigan Audubon Annual Meeting | Mar. 16  
Spring Fling | Apr. 27–28  
Tawas Point Birding Festival | May 16–18  
Cerulean Warbler Weekend | June 1–2  
MA Kirtland's Warbler Tours | June 1–30

Please check the Michigan Audubon website for additional events and more details as they become available.