

Jack Pine *Warbler*

FALL: Bald Eagles Face New Threats ■ Bird Photography Ethics ■ WPBO: Summer Owls and Piping Plovers
Tawas Point Migration 2020 ■ Michigan Young Birders Camp Fosters Next Generation ■ Kirtland's Warbler Tours



Jack Pine Warbler

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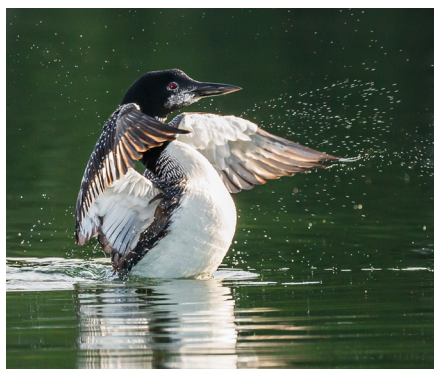
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Cover Photo ■ Common Loon

Photographer: Cari Povenz

Cari Povenz is a widely published, award-winning photographer from West Michigan who shares a passion for bird/nature photography with her husband Joe. She is the owner of Following the Light Photography (followingthelightphotography.com). Last fall, Cari had the experience of a lifetime with seven Common Loons on a lake in northern Michigan. At dawn, she grabbed her 100-400mm lens and rowed to the center of the lake, dropped the oars, and sat quietly. Cari never expected the far-off loons to surround her boat and become so comfortable. As first light streamed across the lake, one of the loons did a wing flap right in front of her.

Thank you to Cari Povenz for submitting this wonderful image for the 2019 *Jack Pine Warbler* cover photo contest. If you have photographs you would like considered for inclusion in future issues of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, please contact Communications & Marketing Coordinator Molly Keenan at mkeen@michiganaudubon.org or (517) 580-7364.

Contents

Features

2-4

Bald Eagles Face New Threats

5-6

Bird Photography Ethics

8-9

WPBO: Piping Plover Monitoring

Columns

10

WPBO: Summer Owl Banding

11

Mark Your Calendars!

12

Michigan Young Birders Camp Fosters Next Generation

13

A Successful Season of Kirtland's Warbler Tours

Departments

1

From the Executive Director

1

Remembering Hugh Zernickow

7

Tawas Point Migration 2020

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 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.

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From the Executive Director

The Impact You Have

In this issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, we think about the lessons from history as they relate to the human dimensions of wildlife. We reflect on our second year of hosting the weeklong Michigan Young Birders Camp. We celebrate the successful fledging of a clutch of Piping Plovers at Whitefish Point. We revel in another successful, research-driven season of banding owls. We share with you changes to our events, to our programs and projects, and demonstrate how Michigan Audubon as an organization is adapting to changes in our environment in a mission-driven way that we believe is needed more than ever. Running a nonprofit conservation organization at this time in history, I believe I have never more seen the daily truth of the Heraclitus quote, "Change is the only constant."

Birds are facing many grave concerns, as well as native wildlife, their habitats, and human rights. It occurs to me that I am writing this column for our members, for supporters of Michigan Audubon. I realize that your time is precious, that our attention spans have changed and dwindled to some degree; that we are overstimulated in this world and in unique ways. We are stimulated to be concerned and to act so constantly, to exercise our values and our voices. To help.

We choose to give time, attention, resources, and support to the organizations and efforts that we believe in, that effectively translate our values to action on a larger scale. I want to acknowledge how that is helping. That is activism. Your support does translate to changes, and as we as an organization face more legislative involvement and advocacy demands than ever, I can say that with absolute, firsthand knowledge.

The fact that you are reading this is a testament to your dedication to conservation, education, and research in the state of Michigan, to Michigan Audubon's mission of connecting birds and people

for the benefit of both. In a changing climate on many levels, not only atmospheric but social and everything in-between, many organizations and institutions alike are witnessing their membership levels dwindle. Michigan Audubon has remained strong and steady in our membership base, and I appreciate your membership. We appreciate your support and what it means and does, not only for our work but for our mission to be actualized.

Thank you for helping us to be as impactful as we can be as a nonprofit. For choosing to be a member. For staying connected. For continuing to give, to read, to reach out, and to be involved. I suspect you and I both rely on birds and the natural world as a resource that gives back not only in terms of recreation and enjoyment but for 'filling our cups' at such a difficult time in history. Thank you for continuing to celebrate birds, and for being a part of our efforts to impact history in our state for the sake of our birds and the incredible breadth of habitats our state possesses.



Heather L. Good, Executive Director



Remembering Hugh Zernickow

Audubon and cranes lost a good friend Aug. 6 when Hubert Peter Zernickow passed away at age 97. After many years of good health, he fell requiring a hip replacement and then suffered a series of setbacks before being transferred to Henry Ford Allegiance Hospice Center in Jackson. Hugh served as president of the Michigan Audubon Society from 1976 to 1978, and previously as vice president and chairman of the Finance Committee. He also served as president of Jackson Audubon Society, was a compiler of the Waterloo Christmas Bird Count, and served from its formation on the Haehnle Committee. Hugh was a

strong advocate of the Haehnle Sanctuary, volunteering at workbees, making weekly crane counts during the fall, and providing sound advice and financial support. Photography was among his other many interests, especially using Leica equipment. His wife, Norene, preceded him in death. He is survived by grandson John Hoyer and wife Laura, and a great grandson, Chris. Honoring his wishes, there was no funeral or memorial service. However, memorials may be given for the Haehnle Sanctuary.

Bald Eagles Face New Threats

BY HEATHER GOOD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Everyone loves a Bald Eagle. I can tell you from personal experience working with multiple bird conservation organizations that this is one bird that impresses people so consistently that their popularity is demonstrated to me on an almost daily basis. Despite the fact that they are now a rather common sighting in our state — something I'll get to later — many people consider sighting a Bald Eagle an exciting, even rare experience (depending on their familiarity with birds, experience, location in the state, etc.). And children are no exception. Last year, I received several requests in the mail from children for quotes and information about Bald Eagles for school presentations, projects, and more. It's no wonder, of course; eagles are beautiful, symbolic, and powerful. Their size, power, appearance, and symbolism can stop us in our tracks and draw us in, whether it's our fifth or five thousandth sighting.

There is a universal appreciation of charismatic megafauna for good reason. Charismatic megafauna are animal species that tend to be large and/or high on the food chain (think elephants, polar bears, and yes — Bald Eagles) that tend to hold widespread appeal, symbolism. This is the case for many

predators — their characteristics, behaviors, and symbolism appeal to and impress us. Unfortunately, these same unique features of predators that impress us can lead to a desire to hunt them for sport, a reality the Bald Eagle population experienced in the United States for many decades. This history of hunting Bald Eagles for sport as well as for the alleged protection of fishing grounds worked in conjunction with widespread pesticide use to drive the Bald Eagle to near extinction throughout most of its range. Today, the Bald Eagle is an obvious, memorable wildlife conservation success story, as most of us know. This bird bounced back with such force in certain states that we are still praising this conservation win.

Even after the timely, much-needed passage of the Bald Eagle Protection Act in 1940 that addressed sport hunting concerns, the widespread use of pesticides like DDT virtually decimated Bald Eagle populations in Michigan. DDT, or dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, a synthetic insecticide that was widely used to control insects, was utilized on a variety of crops as well as in buildings for pest control. DDT became such a popular pesticide because it is effective, relatively inexpensive to manufacture, and lasts a long time in



Bald Eagle © Josh Haas

the environment¹. While DDT is sadly still used in certain countries, DDT was canceled by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 1972².

We owe much to Rachel Carson and her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, which reports how bird populations across the country were suffering as a result of the widespread use of DDT. Carson reported that birds ingesting DDT tended to lay thin-shelled eggs, which would in turn break prematurely in the nest, resulting in marked population declines. The problem drove Bald Eagles, our national symbol, not to mention Peregrine Falcons and other bird populations, to the brink of extinction, with populations plummeting more than 80 percent³. After avoiding extinction, the Bald Eagle population across the United States has been recovering since the 1970s, coinciding with the ban of DDT in the U.S. and with the 1972 passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

In Michigan, we approximate that the number of nesting pairs of Bald Eagles has doubled in the past 15 years. At one point, the Great Lakes state reported fewer than 40 pairs of nesting eagles. Today, after marked progress and collaborative management, we can celebrate the number of nesting eagles exceeding 800 pairs in Michigan, which is about half of the Great Lakes region population. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most recent estimate is 143,000 Bald Eagles nationwide. With this and virtually every other conservation success story, however, we celebrate with caution, awareness, and integration of these lessons from ecology that can result in best wildlife management practices.

Recovery doesn't mean erasure, especially where pollution is concerned. And recovery can be reversed more quickly than we imagine, especially when necessary policies and practices aren't in place. Our work doesn't stop after a species recovers, and our work as conservationists, citizens, voters, and consumers is a daily job that bears consequences for wildlife and their habitat. As long as humans are coexisting with wildlife, there will be threats to wildlife. And as long as policies threaten protections to wildlife, there will be a need for citizen science.

On a policy level, there are trends and changes on a national level that call upon our concern and action. President Donald Trump's interior secretary recently rescinded an Obama-era rule banning lead shot for shotgun shells and lead sinkers used in fishing. Add to that the fact that, in 2018, the U.S. Department of Interior lifted the ban on hunting with lead bullets on wildlife refuges (it's still illegal to



Bald Eagle fishing. © Marilyn Kiegley

use lead ammunition when hunting waterfowl). The overall use of lead in sport hunting and fishing is a tremendous concern for the environment as a whole, not only for Bald Eagles. Let's be clear: no amount of lead in our environment is acceptable or normal. So what is the logic behind using lead ammunition in hunting? The same logic farmers used when they applied DDT to crops: it's cheap and effective. And, like DDT, lead poisoning poses a dire threat to our national emblem, the Bald Eagle.

What does lead poisoning look like in a Bald Eagle?

Since lead is a potent neurotoxin, an affected eagle may appear disoriented, unable to stand, and could show convulsions, head tremors, labored breathing, and signs of dehydration. Lead paralyzes their gut, so once an eagle is poisoned by lead, they soon won't be able to digest food. Biologists and researchers are working to address the disturbing trend of the increased lead-related deaths in eagles. The number of lead poisoning cases reported by wildlife rehabbers has doubled in the past few years.

In August of 2019, wildlife rehabber Jerry Maynard, co-founder of the Chocoday Raptor Center in Marquette, Mich., reported taking in a sick Bald Eagle with an "astonishingly high blood lead level" that "was likely a result of the bird consuming fish that had ingested lead fishing tackle"⁴. Maynard said it's important for hunters and anglers to understand the dangers of lead tackle and ammunition, and to consider using alternatives.

continued on page 4

What can we do?

I can tell you with confidence that we at Michigan Audubon are putting our resources to work on an advocacy and legislative level to promote the adoption of policies at the state level to help reinforce environmental protection and bird conservation concerns related to lead. Awareness, education, and outreach are vital components of this work. If you or someone you know participates in hunting or fishing, talk to them about avoiding lead ammunition. Help us spread the word and help us gather information while we work to secure better protections for birds and their habitat. If you see a Bald Eagle in Michigan that appears sick or as though it is exhibiting signs of lead poisoning, immediately contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in your area. You can find a complete list of wildlife rehabilitators at www.michigandnr.com/dlr. For your safety, do not attempt to help the eagle yourself. While many birds with lead poisoning will die, some are rehabilitated. Others are put to rest or euthanized by a qualified rehabilitator or biologist. The birds who do not survive lead poisoning remain vital for research and monitoring as well. If you find a dead Bald Eagle or observe an eagle along the roadway that appears dead, report this to the USFWS by using the form found at www.fws.gov/midwest/eastlansing/eagle/eagleform.html. You can also let us know at Michigan Audubon by emailing birds@michiganaudubon.org.

I think back to my first reading, 20 years ago, of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. What moved me about this book had so much to do with Carson and the story of how a scientist's findings, a woman's voice, a conviction to protect wildlife and sound the alarm so widely — despite sexism and myriad other forms of resistance to her and her work — not only saved many species from extinction, but also essentially kick-started the environmentalist movement in our country. We have, in the environmentalist literary canon, a breadth of wisdom and examples we can return to, learn from, and integrate into who we are and how we live. Join me in reading this, in being reminded of the importance of action, and staying the course for conservation.

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



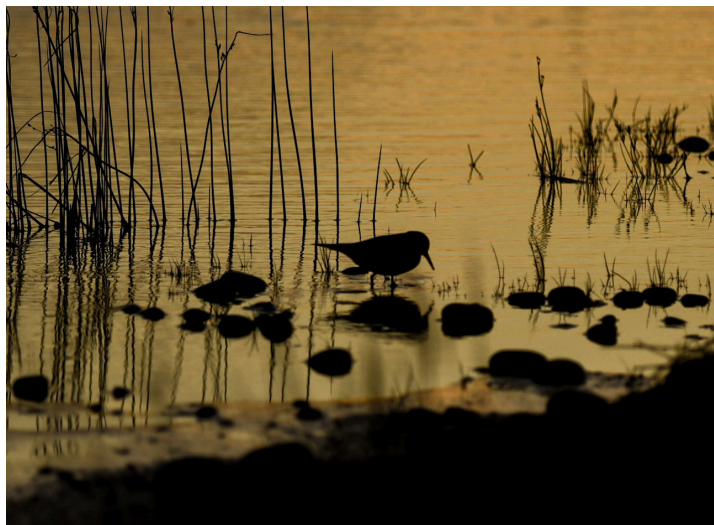
Bird Photography Ethics

BY ALISON VILAG, WPBO WATERBIRD COUNTER

In mid-August, I was parked up at Whitefish Harbor. It was evening and a storm threatened; while waiting for the WPBO owl banders to begin their day, I consumed wild blueberries by the handful to pass the time. It was a lovely evening. I watched a boy climb from a pickup down at the far end of the lot. With smartphone cocked and ready, he approached an adult Bald Eagle perched atop a weathered pine. The boy was neither cautious nor thoughtful in tactic; not surprisingly, the eagle flushed while the boy was still well out-of-range for any sort of smartphone photo. I watched the bird disappear and sat there, munching blueberries, remembering a story for *Jack Pine Warbler* on photography ethics that I needed to be writing...

Now is a ripe time to be thinking about how we can be responsible creators (and consumers!) of bird photography. From smartphone-tailored digiscoping adaptors to comprehensive DSLR outfits, we have a wide array of equipment options, at our disposal, all capable of producing high-quality photos. We also inhabit a culture where many, myself included, enjoy showcasing their work through online communities like Facebook and Instagram.

I don't attempt to masquerade as a photographer. However, I do have a nice camera and lens I enjoy using, have been birding for most my life, and spent a few years guiding, sometimes for clients who were accomplished bird photographers. All this has provided ample opportunity to consider how I can ethically approach my subjects. When photographing a bird, respecting it — and the habitat it occupies — takes top priority to me. It is



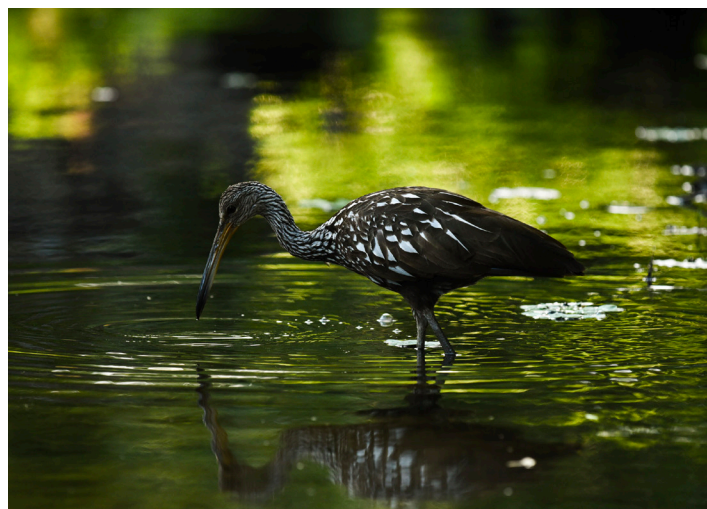
A Baird's Sandpiper combs the shore at Whitefish Point this fall. It is especially important to not disturb the shorebirds using wetlands as they are resting and refueling during migration. © Alison Vilag

not right to impart avoidable stress to a bird that could compromise its physical needs, such as resting during migration or feeding chicks.

In unpacking some of my practices, I hope to encourage a space where you can consider your own...

First off, respect the bird while you are photographing it!

- I familiarize myself with the species I am targeting; learn alarm calls and distress signals. This makes it easier to ascertain the impact of my presence.



A Limpkin foraging in Florida's Loxahatchee River. © Alison Vilag

- When I've located a bird I intend to photograph, I am careful to be quiet and slow in movement. Last spring, I was canoeing Florida's Loxahatchee River and encountered a Limpkin. I pulled out of the current, let the bird get comfortable, and approached incrementally, pausing often. (As an aside, a careful approach to your subject often facilitates the chance to document interesting behaviors — to me, this creates more appealing photographs; in this case, I got some neat shots of the Limpkin foraging!) It's important to take the same caution you used in the approach when leaving your subject, too. Just because you got the photo does not mean you can disturb the bird as you move on to whatever is next. Patience is key.

- There are many opinions on playback. I don't like it — it just doesn't sit quite right that I am distracting a bird from whatever it was doing so that it can defend its territory against an imaginary rival for my superficial purposes. The American Birding Association's Code

continued on page 6

of Ethics also cautions against inappropriate use of playback, saying to “limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas or for attracting any species that is threatened, endangered, of special concern, or is rare in your local area.” This same code of ethics mentions using a blind (vehicles work well for this in some settings) and using flash photography sparingly.



After accidentally flushing this Spruce Grouse, Alison sat down and allowed the bird time to determine that she was not a threat and to become at ease with her presence. © Alison Vilag

- **Baiting:** It is well-known that, especially with owls, photographers will use live mice to draw the bird nearer and get flight shots. There is a slew of valid reasons to denounce this practice: baiting places the target bird in a potentially dangerous situation (I have seen owl photographers in the Upper Peninsula placing mice so that the hawk-owl has to fly across a road to get the bait); baiting establishes unnatural behaviors in owls on winter territories; there is the chance that bait animals may introduce invasive pathogens into the ecosystem. “Why You Shouldn’t Feed or Bait Owls” written by Scott Weidensaul and accessible via Audubon Society’s website, is a good read on this subject.

- **Respect the habitat!** Don’t remove twigs or vegetation to create a clearer shot, and don’t venture off-trail, particularly in sensitive ecosystems, to achieve a better angle.

On respecting the bird after you’ve photographed it:

- When dealing with a sensitive species, especially one using a site that gets heavy birder/photographer traffic, keep the location undisclosed: don’t tell people, don’t post it to eBird, and don’t reference the location if you are featuring the photo on social media.

On consuming other people’s work:

- In particular, this applies to interactive online photo-sharing communities. Instagram and other social media sites are wildly popular right now; they can be guilty parties in the despoiling of wild areas and the organisms that inhabit them. Remember the superbloom events in California and Big Bend this spring? The popularity of these photos culminated in thousands of people destroying the very fields of flowers they found so beautiful, as they sought to create their own photo.

- When browsing photos shared online, I am intentional to only support photographers who seem to create their art ethically. One thing, in particular, I look for is the amount of backstory included with the photo. If the photographer is open about how they created the shot, and what they’re saying aligns with my practices, then I can support their work. If it is an owl photo, I look to see if bait was used.

We are all part of a world increasingly riddled by so many environmental uncertainties. I find it important to be purposefully thoughtful in how we can more kindly treat our non-human surroundings, even on a small scale. Photographing birds ethically falls under this practice.

Further references I have used to shape my approach include the ABA Code of Ethics (aba.org/ethics), and various productions of renowned conservation photographer and writer Melissa Groo (melissagroo.com; in particular, I recommend her article “Ethics from Empathy”). Thank you for reading — happy shooting!



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

A Snowy Owl perches on the ice at Whitefish Point this spring. WPBO field staff made sure to respect the bird by both not approaching closely, and also refraining from telling others of its presence. © Alison Vilag

The Evolution of Tawas Point Birding Festival



Blackburnian Warbler seen at TPBF in 2019. © Kathy Burgis

Fourteen years ago, Michigan Audubon and one of its chapters, AuSable Valley Audubon (then called Iosco Audubon), decided to collaborate in creating an event for birders to help put Tawas and Iosco County on the map for birding, particularly during spring migration in Michigan.

We recognized the opportunity to draw more people to this magnificent birding hotspot during spring migration in order to connect people and birds for the benefit of both. That initial idea in 2006 evolved into a collective effort that also involved the Tawas Chamber of Commerce and businesses in the Tawas area, bringing birders and business to the area.

Throughout the years, it's clear that — through our collaborative work — we've met our objectives successfully each year. In fact, the festival has officially placed Tawas Point on the map of birding hot spots for birders across the country! We are so pleased that we met our goal with this collaboration and that so much education and connection with birds has happened as a result. The Iosco County area is strongly cemented as the place to go in Michigan in mid-May for warbler migration. This is evidenced by the flocks of birders who come to Tawas Point State Park throughout the month of May. Birders are coming to the area, not purely because of the festival, but simply for the birds!

Since 2016, Michigan Audubon has grown tremendously in terms of our programs and projects, and we continue to expand our reach and impact in terms of conservation, education, and research. We will continue to support the Tawas Point Birding Festival, but we want to share with you, our members, and many past attendees of the festival, that the AuSable Valley Audubon has agreed to formally own and lead this event in the future.

The AuSable Valley Audubon chapter leaders, members, and festival volunteers have been steadfast in their commitment to sharing the Tawas area to both new and experienced birders. Given this group's location in the Tawas region, history, investment in the event, and commitment to it, we are excited to see this group take ownership of the festival. Ruth Golm, president of AVA, said, "It has been a true adventure, educational experience, and a thrill to see the festival grow and prosper over the years of work and fun. It was a huge benefit to have Michigan Audubon involved for so many years."



Ruby-throated Hummingbird from TPBF in 2019. © Kathy Burgis



Golm also stated, "We recently had our first committee meeting to begin plans for Tawas Point Migration 2020. We will be going forward with that for May 14 – 16, 2020."

Michigan Audubon will continue to share this festival's registration information on our website and in the *Jack Pine Warbler*, and we encourage you to attend this event and make it a May mainstay in your calendar year of enjoying Michigan birds!

Piping Plover Monitoring

Two chicks fledged at WPBO

BY GREG MCCLELLAN, US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE



Piping Plover photos © Laura Wong

For 2019, we had another successful nesting year for Piping Plover at Whitefish Point, but it was not without some difficulties. In early May, the WPBO waterbird monitor started to regularly see at least one plover at the Point. On May 15, plover monitors observed three plovers at the Point, two females and one male. By the end of the month, the male and one of the females had formed a bond and nested. The nest was initially found on May 29 and a full clutch of four eggs was laid. The nest was

in the same general area as last year but was significantly closer to the boundary of the closed area, only 15 – 20 feet inside the psychological fencing. The nesting female was the same bird that nested at the Point last year, while the male was different — he came from a brood that hatched in Wisconsin just last year. The second female, although seen off and on at the Point throughout the summer and regularly at Vermillion, never found a mate.

Water levels in Lake Superior were high all summer. The pool inside the closed area was the biggest I had seen since Piping Plover re-started nesting at the Point in 2009. On June 10, we had high winds and high surf and the water got within 10 feet of washing out the nest, but thankfully the closeness didn't cause the adult pair to abandon it. The surf did wash out multiple posts that were part of the psychological fencing — some just had to be reinstalled while a couple had to be replaced.

Another unusual event occurred on June 17. The plover monitor observed the male plover fly into the enclosure and switch out with the female that had been incubating the nest at about 8:35 a.m. Tagging along with the male Piping Plover was a Sanderling. The Sanderling stayed near but outside the enclosure for over half an hour and then walked into the enclosure, causing the male to chase it back out. The Sanderling stayed nearby until around 10:08 a.m. when the female returned to the nest and the male Piping Plover charged toward the Sanderling as it



exited the enclosure. The male Piping Plover left while the Sanderling continued staying by the enclosure for another 20 minutes, eventually exiting the area around 10:30 a.m. The monitors did not observe the Sanderling and Piping Plover interacting ever again during the summer. Since plover monitoring at the Point began in 2009, this was the first reported interaction of this kind.

On June 26, it was discovered that an egg was missing from the nest. No damage was noted to the enclosure and no tracks of a possible predator were detected either. A similar instance occurred in 2015 with a single egg being taken from a nest and the cause of the egg loss was never determined. Two eggs hatched on June 30. The adults kept incubating the third egg into July 1. On July 2, one of the monitors went into the enclosure to check the egg. The egg had a small hole and was completely dry inside, thus a non-viable egg. The two remaining chicks did fine through July and both were banded on July 12. The adult female displayed typical plover behavior by being the first to start her migration south when she left the Point around July 21. Four chicks from the captive rearing program were released at the Point on July 24 with the hope that they would follow the lead of the wild Piping Plover chicks that are of a similar age. The adult male, which was re-banded on June 20, departed the Point on July 27 — both adults usually leave for the wintering grounds before the chicks do. The wild-raised chicks departed the Point on Aug. 2 and the captive-reared chicks left the following day.

Although the plovers did suffer some drawbacks this nesting season, overall it was a successful year for the Piping Plover at the Point. We primarily had good cooperation by the public in obeying the beach closure signs surrounding the plover nesting area and the closeness of the nest to the boundary allowed the public a unique opportunity to get a good view of a Piping Plover and to learn more about the importance of continuing efforts to conserve habitat for this shorebird.

Greg McClellan has been working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for over 34 years and has been at Seney National Wildlife Refuge since September 2005. Greg is the assistant refuge manager at the refuge and has been working with Michigan Audubon in overseeing the monitoring of Piping Plovers at Whitefish Point since 2010.



Summer Owl Banding at Whitefish Point

BY CHRIS NERI, WPBO HEAD SUMMER OWL BANDER

This summer marked the thirteenth year of summer owl research at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. We were able to band on 52 of 55 nights from July 1 to Aug. 24 this season. A total of 197 new owls were banded, and five previously banded owls were recaptured. The new owls were comprised of 174 Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO) and 23 Long-eared Owl (LEOW); all five of the recaptures were NSWO. The main focus of WPBO's summer owl research is the unique movement of juvenile saw-whets that occur here annually, and their numbers are the most significant variable affecting the relative success of a given summer owl season. Of the 174 NSWO banded this season, 124 were juveniles and 50 were adults. These results are on the low end of what we have experienced in past summers but are consistent with what we have previously experienced relative to where we were in the NSWO breeding cycle.



One of the 124 juvenile Northern Saw-whet Owl that was banded this season. © Chris Neri

There is a natural cycle of breeding success among many raptors, and Northern Saw-whet Owl have a 4- to 5-year cycle that is directly related to their main food source of mice. When the mouse population peaks, adult NSWO are able to provide lots of food to their young allowing them to produce lots of owlets. When the prey population crashes, so too does

the number of fledglings that NSWO can produce. During the peaks of NSWO breeding success, we have banded over 530 juvenile NSWO in a single summer. Conversely, we have banded as few as 50 when breeding success has crashed. We have been through this cycle twice before and this season's results were similar to what we have experienced in the past. We were at the same point in the cycle in 2009 and 2014 when 189 and 125 juveniles were banded, respectively. So, while the results this season were low in comparison to peak years, they were comparable to previous years relative to where we were in the breeding cycle.

Naturally, there is more to experience than just the owls when you spend a season working in the woods at the Point at night. This season we also banded a Black-billed



Three Striped Skunk kits kept the owl banders on their toes while they traveled the net lanes this season. © Chris Neri

Cuckoo, two Eastern Whip-poor-will, and a Common Nighthawk. We have banded Black-billed Cuckoo during previous seasons, but both the whip-poor-will and nighthawk were new birds for the summer research. Another new experience was the constant presence of three Striped Skunk kits. Skunks are beautiful animals and the kits are incredibly cute. They eventually came to favor foraging around the Owl's Roost, and although we became accustomed to their presence, we were admittedly startled a few times when we opened the door to go on a net check and found one standing on the little step just outside the door. Aside from those few, sudden, too-close-for-comfort encounters, it was amazing to have the opportunity to sit and watch them do their thing at close range every night. Perhaps the most unexpected surprise was finding someone camping in the net lanes. After several attempts at very politely explaining to the person that he needed to move, things eventually got a bit heated, but it worked out fine in the end. Even after 20 years, each season at the Point provides a variety of new experiences with nature and humans.

Another new experience this summer was a brutal stretch of 46 consecutive nights without a night off. I cannot express enough appreciation for my banding partner, Hannah Toutonghi. We both felt our mental and physical state increasingly diminish from night-to-night as we limped through the end of that stretch, but Hannah has a great work ethic she stayed positive throughout. Thank you, Hannah! As always, we also thank all of you who support Michigan Audubon and its research and programs at WPBO. We say it all the time, but these programs truly would not be possible without your generous support.



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."

Mark Your Calendars!

120th Christmas Bird Count | Dec. 14, 2019 – Jan. 5, 2020
Winter UP Birding Trip | Jan. 19 – 20
Winter UP Birding Trip | Feb. 9 – 10
Great Backyard Bird Count | Feb. 15 – 17
Quiet Water Symposium | Feb. 29
WPBO Spring Hawk Count | March 15 – May 31
WPBO Spring Owl Banding | March 15 – May 31
WPBO Spring Waterbird Count | April 15 – May 31
Spring Bluebird Festival | March 21
Mackinaw Raptor Fest | April 3 – 5
Spring Fling | April 24 – 26
Biggest Week in American Birding | May 8 – 17
World Migratory Bird Day | May 9
Tawas Point Migration 2020 | May 14 – 16
WPBO Birdathon | May TBD
Cerulean Warbler Festival | May 29 – 31
MA Kirtland's Warbler Tours | June 1 – 30
Michigan Young Birders Camp | June 23 – 28
WPBO Summer Owl Banding | July 1 – Aug. 25
WPBO Fall Waterbird Count | Aug. 15 – Nov. 15
MA Swift Night Out Surveys | Sept. 11 – 13
WPBO Fall Owl Banding | Sept. 15 – Oct. 31
CraneFest | Oct. 10 – 11
121st Christmas Bird Count | Dec. 14, 2020 – Jan. 5, 2021

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



Michigan Young Birders Camp Fosters Next Generation

BY LINDSAY CAIN, EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Michigan Audubon, in partnership with Alma College, Chippewa Nature Center, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are happy to share with you that we were able to offer, for the second year, an opportunity for adolescents to be emerged in learning about birds and conservation for a week.

The 2019 Michigan Young Birders Camp was composed of seven campers ranging in age from 13 to 17. These campers spent five days visiting several important bird habitats, learning about bird-related conservation efforts, and experiencing hands-on research efforts while banding birds and performing point counts with leaders from the organizations that have worked to create and sustain this camp.

The highlight of this year's camp occurred when we entered the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. Although Wildlife Drive was closed to public access, we were granted special entrance and escorted by Refuge Manager Pam Repp and Deputy Refuge Manager Lelaina Muth. On our second stop, we focused our binoculars on what appeared to be a flock of foraging egrets. However, one stood taller than the rest with a patch of red on its head. It was a Whooping Crane!

Hearing a gasp and seeing a look of pure joy spread across the face of Roberto, a 17-year-old returning camper, was just the beginning of this special sighting. A lifer for all seven campers, both counselors, and this Michigan Audubon employee, this moment was an exciting surprise that we would all remember.

The rest of our trip to SNWR was full of other exciting species. In addition to the Great Egret and Whooping Crane were a pair of Sandhill Crane. We also saw Bald Eagle, including a nest and a juvenile, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Night Heron, Caspian Tern, Black Tern, and several species of waterfowl.

Other special moments during the week included a trip to Chippewa Nature Center, visiting the Whiting Forest Canopy Walk, exploring wildlife rehabilitation at the Wildlife Recovery

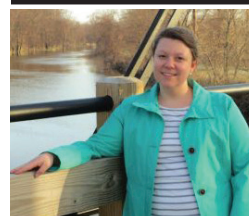
Association, and dinner at The Maple Grille, a farm-to-table restaurant near Alma College.

Campers were exposed to bird banding firsthand at Forest Hill Nature Area and the Alma College Ecological Station. During this time they also performed point counts in the areas. They got a good taste of the nature of fieldwork, both the joys and the challenges. We had a few falls in the boggy sphagnum moss, too many mosquito bites to count, and plenty of wet feet, but we also had opportunities to see, hear, measure, and handle several bird species up close and personal and experience immersion in the natural world in a wonderful way.

Two of this year's seven campers were returning campers from last year, and both agreed that they learned even more at this year's camp. We kept the students busy and tired them out, but I have no doubt they'll be ready for more learning, development, and fun next year.

By the end of the week, all campers had a lifer, and our species list was just over 100. These memories, skills, knowledge, and friendships are sure to last our campers much longer than the summer.

As we begin planning for next year's camp, we encourage all of you to help us connect more young birders with these opportunities by helping us spread the word. Information about next year's camp will be available on the website by the beginning of 2020.



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.



I want to extend a very warm and real thank you to our members and donors who gave a financial gift to support the Michigan Young Birders Camp this year! We work hard to not only fund this camp but to keep registration costs for our kids as low as possible, as well as offer a number of scholarships to encourage participation. We don't want financial difficulty to stand in the way of raising the bird and conservation knowledge, awareness, and experience of young people. If you gave in response to the mailing for this camp, I want to sincerely thank you for supporting Michigan Audubon's growing educational reach as an extension of our mission to connect birds and people for the benefit of both! If you wish to give to this or another program that embodies our work and mission, please reach out to us at birds@michiganaudubon.org.

Heather Good, Executive Director

A Successful Season of Kirtland's Warbler Tours

BY MARQUETTE MUTCHLER
2019 KIRTLAND'S WARBLER TOUR GUIDE



I was excited to begin my work in Grayling, Mich., after spending the last two years attending college in the deep south at Louisiana State University. The cooler summer temperatures and the presence of seasons paired with working with a charismatic species was an exhilarating thought. Growing up, I have always been keen on birds. Even now going to college, I plan to pursue a graduate degree involving birds. This combination of public outreach, conservation, and the Kirtland's Warbler felt like the perfect job.

My first morning tour for the season began with scraping ice off my windshield. Determined nonetheless, I was off to lead a small group of people who had gathered at Hartwick Pines State Park to see one bird — the Kirtland's Warbler. These unique, migratory warblers had likely arrived within the last two weeks from their winter home in the sunny Bahamas, a distant memory now as they dealt with the frosty nights.

Although battling bugs, weather, and potential bad luck, our first tour was off to a good start. Opening our car doors to the sound of Kirtland's Warblers was a relief. Nothing is quite as disheartening like starting a tour and not having the target bird around. As I would find with future tours, it would often only take 15 minutes to get our first glimpse of a Kirtland's Warbler. Occasionally, our first views of these skittish warblers would be almost instantaneous and highly rewarding!

The Kirtland's Warbler may have been the goal for those on the tours, but I also managed to tally more than 60 bird species for the month. Several other bird species use this unique jack pine habitat such as Clay-colored and Lincoln's Sparrows. Nashville and Yellow-rumped Warblers were also easily seen and heard as they built their nests and raised young amongst the jack pine branches.

Not a single tour was canceled the entire month thanks to relatively mild weather and little rain. Most tours had around 15 to 20 people and occasionally upwards of 50. We had people from across the globe arriving before 7 a.m. to spend the morning searching for these alluring birds. A few tours were lucky enough to catch glimpses

of a Kirtland's Warbler nest and at the very end, a few young hiding in the lichens and mosses underneath the jack pines.

Not only was it a highlight to see the bird, but I found it equally as rewarding to share the conservation success story of the warbler with such a broad audience. Often people were aware of the birds' endangered status but weren't so aware of the tremendous amount of effort it has taken to help these birds out.

One of my favorite experiences was learning the individual songs of each male Kirtland's Warbler at the Chase Bridge location we would visit. I knew them well enough to give them names and often knew each male's schedule, so it made lining tours up with the right male easier. The most famous male of the tours was the pair near the parking lot with the male named "Joe." Most of the males were named based upon different sounds unique to their song, and Joe was the least unique, one could say. His song sounded most like the classic Kirtland's Warbler song you can find online and therefore earned the name "Average Joe." Of course, he was anything but average. I watched tour after tour as he would approach our group, singing loudly, constantly foraging, and, finally, practically landing on the participants as he roamed his territory. It was like entering into the warblers' realm. The birds seemed oblivious to our group each morning, something I had never experienced with large groups before. Being able to share this world with tour-goers was truly surreal and by far one of my favorite memories.

Of course, none of these experiences could have been possible without Michigan Audubon and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. These tours would never have been successful, let alone exist, without all the years of effort put into conserving and managing the habitat for these warblers.



Marky is a birder, artist, and ornithologist who has been birding since the age of five. Marky is excited to continue onwards in supporting conservation of the birds she loves through the education of others and her work as a student at Louisiana State University.



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.

Cynthia Bily
Mari Blanchard
Carol Bowman
Kimberly Bufford
Daniel Burnard
Edwin Charlton
John Christ
Melanie Cooper
Margaret Cottrill
Spencer Ford
RaeAnn Gibbs
Thane Hall
Carolyn Horne
Grace Huizinga
Judith Johnston
Mike Klingensmith
Cynthia Lakes
Joanne Mahoney

John Marshall
Linda McCallum
Nancy McIntyre
Maureen Michael
Steven & Denise Murray
Carolyn Norman-Kiser
Don Paarlberg
Margo Phalen
Amy Reinartz
John Reinartz
Karen Ruman Todd
Laurie E. Van Ark
Christine Van Wagoner
Jennifer Wesley
Shelly Windett
Frank Wiseman
Lynn E. Wright

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 mkeenam@michiganaudubon.org or (517) 580-7364. Thank you!