

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

WINTER: Urban Birding ▪ Bird-Friendly Communities ▪ WPBO Fall Waterbird Recap ▪ WPBO Fall Owl Banding ▪ Spring Fling ▪ Annual Member Meeting ▪ Haehnle Sanctuary Eyes Expansion



# Jack Pine Warbler

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**Cover Photo ■ Bohemian Waxwing**  
Photographer: Darlene Friedman

Darlene Friedman has been a birder since 1971, and began photographing birds in 2006 when she bought her first digital camera. Darlene was already passionate about birds and birding, but becoming a bird photographer has brought her even greater happiness, as her photographs remind her of the joy she felt when she took them. Darlene took this photo after stumbling upon some Bohemian Waxwings busily feeding in a tree laden with berries. The photo was taken with the Nikon D70s camera and a Nikon 300mm lens.

Thank you to Darlene Friedman for submitting this wonderful image for the 2017 *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 Diane Huhn at [dhuhn@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:dhuhn@michiganaudubon.org) or (517) 580-7364.

# Contents

## Features

2-3

The Joy of Urban Birding

4-5

Bird-Friendly Communities Program for Greater Lansing

6

Haehnle Sanctuary Eyes Expansion

## Columns

8

Milestone Celebrations at the Point

10-11

Fall at Whitefish Point

12

Fall Owl Banding at WPBO

13

Fall Waterbird Count at WPBO

## Departments

1

Executive Director Letter

7

Chapter & Organizational Events

9

Events & Thank Yous

14

Calendar, 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.

*Visit [MichiganAudubon.org](http://MichiganAudubon.org) for more updates, and follow MichiganAudubon on social media*



# From the Executive Director

Happy New Year, Michigan Audubon members!

I want to use this time and space to invite you to our annual meeting which is happening in just a few short months. With policy concerns, issues impacting birds and the environment, programs and incentives to learn about and be a part of, there is no better time for us to gather and collaborate. Keeping you connected and informed is a big part of what we do in connecting birds and people for the benefit of both.

Whether you are affiliated with one of our statewide chapters or are an independent member of Michigan Audubon, you are invited to join us for this event. There will be relevant content tailored to both chapter leaders and individual members.

In addition to learning from sessions and unique networking opportunities, there will be recognition of volunteers with an award presentation and voting on issues and priorities for bird conservation in the state of Michigan. Your voice is important to us. Your involvement is important to us. This meeting is dedicated to serving our members and our chapters and meeting your needs as the collective Michigan Audubon network.



The Michigan Audubon Annual Meeting of Members will be held in Ann Arbor on Saturday, April 14, 2018, at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens (1800 N. Dixboro Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105).

The meeting begins at 10 a.m. with a keynote presentation on the development of Motus in Michigan, followed by lunch and afternoon workshop sessions. At 5 p.m., we'll host a Member Happy Hour in the Conservatory. Arrive early and explore the beautiful trails of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens!

Thanks to Washtenaw Audubon, the official chapter sponsor of this year's meeting.



If you have questions about the Michigan Audubon Annual Meeting of Members, feel free to contact Molly Keenan, administrative specialist, at [mkeenam@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mkeenam@michiganaudubon.org) or (517) 580-7364.

We look forward to seeing you in April!

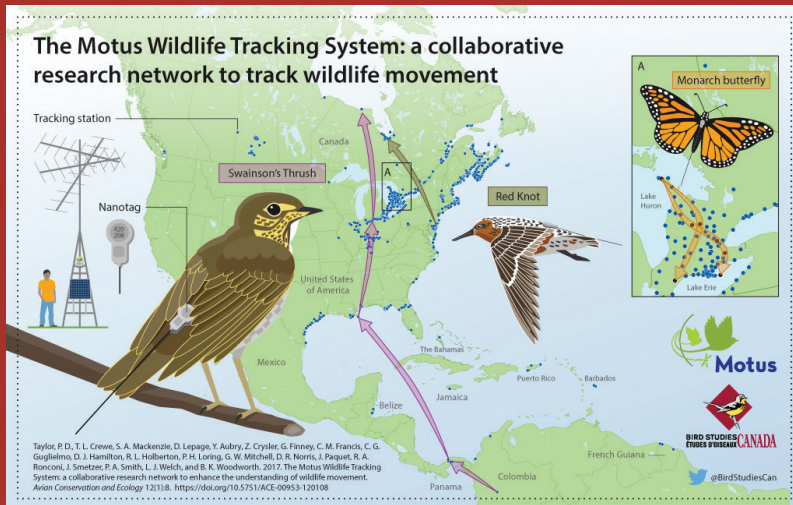
Heather Good, Executive Director

## Motus in Michigan

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System (Motus, latin for 'movement') is an international collaborative research network that uses a coordinated automated radio telemetry array to track the movement and behavior of small flying organisms. Motus tracks animals (birds, bats, and large insects) affixed with digitally-encoded radio transmitters "nano-tags" that broadcast signals several times each minute. These signals are detected by automated radio telemetry stations that scan for signals 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. When results from many stations are combined, the array can track animals across a diversity of landscapes covering thousands of kilometers.

This multinational system has its roots in the SensorGnome network, which was piloted in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, a major infrastructure expansion was made possible through a Canada Foundation for Innovation grant to Western University, The University of Guelph, and Acadia University. This gave rise to the Motus Wildlife Tracking System.

The system has grown steadily since that time and as of February 2017 over 350 receiving stations were active across the Western Hemisphere. There are now Motus towers in Michigan and the beginnings of a network of people and towers building to better facilitate landscape-scale research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals.



# The Joy of Urban Birding

BY KIRBY ADAMS



The Detroit skyline viewed from Windsor, Ont. Copyright CC-BY-SA Chris Woodrich

One of birding's many beauties is its lack of need for specific locale. You can't just golf anywhere on the planet. You can't go fishing if there isn't any water. But birding can be done literally anywhere outdoors, or even somewhere with just a view of the outdoors. That's important in Michigan where we have about 30 cities of 50,000 people or more. Odds are you either live or work in one of those cities, and you probably have a half hour to spend birding there every so often.

Birding in urban areas is all about expectations. You're probably not going to get a 100 species day in May, unless you're in New York's Central Park or perhaps a city on the sea coast. You're going to see lots of a few types of birds. There will be pigeons.

Where would you expect to find birds in a city? Obviously green spaces like parks are the first place to look. Along rivers is always a good bet. Think like a bird and you'll find the birds. They need food, water, and cover. Find those things and there you will also find birds.

Consider a birding day that included views of the following birds nesting or tending young: Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Pileated Woodpecker, Wood Duck, Great Blue Heron, and Barred Owl. On this same day you also saw 15 species of warbler in migration. Sound like a good time? That can be done with relative ease in May on a two-hour walk within the city limits of our capital Lansing. All of that is along the fully accessible Lansing River Trail system, so it can be done by foot, bike, wheelchair, rollerblade, or just about any other non-motorized method. Urban birding is birding for everyone.

The tree-lined river trails are one thing, but urban birding can mean something quite different when you push it a little further. Karl Overman has been birding Detroit for decades and to him "urban birding" means walking the city's core to see which birds have adapted to, or at least learned to tolerate, our human creations. When he's urban birding, he's seeing more concrete, steel, and glass than anything else, and a Pileated Woodpecker is not going to even think about setting up shop there. Only a handful of birds breed in these areas, many of them our common non-native species: Rock Pigeon, European Starling, and House Sparrow. Chimney Swifts, which are champions of adapting to human constructions, are a nice native sight in the city.

Overman's seen a few remarkable changes in the birds of urban Detroit over the years. In the 1970s a Cooper's Hawk would be a rare sight, but now he finds them regularly hunting pigeons downtown, and in one case catching a rat! Most of the trends he notices as a regular urban birder involve migrants.



Cooper's Hawks have become a more common sight over the past several decades in urban areas such as Detroit, Mich. © Thomas McClanahan



No urban birding experience would be complete without ticking off a few Rock Pigeons on your checklist. © Hui Sim

The urban core is a microclimate that can disrupt, for better or worse, a bird's migration impulse. It will generally be warmer, sometimes significantly so, in the city center than in surrounding areas. Non-native plants in flowerbeds can also bloom and grow longer into the fall or winter season than in more wild areas. This, and certainly other unknown factors, leads to migrants lingering longer in Detroit in the late fall. Overman notes Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Lincoln's Sparrow, Ovenbird, and Wood Thrush as species that are noticeably hanging around downtown Detroit when all the rest of their conspecifics have headed out of Michigan.

Finding the migrants downtown goes back to thinking like a bird. Low hedges and flowerbeds are the key habitat. Overman notes that shade trees in the city don't seem to harbor many migrants. Most cities tend toward hardy non-native trees for city decoration, and migrants are often picky about particular native trees, especially in spring when oak and cherry blossoms are so popular. In fall, migrants are drawn to trees with vines like virginia creeper and poison ivy that have lingering berries, but you aren't likely to find robust poison ivy vines on a shade tree in front of an office building.

One aficionado of poison ivy is the Yellow-rumped Warbler. Whether it has anything to do with the lack of ivy is arguable, but Overman notes that as a common bird elsewhere that is very hard to find in urban Detroit. A less common warbler overall, the Ovenbird, is far more regular in the city. Those are the kind of things you notice when you bird a city year after year. If you do it as much as Overman has, you also see things like Snowy Owl, Sora, and Northern Saw-whet Owl, all of which he's logged in urban Detroit.

As mentioned before, birding is less restrictive than just about any other hobby, and it is not inherently discriminatory. Despite that, it is notorious for the lack of diversity among its participants. Great work is being done in many areas to help young people who, due largely to socioeconomic constraints, spend their whole lives in cities, get out into a natural area and see some birds. It works, thanks to birding being an addictive and infectious hobby. Perhaps it's worth thinking about taking the birding to these folks rather than

taking them out to the birding. Birders who frequent the least "natural" places of the state know where the birds are that millions of people walk past without noticing every day. That little warbler with the bright orange stripe on its head bouncing around in the flower bed might turn a city kid into someone who grows up to fight for the protection of large swaths of forested stop-over habitat. Forget the rarities at Whitefish Point. That urban Ovenbird might be the most important bird in the state.



Migrants such as this Ovenbird may be found in urban areas long after their cohorts have left for warmer climates in the fall. © Daniel Behm



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.

# The Bird-Friendly Communities Program for Greater

BY RACHELLE ROAKE, CONSERVATION SCIENCE COORDINATOR



Purple Martin gourd rack installed at the Capital City Bird Sanctuary in spring of 2017.

**A**rguably, humans are the worst invasive species on Earth. Our complete consumption of resources around us is akin to Kudzu. We have converted hundreds of millions of acres of natural lands for our own use – crops to feed us, crops to feed our livestock which then feed us, shiny glass-covered infrastructure, impermeable surfaces, aerial hazards, chemical inputs – our footprint is broad and deep. Is it possible for humans to curb this tsunami of destruction? Can we share the human-dominated landscape with other species? It is sobering to consider our species' impacts on those around us.

To tackle all of these solutions will take decades of cultural and institutional change, but we can start small by taking action at home and in our communities. Do you live in a bustling city or a quiet, one-stoplight town? Do you have a petite patio or a sprawling 100-acre wood? The Bird-Friendly Communities Program aims to help birds and people thrive from Monroe to Marquette. No matter the size or location of your “habitat,” there are much-needed solutions to better share our land, air, and water with the native flora and fauna of our state.



We are delighted to announce that Michigan Audubon was selected to receive an Urban Bird Treaty City grant, funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. This financial support will build the Bird-Friendly Communities Program in the Greater Lansing Area and create tools and templates for use by other communities, statewide. In Lansing, over 15 partners have already committed to making a change for birds, whether it's nurturing native plant gardens, hosting educational workshops, or installing new homes for breeding birds. Success of this program depends upon expanding

# Lansing and Beyond



our reach to connect with people young and old, local businesses, and units of government – we cannot contain this work within our “birder bubble” and expect to have large-scale impacts for birds.

We invite all of our members and chapters to join us in building the Bird-Friendly Communities Program. While we have exciting goals for the Greater Lansing Area pilot year, we recognize that other chapters, groups, and individuals have already made incredible progress towards cultivating bird-friendly communities in unique ways: natural areas stewardship, Safe Passage programs, swift counts, birding trails, nesting boxes and platforms, and much more. Every public bird walk and educational presentation is an important outreach opportunity that connects more people with the birds of their community. However your group supports the birds in your community, we want to hear about it. However your group wants to support the birds in your community, we want to help you. Please share your experiences and ideas with us via a phone call, email, or photo.

While our species may have spread like an ecological steamroller, we still have ample opportunity to turn this proverbial car around – and we must. Birds naturally build communities around them; birds make friends out of complete strangers and

## Action items for the Greater Lansing Area Bird-Friendly Communities Program:

- Install 3 Chimney Swift nesting/roosting towers
- Install 6 Purple Martin nesting colonies
- Install 3 native plant gardens at one school, one church, and one library
- Monitor buildings for window strikes
- Monitor Chimney Swift nesting/roosting sites
- Enhance 1,200' of river shoreline habitat
- Enhance 9 acres of wet meadow habitat
- Lead 5 urban bird educational workshops
- Lead 4 citizen science training events

inspire compassion and wonder across all ages. The Audubon community has come together *because* of the birds, now let's work together to build safe, supportive communities *for* the birds.



Rachelle Roake is the Conservation Science Coordinator at Michigan Audubon. Rachelle oversees conservation efforts at our bird sanctuaries and coordinates Michigan Audubon's Bird-Friendly Communities Program. Contact her at [rrourke@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:rrourke@michiganaudubon.org).

# Haehnle Sanctuary Eyes Expansion

BY HAEHNLE SANCTUARY COMMITTEE

The Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary has been an important and beloved property of Michigan Audubon since the original 497 acres were donated to the society in 1955 by Casper “Cap” Haehnle. With gifts from Cap’s granddaughter, Judy Cory, and purchases by Michigan Audubon, including the Klee Tract addition, the sanctuary currently covers over 1,000 acres. Owned by Michigan Audubon and managed by the Jackson Audubon Society and the Haehnle Sanctuary Committee, it is indeed a special place that continues to serve its intended purpose as a sanctuary for wildlife in an increasingly developed world.

Recently, we were made aware that a 25-acre parcel bordering the southwest corner of the sanctuary is up for sale by owner George Smith. Adjacent to Eagle Lake, the property would certainly be a prime target for developers. The property has long been on our watch list and has been part of the conservation plan to protect Eagle Lake from further development.

Ownership of this parcel would certainly help protect the wetland area and maintain the water level in Eagle Lake. A drainage ditch forming the south boundary of the parcel has lowered water levels in the wetland west of Eagle Lake. Having control of this ditch would enable us to protect both the wetland and the lake from further drainage.

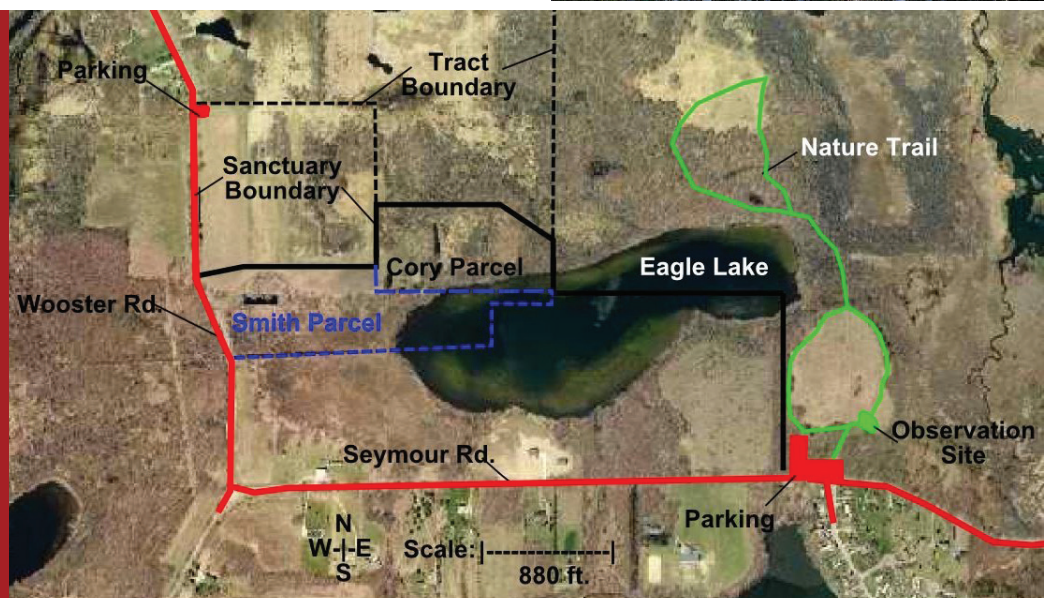
It would also make a significant addition to the adjacent 16 acres of the sanctuary’s native grassland. Numerous studies have shown that grassland birds prefer larger areas than the current size of the adjacent sanctuary grassland.

Mr. Smith is asking \$90,000 for the parcel. Generous pledges of \$53,000 have already been made, leaving \$38,000 to reach our goal. In addition to the asking price, we would also incur additional expenses such as title insurance, transfer fees, attorney fees, and the like. According to Mr. Smith, the land has been surveyed so that would not be an added expense.

*Images: Eagle Lake (top), view of Smith property from sanctuary parking lot on Wooster Rd. (center), treeline on Smith property (bottom).*



If you would like to make a pledge to assist in the efforts to secure this important addition to the Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary, please contact Michigan Audubon Operations Manager Maura Villhauer at [mwillhauer@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mwillhauer@michiganaudubon.org) or (517) 580-7364.



# Chapter and Organizational Events

## Mackinaw Raptor Fest Coming in April

The third annual Mackinaw Raptor Fest, sponsored by Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch (MSRW), will take place April 6 to 8, 2018. The keynote speaker will be Gene Jacobs, lead researcher and owner of the consulting firm, Raptor Services, and the Linwood Springs Research Station near Stevens Point, Wisc. In “Snowy Owl Winter Habitat Use,” Jacobs will share his research which uses solar-powered transmitters to record owl locations in three dimensions – latitude, longitude, and altitude. During several optional sessions throughout the fest, Jacobs will discuss what he has discovered over 30 years of banding Northern Saw-whet Owls, share the results of 45 years of studying Red-shouldered Hawks nesting ecology, and explain how and why Merlins are expanding their range.

The Morning Plenary Speaker Josh Haas will show his popular “Raptor Migration and Conquering ID: Using Video to Make Raptor ID a Snap!” The Evening Plenary Session, which can be attended separately from the daytime talks, features renowned wildlife artist and falconer Glen McCune from Petoskey, Mich. who will bring one or more of his live birds.

Break-out sessions feature other excellent speakers, including Joseph Youngman’s “Waterbird Migration Over Lake Superior” an explanation of various waterbird species pathways through Lake Superior, and much more.

Owl Banding and Constellation Discovery will also take place at the Guest House of Headlands Dark Sky Park in Mackinaw City on the evenings of April 6 and 7.

Registration for the Mackinaw Raptor Fest opens in early January 2018. For more information, visit [www.mackinawraptorfest.org](http://www.mackinawraptorfest.org).



## Tawas Point Migration 2018



AuSable Valley Audubon, a chapter of Michigan Audubon, will host a new spring birding event in Iosco County on May 17-19. Home to Important Bird Areas of Tawas Point and the AuSable River, this area is a birder’s mecca in the spring. A typical spring weekend species count can reach 175. Check out [www.ausablevalleyaudubon.org](http://www.ausablevalleyaudubon.org) for more information.

## Spring Bluebird Festival

Love bluebirds? Celebrate the return of these spectacular songbirds at the Michigan Bluebird Society’s Spring Bluebird Festival! This year’s event will be held at Washtenaw Community College’s Morris Lawrence Building, 4800 E. Huron River Dr., Ann Arbor on Saturday, March 24 from 9 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Admission is free and open to the public. Lunch will be offered at a modest price per person. The schedule of events will include a variety of presentations regarding how to help bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds, a Q&A session with a panel of bluebird experts ready to answer audience questions, a nestbox building workshop where participants can assemble their very own bluebird nestbox, and much more. The schedule will be finalized closer to the event date. For details, updates, and to register as an attendee, please visit [www.michiganbluebirds.org/springfestival](http://www.michiganbluebirds.org/springfestival).





# Milestone Celebrations at the Point


## 30th Annual Spring Fling at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory

We are looking forward to a very special celebration of spring migration this year at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. This year we are excited to mark some important milestones as we prepare to welcome birds and birders back for another spectacular season of birding at the Point, arguably one of Michigan's most beloved birding destinations. Not only does 2018 mark the 30th anniversary of Spring Fling, but it also marks the 30th spring season of the official owl banding program. In honor of these achievements, our speakers, presentations, tours and other activities will highlight the uniqueness of the Point, celebrate the achievements of the observatory's past, and explore exciting new developments in its future.

There is no denying that Spring Fling at Whitefish Point is an experience for birders of all ages and skill levels. It is a great opportunity to share your birding skills with others or pick up some new ones. Pre- and post-event field trips will again be offered on a first-come basis. Workshops and presentations will take place in the morning and afternoon. Guided bird and botany walks throughout the day are sure to delight. With experienced and friendly staff and volunteers who are ready and willing to answer questions and share their expertise, Spring Fling presents the perfect opportunity to become a better birder.

Following a full day of birding bliss at the Point, the annual banquet offers a wonderful opportunity to warm up while enjoying excellent food, good friends old and new, and the opportunity to share great birding escapades from days past or from just hours before. In celebration of the 30th year of the owl banding program at WPBO, we will welcome Nova Mackentley as our speaker for the evening. Nova has been banding owls at WPBO since 2005 and after dinner and socializing, she will share an engaging program about the owls of Whitefish Point.

For 30 years birders have been travelling to Paradise to participate in this grand celebration of spring migration. We hope you will join us again this year for this special 30th anniversary event or experience the celebration for the first time.



## Whitefish Point Bird Observatory

# The MIGRANT

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2      SUMMER, 1988

### THE 1988 SEASON

Spring, 1988 was interesting and eventful at Whitefish Point. The season began with plenty of snow on the ground and ice on the Bay. March and April were very cold -- the staff got plenty of use from their warm weather gear! May was much better, with excellent weather throughout the month.


A record high total of 236 species (pending acceptance of all sightings by the Michigan Ornithological Records Committee) was recorded this spring, a tribute to the great staff and the sharp eyes of visiting birders. Our biggest day occurred on 15 May when 129 species were tallied.

Visitors to the Observatory this spring came from as far away as London, the Philippines, Kenya, and Scotland, not to mention 31 of the United States. Many enjoyed our owl shows presented on weekend mornings (Boreal Owls were the feature attraction this year!). Also well received were the several bird walks and banding demonstrations led by our staff. Highlighting the spring was our second annual Evening Program, featuring an excellent presentation by Dr. Tom Allan on the plight of the Piping Plover in Michigan.

**Rarities**

Once again, Whitefish Point lived up to its reputation for rarities. The following are some of the more interesting sightings, in taxonomic order:

A Pacific Loon flew by on 25 May, as did an American White Pelican on 28 May and a Harlequin Duck on 23 April. A Black-shouldered Kite passed by the Point tip on 26 May -- if accepted by the Michigan Records Committee, this sighting will be the first record for the state! Not to be outdone, the hawk counter documented a Mississippi Kite on 31 May. The hawk counter also observed two Swainson's Hawks and a Gyrfalcon this season.



A stray Marbled Godwit appeared on 19 May. An unprecedented six Parasitic Jaegers were observed in May, plus an additional five unidentified Jaegers -- in previous years, even one Jaeger was considered a treat! A Thayer's Gull was well documented on 30 April. Two Northern Hawk Owls appeared this spring, one very late on 10 May.

The waterbird counter had a brief look at a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on 22 May. On 15 June (yes, there's still some migration then!) a Townsend's Solitaire appeared at the Point, and even sang once. A Loggerhead Shrike strayed north to the Point on 16 May, and a Harris' Sparrow strayed east on 11 May.

Front page of 1988 summer issue of *The Migrant*, WPBO's member publication for many years.

Spring Fling tickets go on sale beginning February 2, 2018. Each year we have been thrilled to see this event grow. Be sure to get your tickets early as space is limited and we've been getting close to selling out over the past few years. For more information and the link to purchase tickets, visit [www.wpbo.org](http://www.wpbo.org). Questions may also be directed to [events@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:events@michiganaudubon.org) or by calling the Michigan Audubon office at (517) 580-7364.



Aerial view of Whitefish Point.



## Member & Signature Events

### Michigan Audubon Annual Member Meeting April 14, 2018 | Ann Arbor, MI

We are looking forward to spring and our annual Michigan Audubon member meeting. The meeting will take place on April 14, 2018, at the University of Michigan Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor. We hope to see you there!

### Spring Fling 2018

April 28-29 | WPBO | Paradise, MI

Join Michigan Audubon for the 30th annual Spring Fling at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. This year's celebration of spring migration will highlight the uniqueness of habitat and species at the Point. We will celebrate 30 years of spring owl banding with a special banquet presentation by longtime owl bander Nova Mackentley.

### Kirtland's Warbler Tours 2018 June 1-30, 2018 | Grayling, MI

Michigan Audubon will employ a guide to lead Kirtland's Warbler Tours June 1-30, 2018. Tours will depart from the Hartwick Pine Visitor Center daily at 7 a.m. with an additional 11 a.m. tour on Saturdays and Sundays. Tours will cost \$10 per person; individuals 13 and under are free. Reservations are not necessary for groups of four or less individuals. More information can be found at [www.michiganaudubon.org](http://www.michiganaudubon.org). Please contact Michigan Audubon at [events@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:events@michiganaudubon.org), or (517) 580-7364, with questions or to make reservations for groups of five or more.

### Cerulean Warbler Weekend June 2-3, 2018 | Hastings, MI

The Cerulean Warbler is the fastest declining songbird in North America. Barry County is Michigan's top spot to observe this rare bird as well as other unique species. Join Michigan Audubon for this year's festival at the Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary. Activities will be available for all ages. Visit [www.michiganaudubon.org](http://www.michiganaudubon.org) for the most up-to-date information on the event.

### Sandhill Crane and Art Festival October 13-14, 2018 | Bellevue, MI

CraneFest features family-friendly activities such as guided nature hikes, live animal displays, kids activities, and art vendors. In the evening, watch as thousands of Sandhill Cranes "fly-in" to Big Marsh Lake.

## Thank You!

Michigan Audubon would like to congratulate Brandon Mroczek on achieving the rank of Eagle Scout in conjunction with his work to improve safe access at Martha Mott Sanctuary, in Mattawan, Mich. Not shying away from a challenge, Brandon accomplished an incredible amount of work including clearing brush, replacing fencing, refurbishing the sanctuary sign, and building an information kiosk and bench. We couldn't be more impressed by his commitment and strong work ethic that brought his vision to life at Mott Sanctuary. Brandon had this to say about his experience:



Brandon Mroczek receives the rank of Eagle Scout in conjunction with his work at the Mott Sanctuary.

*"I chose this project because when I first visited the site, it was in dire need of clean up. The lady that lived across the street said lots of questionable people would hang out there. I wanted the sanctuary to be something more than that, I wanted people to come there and enjoy nature."*

Next fall, Brandon plans to venture north to Michigan Technological University and pursue a degree in mechanical engineering. All the best to you in your future endeavors, Brandon!



# Fall at Whitefish Point

BY CHRIS NERI, WPBO FALL FIELD ORNITHOLOGIST

There is always a bit of culture shock when a field season comes to an end. The abrupt change from the field work, to hours sitting at a computer entering data, writing seasonal reports and composing articles is often a rough transition. Despite the restlessness we may feel sitting at our desks, it is always rewarding to work with the data and to reflect on the experiences we were fortunate to have had during the field season. Inevitably, some aspects of a migratory season prove disappointing, while others exceed expectations. This season was no exception.

A total of 215 species were recorded at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO) this fall. In terms of rarity, the most notable of these were the first Point records of Tropical Kingbird and Vermilion Flycatcher. Additional rarities included Say's Phoebe, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher



This Tropical Kingbird was a first record for Whitefish Point. © Chris Neri

and Loggerhead Shrike. Although not as significant on a statewide level, sightings of White-eyed Vireo and Carolina Wren this fall are of note at the Point and anywhere along the shore of Lake Superior. Sightings like these are undeniably exciting and there is no better place to experience them, but vagrants and rarities are just one part of what makes birding at Whitefish Point so amazing.

Most of the time, it's the migration of the common and expected species that provide regular enjoyment.

The pulse and progression of the overall migration can make or break a season. We hope for a good warbler migration early in the fall, thrushes and sparrows mid-season, followed by winter finches late in the season. We experienced very mixed results in regard to these general expectations this fall. It was unusually warm with a lot of south winds. This weather pattern seemed to have a very negative impact on the warbler migration here and all along the Superior shoreline. Warbler diversity and numbers were simply disappointing. The one exception was the Blackpoll Warbler migration. For whatever reason, it was a particularly good season for them. The only notable warbler sighting was not even of a rare species,



A Vermilion Flycatcher, a first record for Whitefish Point, delighted WPBO visitors on Oct. 8, 2017. © Chris Neri

but rather of the eastern subspecies of Palm Warbler. The sparrow migration was also somewhat disappointing. Although there was good diversity, overall numbers of common species such as White-crowned and White-throated were very low. As late October approached, our last hope for general songbird migration was the late season finch migration.

There were a few early signs that the finch flight could be interesting. One of the most unusual was the Pine Siskin flight. During summer owl banding I regularly heard large nocturnal flights of Pine Siskins. I had never heard even a single Siskin at night during my previous 16 springs and 11 summers of owl banding at the Point. The first night I heard them, I couldn't help wonder if I was confusing them. As it turned out, they were indeed Siskins and this nocturnal migration was the first sign that it was going to be a particularly good fall for them. Not only did we experience a great diurnal migration in the summer, but fall owl banders continued hearing significant numbers well into the fall. The numbers built up through September and peaked on Oct. 11 when 3,367 were counted heading out over the beach and crossing the lake toward Canada. The following day another 2,024 were counted heading out over the lake. The flight wound down after that, but thankfully the Redpoll flight was about to start.

The first Common Redpoll was observed on Oct. 19. Their numbers remained relatively low over the coming week, but daily counts began breaking the 1,000 bird mark in late October, eventually reaching an amazing peak of 10,034 on Nov. 4. The Redpoll movement that morning was intense. Flocks in the hundreds continually flew past the waterbird shack in the early morning with 8,500 of the total counted during the first two hours. It was admittedly overwhelming trying to get an accurate count as they poured over. We would hear the flock approaching, then first get a naked eye visual on the densest portion of the flock. As we got the flock in our binoculars we would then



More than 24,000 Common Redpoll were counted during the Fall Waterbird season with a peak of 10,034 on Nov. 4, 2017. © Chris Neri

start scanning to count the entire flock, only to realize that it stretched from the lakeside beach back down the bayside beach behind us. As we were counting, we often realized that there was another layer up above the lower flock that we had noticed first. It's impossible to know how accurate my count was that morning, but I did my best! The Redpoll numbers naturally dropped off after the peak, but continued through the end of the season and were often joined by relatively good numbers of Pine Grosbeaks. While the Siskin and Redpoll flights were incredible to witness, my favorite part of the finch flight might have been the Red Crossbill migration.

While their numbers were dwarfed by the Siskin and Redpoll numbers, the Red Crossbill flight was of particular note. As with the Siskins, I began noticing a significant flight of Red Crossbills late in the summer. Not only were their numbers of note, but the flight calls were clearly not of the expected subspecies. There are currently at least 10 recognizable calls of different Red Crossbill "types" in North America. Just this year one of these that was formerly considered a subspecies was split into its own species, with the remaining nine still considered



A least four, possibly more, types of Red Crossbill visited Whitefish Point in the fall. © Chris Neri

subspecies. The subspecies that breeds in our area, and that we regularly observe, is type 10. Beginning in August we began hearing flocks of Red Crossbills that were clearly not type 10. It is believed that a cone crop failure out west, along with the major wildfires are contributing factors to the irruption of western Red Crossbill types being documented in the Midwest this year. These different types can only be distinguished through the analysis of their vocalizations. Thanks to Matt Young, Cornell's Red Crossbill expert, we already know that at least four types occurred at the Point this fall.

At the time of publication, I have just begun to sort through the recordings. Matt was able to identify types 2, 3, 4 and 10 from four recordings I recently sent him. The common names of types 2, 3 and 4 are Ponderosa Pine, Western

Hemlock and Douglas Fir Crossbills respectively, clearly indicating that they are not typically found in our area. I'm hopeful that other recordings will produce type 5, Lodgepole Pine Crossbill, which were documented in Wisconsin and Minnesota for the first time this fall. For those of you interested in learning more about the different types and the current invasion check out the very informative eBird article by Matt Young and Tim Spahr, complete with recordings of the different types at <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/news/crossbills-of-north-america-species-and-red-crossbill-call-types/>.

In addition to the daytime field work, I once again gave evening presentations on WPBO's long term owl research. It's always rewarding to share some of the results of this project with those interested enough to visit the owl banding during the weekend visiting hours. It was a pleasure to again work with head fall owl bander Keegan Tranquillo and to welcome assistant owl bander Steve Cairn for his first season at WPBO. This was my third season working closely with waterbird counter Eric Ripma. I cannot possibly say enough in regard to the positive impact Eric has had on my experience here the last three falls. His skill as a birder and his work ethic gave me confidence and inspired me to be at my best. Finally, thanks to all the visitors and to all of you who have donated to WPBO. It is only through your generosity that our long-term research is possible. Hopefully I have provided a reasonably interesting account of the season. I undeniably found it difficult to condense the field season into a few paragraphs, and I didn't even mention the mosquitoes, exposure to the elements, or the flooding in the woods.



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."

# A Change in Seasons

## 2017 Fall Owl Banding at Whitefish Point

BY KEEGAN TRANQUILLO, 2017 WPBO HEAD FALL OWL BANDER

I used to subscribe to the Aldo Leopold philosophy of not returning to a place a second time for fear that it would not be nearly as good as the last time you visited. That worked for my first two years as a bird bander. But then I spent a summer banding in Jackson, Wyo. and quickly realized that one visit was not nearly enough. I went back for second try and determined that philosophy would be hard to follow. So in the fall of 2016 I also found myself back at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory for a second season, followed by a third in 2017.

Returning to a field site from year to year does indeed provide a bit of change from one year to the next, but not necessarily a bad change. If anything it can increase a personal attachment to a location. It not only provides an opportunity to learn more about a place, but helps develop a deeper appreciation for the location.

My 2016 and 2017 fall seasons at Whitefish Point were vastly different experiences. First, the banding site was flooded much more frequently during the entirety of 2016. This fall it only started to flood around the last two weeks of the season. Second, the temperature in 2016 was moderately warm and slowly turned cold during a comfortably mild fall. This fall the temperature was above average until the middle of October before quickly dropping to below average temperatures and bringing snow for many of the last few nights of the season.

Our captures and net effort were pretty much opposites. In 2016 we caught 80 owls in September and 174 in October. This fall we caught 121 owls in September and 89 in October. The amount of nights we were unable to band due to inclement weather in 2016 was double that of 2017. Almost all of our nights off in 2016 landed right around the typical peak of migration, a fairly frustrating experience to say the least. This fall the weather was much more cooperative around the peak of the season and the majority of the nights we were unable to band came well after the peak. We caught nearly 50 more owls in 2016 than 2017. We caught only four Long-eared Owls compared to the 16 last year, and this after a record setting spring and summer.

When you return to a location, particularly for fall migration, it creates a lot of questions. What caused the huge push of owls during our warm September? I did not expect to break season records, but I did not expect to only catch 89 owls during the whole of October. Where did all the Long-eared Owls go? Banders at the Point caught over 500 in the spring and summer. How did we end up with only four new Long-eared Owls in the fall? I did not expect to catch 100, but I certainly expected to catch more than



One of only four new Long-eared Owls banded during the fall season. Over 500 Long-eared Owls were captured during the spring and summer. © Keegan Tranquillo

four! These mysteries that occur from one season to the next certainly makes returning a worthwhile choice.

While many things changed from one season to the next, some things happily stayed the same. The great diversity of night life one can observe, the beautiful night skies, the sound of the waves, and the great company were delightful. Something that I have begun to admire after many years traveling as a field biologist are the researchers who return to a location year after year. Or better yet, the biologists who live near their research locations to observe the nuances for many years.

So as I reflect on the fall season at Whitefish Point, sometimes returning to a place actually makes it better than the time before!



Keegan Tranquillo grew up in southeast Pennsylvania with a great view of the Appalachian Mountains. He became addicted to banding birds and traveling in 2010. Working as a field biologist has taken Keegan all over the United States, the South Pacific, and Malaysia. He never tires of experiencing the great outdoors.



# A Shack with a View

## The Fall Waterbird Count at Whitefish Point

BY ERIC RIPMA, 2017 WPBO WATERBIRD COUNTER

A Parasitic Jaeger soars over the waterbird shack at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. © Eric Ripma

It was another exciting waterbird count at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory this fall. It was a season defined by minimal migration in August, September, and November but an explosion of birds in October. We saw an astounding 44,039 waterbirds migrate by the point in the second half of October alone. Luckily, during the slow month of September, jaegers put on a good show and migrated by in good numbers. About two-thirds of our total jaegers migrated through in September, including two Long-taileds.

Our top six most numerous migrants for 2017 were the same species as most years. As is typical, the most numerous migrant was Long-tailed Duck with a total of 34,903. This number broke the all-time record by 1,180 individuals. Red-necked Grebes were the second most numerous migrant at 13,016. This total is slightly above the long-term average of 12,572, but lower than the past few fall seasons. Red-breasted Mergansers dropped in as the third most numerous species with 7,581 individuals counted. Greater Scaup came in fourth with a total of 7,143 counted. Although lower than the last two years, Redhead rounded out the top five with 4,723, still well above the long-term average of 1,028. White-winged Scoter also made a good showing with a total of 2,896.

As is often the case at the Point, non-waterbirds can be a major highlight at the waterbird shack and 2017 was no exception. It was a great fall for vagrants. We started out with a Say's Phoebe in early September. The major highlight, however, came on Sept. 22 when a Tropical Kingbird dropped into the treeline by the shack for a few minutes. This Kingbird was the first record for Whitefish Point and the third for the state of Michigan. A Loggerhead Shrike the very next day, was a third point record. The "vagrant from-the-shack" theme ended Oct. 8, when a Vermilion Flycatcher, another first point record, spent about an hour around the shack.

Finch migration was also a major highlight this season. Common Redpolls (24,057) and Pine Siskins (15,031) both

migrated by in large numbers with lesser numbers of Red Crossbills (1,383) and Pine Grosbeaks (343).

As always, it was a great season at the point, and I hope everyone will get the chance to come experience it for themselves in the coming years!



Iceland Gull. © Eric Ripma



Eric Ripma became interested in waterbird migration of the Great Lakes region while spending time on the southern shores of Lake Michigan. Eric has conducted the fall waterbird count at Whitefish Point since 2014.



Dated Material

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## 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.

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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 Administrative Specialist Molly Keenan at [mkeenana@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mkeenana@michiganaudubon.org) or (517) 580-7364. Thank you!

## 2018 Events

Great Backyard Bird Count | February 16-19  
Quiet Water Symposium | March 3  
WPBO Spring Hawk Count | March 15-May 31  
WPBO Spring Owl Banding | March 15-May 31  
WPBO Spring Waterbird Count | April 15-May 31  
Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative | Mar 14-16  
Spring Bluebird Festival | March 24  
Mackinaw Raptor Fest | April 6-8  
Michigan Audubon Member Meeting | April 14  
Spring Fling | April 28-29  
Biggest Week in American Birding | May 4-13  
International Migratory Bird Day | May 12  
Tawas Point Migration 2018 | May 17-19  
WPBO Birdathon | May 19-20  
MA Kirtland's Warbler Tours | June 1-30  
Cerulean Warbler Festival | June 2-3  
Michigan Young Birders Camp | June 24-28  
WPBO Summer Owl Banding | July 1-August 25  
WPBO Fall Waterbird Count | Aug 15-Nov 15  
MA Swift Night Out Surveys | September 8-10  
WPBO Fall Owl Banding | Sept 15-Oct 31  
CraneFest | October 13-14  
119th Christmas Bird Count | Dec 14-Jan 5, 2019

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