

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

SUMMER: Chris Hendra Takes Top Honor in 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards • Forestry for Michigan Birds  
Whitefish Point Bird Observatory Spring Reports: Raptor Count, Waterbird Count, & Owl Banding





# Jack Pine Warbler

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**Cover Photo - Song Sparrow**  
Photographer: Chris Hendra

A Song Sparrow pauses to look at its reflection from the edge of a beaver pond in the Western Upper Peninsula. This stunning photo gained Chris Hendra top honors in the 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards. Chris is a Michigan Audubon member who hails from the Copper Country of the Upper Peninsula, where he is married with one daughter. "I have always loved being outdoors and spend the bulk of my free time pursuing Upper Michigan wildlife with my camera. I especially enjoy photographing birds in their natural habitat," he said.

Thank you to Chris Hendra for submitting this image to the 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards. If you have photographs you would like considered for inclusion in future issues of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, please contact Communications & Marketing Coordinator Molly Keenan at mkeenana@michiganaudubon.org or (517) 580-7364.

## Contents

### Features

2-4  
Chris Hendra Gains Top Honor in 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards

5-7  
Forestry for Michigan Birds

### Columns

8-10  
Bird Time: WPBO's Spring 2022 Waterbird Count

11-12  
Tales From the Hawk Deck

12-13  
Spring Owl Banding Report

### Departments

1  
From the Interim CEO

14  
Welcome New Members

## From the Interim CEO

Greetings, Michigan Audubon Members!

I would like to take a moment to thank everyone for such a warm welcome to the Michigan Audubon (MA) family. I started with the organization at the end of May and have jumped right into the work at hand.

This first month has been full of meeting with the Board and the team, and gaining a greater understanding of the work of this dedicated organization. Some of my first experiences have been centered around the MA pillar of education.

During my first week, I was honored to be a part of Bird Olympics at Kinawa Middle School here in Okemos. This was the final event of Bird by Bird, a yearlong program with a class of fifth-graders led by MA Education Coordinator Lindsay Cain. Bird Olympics took the kids through a journey of learning about birds and nature, including five stations of bird-referenced activities that drew the kids' attention. From discovering how close their skill levels came to the abilities of the Great Blue Heron, who sleeps on one leg with its eyes closed, to seeing how many times they can flap their "wings" in 10 seconds. I can report that no one came close to the hummingbird's ability of 700 flaps in just 10 seconds!

The Olympics included discussion with Q&A. The kids answered questions about many different types of birds, their capabilities, and their habitats. They were asking questions with great curiosity and interest. It was clear to me that a profound outcome of this yearlong program was that these kids not only have a great understanding of birds, they now value the role of nature in their lives and have an understanding that people have a responsibility to care for it. Future birders and conservationists have been born!

Continuing with the focus of education, as I write this, the Michigan Young Birders Camp is taking place at Alma College. Campers are traveling across the state, meeting with experts in ornithology, conservation, and bird photography. They are working in the field catching and banding birds and learning new birding skills. Investing in our youth provides a future of residents who care for, value, enjoy, and defend birds and conservation. I'm glad to share that MA actions with this key organizational pillar are alive and well.

Beyond these projects, I've been working on several business functions of the organization. From financials to membership, there is much to learn and move forward. This will be my focus for the remainder of the year, and I look forward to working with the Board on strategic developments.

This issue of the *Jack Pine Warbler* brings forward the results of the Michigan Audubon Photography Awards. WOW! The submissions we received are excellent! To all those who submitted your photography, thank you! This art evokes emotions and warms the heart to see nature at its best.

Thanks again for the warm welcome. I'm looking forward to meeting and hearing from more MA members throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Mennillo, MBA  
Interim CEO



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

... through conservation, education, and research efforts in the state of Michigan. Organized in 1904 and formally incorporated in 1905, it is Michigan's oldest conservation organization. Michigan Audubon supports bird surveys throughout the state, publishes survey data, provides educational opportunities, and preserves nearly 4,000 acres of land within 18 sanctuaries as habitat for birds and other wildlife. More than 30 chapters of Michigan Audubon focus on local conservation issues and provide educational programs within their communities. Contributions to Michigan Audubon are tax-deductible.

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



Kathleen Mennillo, MBA, is known for her ambition, business acumen, and integrity and has served at the executive level for over a decade. She comes from her dual role as Executive Director for both the International Hearing Society and the National Board of Certification for Hearing Instrument Sciences. Leveraging the power of relationships and networks, broad business skills, financial acuity, and strategic management, Kathleen propelled the organizations to unprecedented growth and financial stability. During her tenure, she secured the passage of two legislative bills in less than four years, skyrocketed revenue by 375% to more than \$4 million, reinvigorated their signature education program, and led through a complete organizational transformation, from staffing to location to streamlining processes. She is honored to join such a prestigious organization dedicated to conservation, education, and research and looks forward to assisting the organization in reaching new heights.

Kathleen relishes adventures with her sweet basset hound Olga, traveling the world with her husband, tending the flowers in her garden, advocating for bees, and designing jewelry.



American Redstart.  
Photo by Chris Hendra

Jack Pine Warbler



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# Chris Hendra Takes Top Honor in 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards

We are excited to announce that the 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards winner is Chris Hendra with his stunning Song Sparrow capture!

Hendra's photograph captured the perfect moment of the Song Sparrow pausing to look at its reflection from the edge of a beaver pond in the Western Upper Peninsula. The thoughtful composition draws in the viewer, inciting introspection and a connection with this quiet moment in nature.

Hendra is a Michigan Audubon member who hails from the Copper Country of the Upper Peninsula, where he is married with one daughter. "I have always loved being outdoors and spend the bulk of my free time pursuing Upper Michigan wildlife with my camera. I especially enjoy photographing birds in their natural habitat," he said.

All three submissions from Hendra were evocative, and we look forward to sharing more of his work with you throughout the year.

Earning honorable mentions this year are Jocelyn Anderson, Steve Jessmore, and Joseph Malott. You can view their winning photos on page 4.

All photographers will be featured in a weeklong Instagram takeover to share their stories as nature lovers and advocates for birds, along with being featured on the Michigan Audubon website at [www.michiganaudubon.org/MAPA](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/MAPA).

While we were excited to offer a Youth category, we only received submissions from three photographers. Because we did not meet the minimum of 10 entrants, we will not be declaring a winner in this category. We will feature the photos that were submitted in future social media posts and JPW issues.

You can stay up to date on our future photo contests by ensuring you renew your Michigan Audubon membership, receive our monthly eNews, and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter.

Thank you to all who submitted their photos to the 2022 Michigan Audubon Photography Awards! Your work continues to inspire us to connect with nature and the birds we are here to protect.







Common Mergansers  
Photo by Steve Jessmore



Ruffed Grouse.  
Photo by Joseph Malott



Great Blue Heron.  
Photo by Jocelyn Anderson

**F**orestry for Michigan Birds (FMB) is an initiative designed to help forest landowners and managers integrate healthy and sustainable forest management and planning while keeping in mind habitat needs for forest bird species.

FMB aims to create, enhance, and conserve habitat for birds and other wildlife while also:

- Providing for landowner income
- Keeping forests healthy
- Offering forest management options
- Adapting to climate change
- Planning for future generations

You don't have to own a large plot of land for this information to be helpful to you! According to the U.S. Forest Service, "If you have an acre or more of land with trees on at least 10 percent of it, you have a forest."

### Why is Michigan Important?

With a variety of habitat types and the proximity to the Great Lakes, more than 450 different species of birds have been found in Michigan. Almost half of those

have been confirmed as breeding in the state. With 20 million acres of forestland in Michigan, many of these breeding bird species rely on the habitat found within these forests. Each spring, Michigan's forests become vibrant "baby bird factories" as migratory birds, such as the Red-eyed Vireo or Black-throated Green Warbler, return to find their mates, make their nests, and raise their young. The quality of food, water, and shelter provided by Michigan's forests includes all the needs for the survival of birds and their new babies.

### What's the Problem?

Since 1970, North America has lost 3 billion birds, or roughly one in four birds, which represents an alarming decline of many of our most cherished species, such as the Wood Thrush. While populations of some groups of birds, such as waterfowl, have increased due to successful conservation efforts, other groups, including forest and grassland birds, have not. Forest bird populations as a whole have declined by 1.2 billion birds since 1970. That means there are simply fewer individuals of most species remaining in our forests, which also means a tremendous decrease in the natural benefits of birds, such as control of forest pests and seed dispersal.

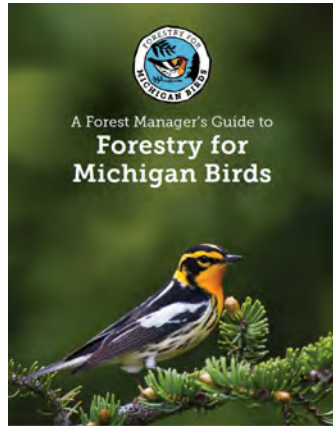


Black-throated Blue Warbler.  
Photo by Brian Lasenby



## How Can You Help?

With 20 million acres of forestland in Michigan, it's critical for us to be aware of how we are impacting the habitat that birds use across the state. Landowners and professional land managers can work together to create, enhance, or maintain your properties' habitat features across the landscape.



FMB has created a toolkit that provides information and resources for landowners and managers to utilize while planning or conducting on-the-ground management.

- **Forest Owner's Guide:** This guidebook provides high level information for the typical forest landowner that is looking for information about what they can do to get started managing their property with birds in mind.
- **Forest Manager's Guide:** This guidebook dives deeper into the technical information that professionals can utilize when discussing management with landowners, creating forest management plans, or conducting on-the-ground management.
- **Bird Habitat Assessment Datasheets:** FMB has provided two data sheets related to each guide. With the landowner's data sheet, landowners can collect information about habitat on their property which will help provide more information to professionals during initial discussions. Professionals can then utilize the manager's data sheet to collect more details to use in the long-term planning process.

You can find links to these resources on the Michigan Audubon website at [www.michiganaudubon.org/our-conservation-impact/forestry-for-michigan-birds/](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/our-conservation-impact/forestry-for-michigan-birds/).

### Improve Your Bird Knowledge

Along with the management information provided within the toolkit guides, 20 priority species were

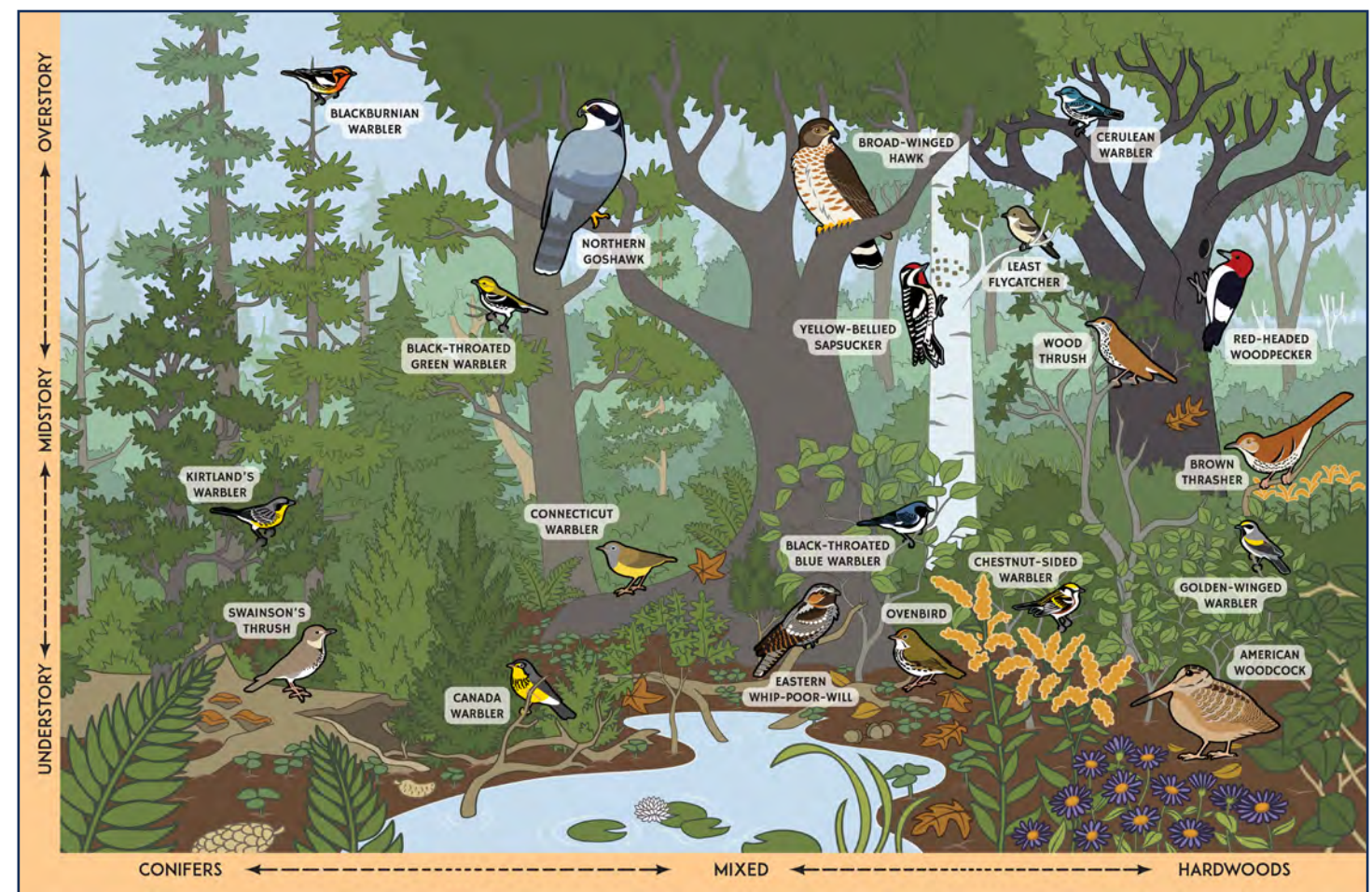
chosen to represent FMB across the different forest types and areas of Michigan. A critical aspect of assessing bird habitat is knowing what birds are present on the property. Improving your bird identification and song identification can give you insight into what types of birds are currently attracted to your property and give you a starting point for management discussions.

The following are great resources for improving your bird identification skills:

- **All About Birds Online Guide by the Cornell Lab:** An online guide to birds and birdwatching that includes information on Bird ID Skills, Feeding Birds, FAQs and Common Problems, Bird-Friendly Homes, and more.
- **Merlin Smartphone App by Cornell Lab:** Answer three simple questions about a bird you are trying to identify, and Merlin will come up with a list of possible matches. Merlin offers quick identification help for all levels of bird watchers to learn about the birds across the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. This app is free to download.
- **Sibley Birds V2 Smartphone App:** The app based on the Sibley Guide to Birds includes all of the content in the printed guide as well as over 2,800 audio recordings, additional text, complete seasonal status data for every species in every state and province, hundreds of searchable criteria, and much more. There is a cost associated with this app.
- **Audubon Online Guide to North American Birds:** Features a catalog of North American bird species information, songs, climate vulnerability, and more.
- **Bird Watcher's Digest:** What bird is that? Consult this bird identification guide to ID mystery birds in the backyard and beyond. Photos, song recordings, in-depth entries, and more help bird watchers correctly identify the birds they spot.

### Forestry for Michigan Birds Events

Forestry for Michigan Birds will hold events such as workshops, bird hikes, webinars, and more at various times of the year. These events will provide opportunities to take topics written in text and visualize them in the forest. They will help delve deeper into any topics and questions that participants may have and provide opportunities to practice bird identification and habitat assessment and how to use that information to develop a forest management plan.



## Forest Habitats With Birds in Mind

Each bird species uses slightly different habitat features, even if the same acre (or tree!) within a forest is shared. Resource partitioning, a division of limited resources within the ecological niche, is a way for wildlife to co-exist. For example, Cerulean Warblers nest in the uppermost third of the forest, whereas Black-throated Blue Warblers nest within six feet of the ground in a well-developed shrub layer. Both warblers are insectivorous but easily co-exist, each foraging at different heights in the forest.

Other species have different requirements — Some may need an older forest with little understory growth, such as the Northern Goshawk. Others, like the American Woodcock, need areas with dense, brushy understory and wide-open areas for their breeding displays. Forest age class is also a factor. Kirtland's Warblers only use jack pine forest when it is young, and trees are less than 30 feet tall.

The Forestry for Michigan Birds project has identified 20 priority bird species (pictured above) and provides more information about them and the habitats they depend on in the toolkits for forest landowners and managers.

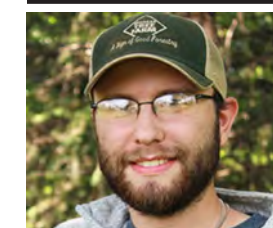
Workshops typically will consist of a classroom presentation portion followed by field trips to nearby forests that portray many topics discussed. Presenters typically include American Bird Conservancy staff, FMB steering committee members, and local hosting organizations. If you're interested in attending an event, you can find information about events on the Michigan Audubon events calendar.

### Contact

If you have any additional questions about Forestry for Michigan Birds, how to get started with managing your property, making a donation, or finding local

resources, contact American Bird Conservancy at [michiganbirds@abcbirds.org](mailto:michiganbirds@abcbirds.org) or 906-251-3065.

Visit [www.michiganaudubon.org/our-conservation-impact/forestry-for-michigan-birds](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/our-conservation-impact/forestry-for-michigan-birds) for information and to download your toolkits.



Michael Paling graduated from Michigan Technological University in 2016 with a bachelor's degree in Forestry. He came to American Bird Conservancy after spending over two years working with private landowners as a forester for Michigan's Forestry Assistance Program with conservation districts in Western Lower Michigan.





This section of the *Jack Pine Warbler* is dedicated to Michigan Audubon's Whitefish Point Bird Observatory and features three articles illuminating the research conducted at WPBO this spring. This work focused on waterbirds (April 15–May 31), raptors (March 15–May 31), and owls (March 15–May 31).

As one of the three pillars of Michigan Audubon's mission, research is at the heart and soul of what we do and integral to our value proposition. Whitefish Point ranks among North America's most significant avian migration sites, and the observatory's long-term research programs provide a picture of species dispersion, populations, demographics, movement, and more. This research is made possible through donations to Michigan Audubon that support our efforts to engage highly talented individuals to perform this work.

WPBO is located just north of Paradise, Michigan, along the shore of Lake Superior. The outdoor spaces of WPBO are open daily from dawn to dusk year-round. You can learn more at [www.wpbo.org](http://www.wpbo.org).

Whitefish Point  
BIRD OBSERVATORY

## Bird Time: WPBO's Spring 2022 Waterbird Count

BY ALISON VILAG, WPBO SPRING WATERBIRD COUNTER



There is a certain urgency attached to spring migration on Superior. Many of the shorebirds and waterfowl that pass Whitefish Point Bird Observatory's (WPBO) waterbird count are traveling to the Arctic's tundra. Up there, the days are long — but the season is short. The span of days to establish a territory and raise the next generation is acutely finite. Birds passing the Point seem especially compelled to move north quickly. Here, migration happens round-the-clock.

Migratory birds — and, by proxy, our work — are bound less to a human calendar than to weather conditions. At WPBO, we measure things less by day or date than by seasonal happenings. "The day the snow slid off the roof;" "The night the spring peepers started to sing;" "The day the loon flight peaked;" "The day the mosquitoes hatched." In fact, when the time changes from Eastern Standard to Daylight Savings, our owl banders continue on standard time, calling it "Bird Time." Conventional business hours are less important to these lines of work than are the boundaries set by lightness and darkness. In a way, all of us performing research at WPBO adopt Bird Time, and in spring, Bird Time sure does fly past.



A Snowy Owl atop an ice floe.  
Photo by Alison Világ

### *Bird Time I (April 15–21)*

On the first day of the spring waterbird count, the first birds are a Rough-legged Hawk and a flock of Bohemian Waxwings, species bound for points much further north. There is little evidence of either spring or water — in fact — my surroundings could pass easily for a scene on a holiday greeting card. Waterbirds are in short supply. But dark lines of dabblers, the first ducks to move through, trace the dark leads of water, traveling towards a season that right now just barely seems to exist.

Twice within this span of time, I see Snowy Owls nonchalantly riding ice floes that move slowly up Superior. I watch the owls sleep, preen, and yawn, all behaviors of birds irrefutably within their element. On the second day of the count, two Short-eared Owls grace my station. Shorties are always a delight to watch. The plumage is striking, the flight agile in the most lovely ways. But more than that, these birds are familiars. My interest in birds began at age 6. The first owl I saw that first spring of birding was a short-eared, and that short-eared set me down the path that has me at the tip of Whitefish Point during migration. It feels right to start the season being welcomed by a species with whom I have this history.

### *Bird Time II (April 22–28): Peak dabbler, Common Goldeneye, and Sandhill Crane flights.*

On April 21, following a slew of days where snow blew and north winds howled, I drive to town and catch a weather forecast on the way — tomorrow's actually going to be a nice day!

It is. Sandhill Cranes, more bound to thermals than the waterbird count's other focal species, fly on "actually nice" days. And April 22, an actually nice day, brings our season's sandhill peak. The cranes cross confidently; I lay down on the cobbles to watch. Overhead is filled with wild bugling, and over land and over water, crane flocks shimmer to the horizon. In roughly four hours, I tally 7,044 cranes. By the end of the season, I'll have 13,118, which exceeds the previous high count (11,814 in 2016). During the waterbird count's incipient years (1984–89), the highest



Trumpeter Swans.  
Photo by Alison Világ

spring total was just 287. In 2022, with the species much more numerous, I get more than that in a single flock.

### *Bird Time III (April 29–May 5): Peak Aythya, Bufflehead, grebe, and loon flights.*

This is the time of the big loon push — for me, a favorite installment of spring. The loons are vanguards of migration's opening floodgates, and everything is exciting this time of year, with each day bringing new arrivals. It's thrilling to imagine so many Common Loons journeying to remote lakes on the Canadian Shield, the Red-throated Loons to the tundra of the coastal plain. The loon flight travels a much broader swath of sky and horizon than many of our other flights. Most waterbirds seem tightly bound to water, preferring to hug the lines of Superior. But loons, strong fliers, will just cut overland from Whitefish Bay to Lake Superior. They travel alone, in pairs, or in widely — but aesthetically — spaced flocks strung out across the sky like constellations.

### *Bird Time IV (May 6–12): Marbled Godwit; peak Surf Scoter flight; overall, a quiet period.*

Poor weather, so long as the winds are from favorable directions, is great weather for waterbird migration. My favorite days are those when rain, clouds, and ducks all blow sideways up the lake — days so windy that I feel like I've got sea legs once I'm back inside, out of the elements. There's something savage about standing out in eight hours of foul weather and feeling indefatigable. But the weather is mostly dry, mostly calm, mostly clear. My eyes beg for relief from the sun; my focus begs for duck flocks to catch, to sort.

### *Bird Time V (May 13–19): Peak Red-breasted Merganser & Bonaparte's Gull flights; Marbled Godwit, Smith's Longspur.*

The lunar eclipse happens, and I go out to the beach to watch it. I arrive at dusk when Long-eared Owls are flying beneath emerging stars. Watching birds move between winter and summer at a vantage marked by the transition of land and water, light and dark, is powerful. Blinking lights from wind turbines and cell towers dot the otherwise dark Canadian and Michigan shorelines, testaments to our attachment to energy, to connectivity. Night-migrating Long-tailed Ducks fly north, yodeling,

headed all the way to Nunavut, maybe.

The very Piping Plover chicks I stewarded here two summers ago court around me until I leave at 1 a.m. I'm delighted they're back. Through my scope, I watch the moon's passage to totality and back, reflecting on the accumulation of hours I've spent on this beach, the energy I've devoted to this place. At the moment the eclipse becomes total, Common Loons howl up and down Whitefish Bay. The night pulses with a connectivity and energy much deeper than the forms produced by wind turbines and cell towers.

### *Bird Time VI (May 20–26): Pacific Loon, uncommon shorebirds (Hudsonian Godwit, Willet, Stilt Sandpiper); peak Long-tailed Duck, White-winged Scoter, and Whimbrel flights.*

On May 22, I tally 655 Long-tailed Ducks. The long-taileds pour out of a space between landforms we call "the gap." When they disappeared into the gap last October, they wore winter: black and white, leaden water and ice. Now, in late May, they reemerge again, wearing summer: hues of tawny grass and dark muck. Watching birds enter the gap in fall, then emerge again in spring epitomizes migration's mystique. The glimpses we get are fleeting, and there's so much we don't know. And this wonder of the not-knowing is a part of why I love Superior's migrations.

The first flock of the Canada Goose molt flight passes the Point, signaling spring's end. These birds, non-breeders, are headed up to James and Hudson Bays. There, they'll molt. The geese are already losing flight feathers, and they look ragged. By this time, I feel ragged. Each day, the alarm gets earlier, the body protests harder, and even when I lay down to sleep, lines of waterbirds keep flying through my closed eyes.

### *Bird Time VII (May 27–31): Willet, Parasitic Jaeger, Pacific Loon; peak Canada Goose flight.*

Black-bellied Plovers — stately, black and white — grace the beach. They're headed to the tundra, and their call is beautifully melancholy. It pierces the soul as everything does at the end of the season. Count regulars, some of whom have visited for decades, hug me goodbye. I watch them disappear down the boardwalk, choke up a bit like I do when a shorebird flock departs the beach to the north.

*continued on page 10*



White-winged Scoters.  
Photo by Alison Világ



Shorebirds are strong fliers and migration champions. Many of them travel not only between seasons but between hemispheres, too. They're unthwarted by bad weather, confident in the Superior crossing. It takes quite foul conditions to ground a migrating shorebird flock at WPBO. And this spring, the weather has been comparatively mild. There hasn't been a day when the freighters had to shelter in the bay, only a few days where I needed my worst-weather gear or to use the shack as a windbreak. My shorebird numbers have been low, and the season feels it's missing something.

I finally get some weather — dense fog — in the count's last days. From the shack, Superior isn't visible. Five Whimbrels drop into the tip pond, shrilling. I stand up — summoned by a higher power, it feels — to observe. The flock builds to 66 Whimbrel, 62 Dunlin, 10 White-rumped Sandpipers, a Willet, and a Stilt Sandpiper, the first to be photographed in spring here. I treat every scope scan as a homage to the travelers, appreciating the graceful lines and long, pointed wings that make these marathon migratory flights possible.

Within the last half-hour of the count, the fog lifts and so do the birds, restless to go. A few days later, loading my truck, mosquitoes swarming, I feel that too. The shorebirds bear north; they rise, they fall, they cry out. My heart does all that, too. It runs better on bird time than it does on standard time.

I am deeply grateful to Nate Crane, Rhoda Johnson, Leonard Graf, Darrell Lawson, Alec Olivier, Evan Reister, and Matt Winkler, who all covered the count on various days so I could get time off. Together, we tallied 40,287 individual waterbirds of 70 species. This total is the second-highest in count history (behind 1997's 42,262), but where 1997's number is a diverse conglomerate of waterbird species, the 2022 total was dominated by Canada Geese and Sandhill Cranes. Together, they constitute 49.8% of the total.

Except for White-winged Scoter and Surf Scoter (below average) and Greater Scaup (average), waterfowl moved through in above-average numbers. New high counts were attained for Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, and Hooded Merganser, and Ring-necked Duck tied its previous high count. Both Horned and Red-necked Grebes showed in numbers close to their cumulative averages. While Common Loon numbers continue to remain, as they have for the last decade, below average, Red-throated Loons were above average.

Shorebirds were a mixed bag. Some species like Whimbrel were well below average. Others, like Dunlin, were above. Some of the dense flights I expect in spring — like evening flights of scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Bonaparte's Gulls, and Whimbrel — didn't happen, though we certainly were out looking for them! I suspect this is more because of a lack of weather events to concentrate these flights than it was reflective of populations.

**Table: 10 most numerous species of spring 2022 waterbird count**

Species	First	Last	Peak	Total	Average
Sandhill Crane	Apr 15	May 31	7044 (Apr 22)	13118	1893
Canada Goose	Apr 15	May 31	3237 (May 30)	6934	2610
Common Loon	Apr 15	May 31	484 (May 5)	3671	5233
Red-breasted Merganser	Apr 15	May 31	444 (May 19)	2712	2585
Long-tailed Duck	Apr 15	May 30	655 (May 22)	2201	1443
White-winged Scoter	Apr 15	May 31	320 (May 24)	1636	1836
Red-necked Grebe	Apr 18	May 29	151 (May 5)	691	630
Bonaparte's Gull	May 2	May 31	169 (May 19)	647	1375
Greater Scaup	Apr 23	May 19	118 (May 1)	528	525
Red-throated Loon	Apr 21	May 31	71 (May 5)	512	438

During the course of the waterbird count, 25,578 individual birds of 115 non-waterbird species were recorded. Of these, the most numerous were Blue Jay (9,344), Broad-winged Hawk (3,967), Sharp-shinned Hawk (1,466), Black-capped Chickadee (992), Common Grackle (752), American Pipit (746), Red-winged Blackbird (472), Yellow-rumped Warbler (464), and Turkey Vulture (425). A Smith's Longspur on May 18 (seemingly the first WPBO record of this species since 2011) was the most unusual non-waterbird sighted this season, and appearances by Red-headed Woodpecker (May 14), Northern Mockingbird (May 16), Eurasian Tree Sparrow (May 23 & 25), and Brewer's Blackbird (May 30) were enjoyed as well.



When Alison Világ was six, her parents asked if she'd like to go look at ducks. Little did they know that day would be antecedent to a multitude of days spent looking at ducks, et. al. Both professionally and as a pastime, the pursuit of birds has taken Alison around the country and the world. Whitefish Point has long been an impactful place for Alison, and she was thrilled to return for a fourth season and continue her connection to the Point.



A Northern Harrier flies over the Point. Photo by Alison Világ

On the morning of Tuesday, March 15, I strapped on my snowshoes and made my way out and up to the top of the dune where the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory (WPBO) hawk deck stands. The boardwalk that starts just past the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum was buried in snow 2-3 feet deep, and the drifts had completely covered the 47 steps that led up to the platform. The last few were blocked by a mountain of a snowdrift that was too steep to walk over with the snowshoes. So, off the shoes came, and I climbed over the mound with the ambition of a child that is allowed to go outside and play on a snow day. It felt appropriate that I had to claw my way onto the hawk deck to achieve access to what would be my home away from home and serve as my humble office for the next two and a half months — the raptor counter shack.

The first day of the season is always filled with anticipation. What will be the first raptor of the season? How will the season play out? Which species will I see more or less of? Will I freeze to death? I am sure these questions are common to migration counters everywhere, though the last may be more Whitefish Point specific. All of these questions became much more sobering after my snowy jaunt and the reality that winter was far from over set in.

It is said that March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb — only this year, the lion decided to eat the lamb and stick around until it ate all the lambs in the U.P. Freezing cold, biting north winds, dense foggy days, and wet weather kept raptors away from the Point. Only 70 raptors, in total, were counted during the 116 hours spent observing from the confines of my shack in March. In 17 days, only two days saw double-digit numbers, with the highest daily total being 24 raptors thanks to 17 Bald Eagles that took advantage of the best weather day of the month. Of the other days, 10 of those days saw three raptors or less, and there were even three days where raptors were nowhere to be seen at all. It was a tough start to the season, and the oppressive gray skies, my numb extremities, and lack of birds made for long days of nothing but imagining raptors somewhere far south of me still waiting for their chance to move.

Starting with a three-day streak of zero raptors, the first half of April could do nothing to satiate the March Lion's appetite as I watched it go on to devour the Easter Rabbit. The bad weather was keeping migrating birds either



stalled or forcing them to take alternative routes as the numbers remained at a historic low. In fact, by mid-April, I was beginning to worry if I was bearing witness to the all-time worst raptor migration in the 44 years of the WPBO raptor count. More than anything, the first half of the 2022 spring season proved to me that the biggest factor affecting migration count numbers is the weather. On April 20, a southwesterly wind brought my first triple-digit flight of the season in the form of 121 Sharp-shinned Hawks. Following those west winds, the wind turned southerly, and on April 22, they brought a unique visitor in the form of a Swainson's Hawk, a rare western visitor from the Great Plains. Finally, on April 24, a strong south wind brought season-high counts of American Kestrel (205), Northern Harrier (91), and Rough-legged Hawk (39) along with 676 Sharp-shinned Hawks. With a total of 1,076 raptors counted, April 24 was the day the March Lion decided it had its fill, left for good, and all those birds I had imagined sitting around twiddling their talons back in March had finally decided it was time to go! The last week and a half of April saw 4,359 raptors fly over the Point, with the last day of the month bringing the second Swainson's Hawk of the season. With such a great end to the month, I was cautiously optimistic that migration had gotten back on track and hopeful as I used my last set of hand and toe warmers that I wouldn't need anymore.

May did not disappoint as it made me all but forget about the harsh trials of the beginning of the season. With more raptors in the sky than I had seen in my previous seasons at Whitefish Point, I enjoyed counting more than ever before. The first week brought over 4,000 Broad-winged Hawks with a single-day high count of 1,812 and the following week brought over 4,000 Sharp-shinned Hawks with a single-day high count of 1,443. During the first half of the month, there were days when raptors surrounded me, and some days it was hard to tear myself away from the deck at the thought of missing what might come next. The Swainson's Hawk guest appearances continued, and the individual that was seen on the last day of April was seen again on consecutive days and then a third for the season arrived on May 12. With 13,524 raptors, the month of May accounted for 74% of the entire season's flight; that's a mid-season turn-around that any baseball team would be jealous of! Still, the weather remained cool throughout the month, and by the end of the third week, northerly winds began to dominate again.

continued on page 12





A Swainson's Hawk soars over the hawk deck. Photo by Richard Couse

# Spring Owl Banding Report

BY CHRIS NERI & NOVA MACKENTLEY, WPBO SPRING OWL BANDERS



As is the case every spring, working in the woods at night at Whitefish Point for two and a half months starting in mid-March presents challenges, struggles, and many rewards. The weather was particularly unsettled for the first month and a half, and the snow hung on with a vengeance. We were effectively wearing the same gear in mid-May as we were on the first night of the season due to an unusually cold April and start of May. Sparring with the weather is worth the effort, as we study these silent flyers and provide insight into the movements of bird species that so many describe as magical.

Despite spending two decades as the spring owl banders, we really did not know what to expect this year with the owl migration. Last year we experienced a particularly productive season that produced an unexpected peak of Northern Saw-whet Owls and a record number of Long-eared Owls. Although we were slightly disappointed in the Northern Saw-whet Owl (NSWO) numbers this year, it proved to be a relatively good season. We banded a total of 734 owls and recaptured 46 previously-banded owls. The 734 new owls comprised 462 NSWOW, 12 Boreal Owls, 240 Long-eared Owls, and 20 Barred Owls. The 20 barred represent the highest total banded in a spring season at the Point. The 46 recaptures were 41 NSWOW, four long-eareds, and one barred. In addition to the owls, we banded three Eastern Whip-poor-wills this spring.

If you are a regular reader of the *Jack Pine Warbler*, you may remember us mentioning that NSWOW numbers have been less predictable in recent springs. The relationship



One of the 20 Barred Owls banded at WPBO this spring — a record for a spring banding season at the Point.

between the number of juveniles we band in the summer and the number we catch the following year on their first spring migration reversed itself in 2017 and 2018, then returned to what is expected in spring 2020. The most recent surprise in summer was an unexpected peak in reproductive success in 2020. The high reproductive success was reflected in the number of NSWOW we banded last spring and again this season. Of the 952 NSWOW banded last spring, 676 (71%) hatched in 2020. Of the 462 NSWOW banded this spring, 197 (39%) hatched in 2020. Unfortunately, this is the last spring that molt patterns will allow us to determine that a NSWOW hatched in 2020.

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"We always remind ourselves that the owls migrate through Whitefish Point whether or not we, or anybody else, is here to witness it."  
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Coming off of last spring's North American record season of 465 Long-eared Owls (LEOW), we would not have been surprised if their numbers crashed to particularly low numbers this spring. Therefore, we were very pleased with the 244, including the four recaptures this spring. We are still excited by the success of changes we made to our protocols in 2015, such as adding an LEOW audiolure, which increased LEOW numbers. During the 27 years before those changes, a total of 1,492 LEOW were banded here in the spring. In the eight years since implementing those changes, we have banded 2,017 LEOW. Prior to 2015, the highest number of LEOW banded in North America in a migratory season was 176, which just happened to be in Chris's first season here in spring 1999. We always remind ourselves that the owls migrate through Whitefish Point whether or not we, or anybody else, is here to witness it. We feel incredibly fortunate to be the ones who get to witness their migration here so intimately and are gratified to have dramatically increased the productivity of WPBO's long-term spring owl research.

Boreal Owl numbers have been alarmingly low since 2009. Boreal Owl irruption years produced 163 and 114 in the springs of 1988 and 1992, respectively. Since 1992, irruption years have only produced numbers in the seventies. Since adding the NSWOW audiolure to the protocol in 2007, the average number of NSWOW banded per spring season went from 63 to 572. Since adding the audiolure for LEOW, numbers went from an average of 55 to 252. Unlike the NSWOW and LEOW, we never saw an increase in boreal numbers after adding an audiolure for the species, and since banding 78 boreals in spring 2013, their highest total was 20 in 2018. As much as we hope their numbers eventually rebound, the possibility that we and future generations of owl banders here may never see them in the numbers we experienced just nine years ago is dispiriting.



One of the 12 Boreal Owls banded at WPBO this spring. Boreal Owl numbers continue to be low despite changes to protocol that have resulted in higher numbers for other owl species.

Future banding efforts at Whitefish Point will continue to shed light on the population and dispersal of these birds that play a critical role in the ecosystem, such as helping to keep rodent populations down.

In addition to the birds, we are always amazed to see many of the amphibians here begin to emerge and make their way to the ponds while there is still several feet of snow covering most of the ground. We observed spotted salamander, blue-spotted salamander, four-toed salamander, eastern newt, wood frog, green frog, Cope's gray treefrog, and spring peeper this spring.



A spotted salamander seen by the owl banders when it emerged from hibernation at WPBO.

We enjoyed visits from Waterbird Counter Alison Vilag and former crew mates Tori Steely, Karl Bardon, Tim Baerwald, and Cory Gregory. As always, we thank all of you who support Michigan Audubon's owl research at WPBO. We say it after each of our seasons, but it would truly be impossible without your generosity.



Nova Mackentley and Chris Neri are a legendary pair of raptor banders living at Whitefish Point. In addition to regularly leading the owl banding program every spring at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, they are accomplished nature photographers.

For the last week and a half, the feeling of migration's end was palpable in the air, and the dwindling number of raptors in the sky attested to this. It seemed like the season's count would end with nothing more than a sigh, but the last two days saw some southwesterly winds, and a final push of immature Bald Eagles kept the counter clicking. On the afternoon of the very last day of the count, as I was aging a first-year Bald Eagle, another bird drew my attention away from it. I gasped audibly at the moment I realized I was looking at a Mississippi Kite! What a spectacular way to end a season that initially I thought would go down in the record books as the worst of all. I have seldom had a bird bring me such elation as this kite, and that feeling alone made every minute of the whole season worth it.

After the dust has settled, I look back at the spring of 2022. Boiling it down to the numbers, over 78 days and 575 hours of counting, a total of 18,386 individual raptors were recorded across 17 species. The total number of raptors counted was 5% above the all-time average total. No new high or low counts were recorded. Distinct species tallied at 17, with their relative abundance varying greatly, ranging from 10 Cooper's Hawks to 8,078 Sharp-shinned Hawks. Sharp-shinned Hawk accounted for 43.9% of all raptors recorded, with Broad-winged Hawk making up another 37.6% of the total. This season's data compared with the past 44 years supports evidence that several raptors such as Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Golden Eagle, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon have increased relative abundance, while others such as Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and Rough-legged Hawk exhibit declines.

All that being said, no numbers compare to the experience of spending a season counting at Whitefish Point. Beyond the birds and the weather are all the wonderful people who come to share the experience and create a community of appreciation for all things with wings, for which I am grateful.



Rich is a conservation biologist from Massachusetts. He is a firm believer in the fact that everything is connected through the ecological web of life, and his path reflects his fascination with all creatures great and small. His field research has taken him to Massachusetts, Michigan, Maine, and beyond.





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.

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