



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER
March/April 2010

Owl Prowl Scores Fowl

By Ray Stocking and Monty Brown

As birders assembled in the late afternoon of March 6, Washtenaw Audubon president Ray Stocking announced that the conditions could not be better for a group going in search of owls. Although the temperatures fell once the sun went down, the day had been relatively warm and an absence of clouds and wind would enhance the chances of seeing the nocturnal raptors. Ray led this limited-participation event with Pioneer High senior Andy Johnson, a veteran of dozens of WAS events who was taking his first turn leading one. The action started before sunset, and the first stop was along the M-14 connector that joins Maple to Miller Road. This year, a pair of Great-Horned Owls is roosting on a nest that has been home both to Great-Horneds as well as to Red-tailed Hawks in recent years. Everyone was able to see the head of a nesting owl, who from time to time favored us by lifting her eyes and staring back. As the sun set, the group moved on to Embury Road, a birding hot spot north of Chelsea. The drivers, including Andy's mom, Sue, had a challenge at times making their way down the road through heavy mud, but the road proved in the end to be serviceable. Once we got settled, everyone remained as quiet as possible while we listened for Barred Owls. At one point we did hear two calling back and forth, in between howls of coyotes and dogs. But neither repeated attempts at playing recorded calls nor a couple of

*Northern
Hawk Owl
Photo by
Andy Johnson*

(While not seen during the "owl prowling," it was photographed during the recent field trip to the Soo. See the article on pg.6).



relocations was able to bring about the desired result—drawing the birds in for the group to see. Although everyone was disappointed not to get at least a glimpse of the Barred Owls, the clear, star-filled sky provided a measure of consolation. We also experienced an unexpected bonus when, as we were driving away from Embury Road and giving up the pursuit of the Barred Owls, some in the group were treated for two or three minutes to outstanding views of the International Space Station as it flew from west to east. At our last stop of the evening, Andy and Ray fairly quickly drew in a highly cooperative, red-morph Eastern Screech-Owl. The group was buzzed twice as the owl flew from branch to branch directly over our heads. Andy engaged the bird vocally for a few minutes while Ray shined a light near but not directly at this handsome specimen, ensuring that everyone in attendance had good looks at this handsome bird while not unduly disturbing it.

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President's Letter

By Ray Stocking

This past February I had the pleasure of joining Lathe Claflin and Gary Siegriest on their joint Washtenaw/Jackson Audubon Society annual trip to Sault Saint Marie (the Soo) for some extreme winter bird watching. This was my first time ever in Northern Michigan for winter birding, and Lathe and Gary did not disappoint us – either me or the other 23 bird enthusiasts who were there. I use this trip as the focal point for my President's letter, not only because I am still in awe of the birds seen on this trip, but because I want to point out why participating in our monthly programs and attending field trips can inspire all of us to get out and enjoy nature and birds more often.

For me, the catalyst for registering for the Soo trip was produced by last November's Washtenaw Audubon monthly gathering where Lathe and Gary were the guest speakers and talked about their previous winter trips to the Soo. Listening to their stories and admiring their photos, not only of birds but of the scenery itself, gave me that final incentive I needed to register for the trip. Mind you, ever since becoming a member of Washtenaw Audubon, I have always wanted to go on the Soo trip, but it was this presentation that proved to be the ice-breaker (pun intended).

You, too, will be inspired to join us for a trip or other event sponsored by Washtenaw Audubon if you can see for yourself how exciting these events can be. The trick is that you need to come to some of our programs. Unfortunately, many of our members do not attend the programs and field trips offered by Washtenaw Audubon. Almost all of our trips are free and open to the public, with no advance registration required.

I know I sometimes sound like a broken record in this newsletter, constantly encouraging members and non-members to come to our monthly gatherings and/or attend field trips. Trust me when I say I know from personal experience that it is hard to grasp just how much you will enjoy one of these events until you have actually participated in one. So, please, if you have been thinking about attending one of our monthly programs, let my experience from last November's gathering be the impetus for you to realize what several members of Washtenaw Audubon Society already know. These events are great fun for all levels of birders. I hope to see you out in the field or at our monthly program sometime soon.

Acknowledging One of Our Youngest and Brightest

On a personal note, I would like to thank Andy Johnson for co-leading the recent WAS-sponsored Owl Prowl field trip with me earlier this month. Andy and I benefited from the many owling tips we have received over the years from two of Washtenaw Audubon's best owl experts, Don "Screech" Chalfant and Dea Armstrong.

(Continued on the next page)

Rare Bird Alerts

Michigan Bird Report

<http://birdingonthe.net/birdmail.html>

Scroll down to Michigan, Mich-listers, and SE Michigan

(President's Letter continued)

When Andy and I decided to lead this exciting trip together as a team, all of my 44 years were honored to work with this young man and it took nothing for me to step aside and let him run the show.

Andy, now 18, will graduate from Ann Arbor Pioneer High School this spring. He will waste no time heading to Canada's Churchill, Manitoba – the polar bear capital of the world! – to study the Hudsonian Godwit and other birds. In late August, Andy will return to Ann Arbor briefly and then head off to college (which one is still undecided as we go to press). Please join me in wishing Andy well with his new adventures this summer and beyond. Best of luck, Andy!

Good birding!

Ray

Volunteers Needed to Census Michigan's Rare Birds

Michigan Audubon is seeking individuals with a passion for bird conservation to help find Michigan's rare birds. As a bird census volunteer, you will be trained on surveillance and monitoring methods for a specific species or habitat in order to help document the presence of rare birds. In addition, volunteer Bird Census Coordinators are needed in order to help us recruit and train volunteer bird monitors throughout the State of Michigan. If you are passionate about bird conservation, organized, outgoing, dynamic, and can be trained to run a training yourself, we encourage you to contact us!

“Michigan Audubon, as part of the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative, will ensure that all Red List, Endangered, and Threatened species will be surveyed and/or monitored,” says Jonathan Lutz, Executive Director of Michigan Audubon. Michigan Audubon seeks to fill in the gaps in order to cover species not currently part of surveillance or monitoring programs. This will be accomplished by training individuals as a Bird Census Coordinator by species and region. These coordinators will then recruit, train, and facilitate volunteers in the monitoring of a particular species (and in some cases, a group of species or even habitat type) in an area of Michigan. Birds considered for 2010 include Kirtland's Warbler, Piping Plover, Cerulean Warbler, Peregrine Falcon, and Sandhill Crane. Species considered for inclusion in 2011 and subsequent years may include Common Loon, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, and Red-headed Woodpecker along with others. Michigan Audubon will hold an informational meeting in to find interested birders and answer questions about monitoring Michigan's birds. The location and date are Matthaei Botanical Garden in **Ann Arbor** on April 21st, 6 pm.

Please RSVP if you plan on attending. If you cannot attend and are interested in becoming a volunteer coordinator or volunteer monitor, please contact Thomas Funke, Director of Conservation at (c) 269.275.0004 or (w) 517.886.9144 or email tfunke@michiganaudubon.org.

Annual Midwest Crane Count

This year, the Midwest Crane Count will be conducted on **Saturday, April 17, 2010 from 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.**

The Annual Midwest Crane Count is a tradition dating back to 1976. It is one of the largest citizen-based inventories in the world. One of the primary purposes of the Crane Count is to allow The International Crane Foundation (ICF) to monitor the abundance and distribution of cranes in the Upper-Midwest of the United States.

Get involved with Crane Count! Volunteers are the most important part of this unique program. You can play an integral role in helping ICF study Sandhill Cranes (and maybe even a Whooping Crane!)! Join over 3,000 volunteer counters throughout the Upper Midwest on April 17th to count cranes and witness the awakening of dawn. If you are interested in participating this year, please contact Anya Dale, the Crane Count Coordinator for Washtenaw and Jackson Counties at anyaaudubon@gmail.com to select a site that is nearby and/or interesting to you for the morning of the count! Thanks!

Birdhouse Basics

By Dea Armstrong

At a recent program on Birdhouse Basics, I covered the fundamental points of providing birdhouses for our feathered friends. While this article isn't intended to go over all that we covered, it should provide you with resources to help you put up the right kind of birdhouse that will provide a nest site for one of our native birds.

Now is *the* time to get birdhouses set up for the breeding season. But before you do, think about what kind of birds you see in your yard over the year. While a nest box will provide "new habitat" in your yard, it is unlikely to be found by a bird that doesn't come into your yard regularly. Think about providing a house for a bird that you see on your property.

If you have European Starlings and/or House Sparrows, consider providing a house with an entry hole too small for these two aggressive species because there is no good reason to encourage them to nest in your yard. Houses with very small entrance holes like those designed for a House Wren or a Black-capped Chickadee would work well. You can buy or build a birdhouse suitable for these native birds. Plans are readily available on the web.

If you are lucky enough to live in a large yard or a more rural setting than I do, you may be able to think about Eastern Bluebirds. However, you may still have to do battle with House Sparrows. What ever you do, please do your research before you buy, build or set out that nest box. The following resources should be very helpful.

Stokes Birdhouse Book - Donald and Lillian Stokes

Stokes Guides to Bird Behavior (Volumes 1-3) – Donald and Lillian Stokes

The Birder's Handbook: A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds – Ehrlich, Dobkin, and Wheye

Julie Craves of the Rouge River Bird Observatory in Dearborn has a wonderful pamphlet that everyone should read before delving into the world of birdhouses! Look through the FAQ list for the topic "I want to put up a nest box."
http://www.umd.umich.edu/dept/rouge_river/springFAQ.html

Birder's World- Attracting Birds. You may have to join or subscribe to access this site but frankly the magazine is well worth it!
<http://www.birdersworld.com/birdwatching/attracting%20birds.aspx>

USFWS "Homes for Birds " Publication <http://library.fws.gov/BirdPublications.htm>

Cornell's Lab of Ornithology- Nest Watchers' Resources

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/nestinginfo/nestboxref/nestboxref/>

North American Bluebird Society <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>

Wild Birds Unlimited <http://www.wbu.com/education/>

Washtenaw Audubon Society <http://washtenawaudubon.org/>

Natural Area Preservation <http://www.a2gov.org/government/publicservices/fieldoperations/NAP/Pages/NaturalAreaPreservation.aspx>

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April--May)

By Monty Brown, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For more information, go to our webpage. Changes and updates will be made via our Twitter service, the birders@umich.edu listserv and/or our web page at www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php with updates as needed. If you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send an e-mail.

**Thursdays,
April 8-May 27**

Spring Migration Walks in Nichols Arboretum This will be our 5th season reveling in spring migration at the Arb. Join us as often as you like during our eight-week series of Thursday morning walks to observe migrants as they pass through on the way north to their breeding grounds. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to meet and bird with others. In addition to the birds, the Arb's flora in spring are marvelous to behold. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off Geddes Road at 8:00 a.m.

Thurs., April 29

Basics of Birdwatching Class, BIRDING 101 presented by Dea Armstrong just in time for the busy migration season in May. This multimedia class will provide you with the information you need to move from simply liking birds to really taking time to observe them. Where: REI store at 970 West Eisenhower Parkway, Ann Arbor from 7-8pm. Call (734) 827-1938 for directions.

**Tuesdays,
May 4 -25**

Tuesday Evening Birders (Leaders: Dea Armstrong; Lathe Claflin and Mike Sefton)
Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the Miller Road/M-14 park-and-ride lot to consolidate into fewer cars and prepare for a 6:15 sharp departure. These outings will end at dusk.

Sat., May 8

International Migratory Bird Count (Washtenaw County compiler: Roger Wykes)
"May Count," takes place every year on the second Saturday in May. Washtenaw County has often been the Michigan leader in number of species counted, and is usually the state leader in the number of participants counting. Roger divides the county up into sections, most consisting of two townships, and each section has a leader. Volunteers are always needed. As the date gets closer, info will become available. Check the Washtenaw Audubon field trips webpage and on birders@umich.edu for updates.

Sun., May 16

Crane Creek/Ottawa NWR in Northwest Ohio (Leader: Karen Markey) Crane Creek is an internationally known migrant trap where neotropicals stop to refuel before their long flight across Lake Erie. Warblers, flycatchers, sparrows, and thrushes are just some of the many types of birds you will see. It's not uncommon to end a day having seen more than 100 species. Meet in the Busch's Supermarket parking lot on the corner of Green and Plymouth Roads in Ann Arbor at 6:00 a.m. for carpools and a 6:15 sharp (!) departure. Alternatively, you may meet Karen at the warbler sign on the boardwalk at Crane Creek at 8:00 a.m. The trip usually goes until approximately mid-afternoon. Bring a hat, insect repellent, lunch, and adequate fluids for hydration.

Sun., May 23

Hudson Mills Metropark (Leader: Karen Markey) As spring migration winds down, this outing reliably yields many delights. Target birds include cuckoos, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, vireos, flycatchers, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, and more. Please leave pets at home. If you do not have a Huron-Clinton Metropark annual sticker, there is a vehicle fee to enter the park. Meet at the flagpole in front of the Activity Center.

Blue Skies, Crisp Air, and Great Birds *By Cathy Carroll*
(adapted and abridged from a post to Cathy's blog "Into the Woods and Elsewhere" at
<http://intothewoodsandelsewhere.blogspot.com/>)

Over the first weekend in February, Lathe Claflin, Gary Siegrist, and Don and Robin Henise led the annual combined Washtenaw Audubon-Jackson Audubon field trip to Sault Ste. Marie. I can't say enough good things about this field trip.

Day One: Our fleet of six cars pulled out for a 7:30 a.m. start. The early start was necessary in hopes of seeing Sharp-tailed Grouse on their lek. After one quick stop along the frozen St. Mary's River, we got to the lek and found just a single bird. After a while it flew to trees adjacent to the lek joining two others. As it turned out, the birds were surprisingly tolerant of our presence and many birders got great photos. I saw my first Sharp-tailed Grouse when I first attended this trip in February 2005, and now I can't see this bird without thinking of Lathe and Gary. In Lathe's words, "every feather on this bird is beautiful."

(Text continued on the following page)



Pine Grosbeak (left)
Photo by Andy Johnson

Sharp-tailed Grouse (below)
Photo by Andy Johnson



(Continued from previous page)

Following the Sharp-tailed Grouse stop we made our way to Dunbar Forest , where we saw three Pine Grosbeaks. While other birds were scarce, we did find two very fresh owl tracks and wing imprints in the snow where an owl had landed to seize its prey.

From Dunbar Forest we made our way to the star of the day. We stopped to see our first Northern Hawk Owl, a perched bird well seen through spotting scopes but much too distant for photographs. Harold Eyster spotted a second, well-camouflaged hawk owl tucked in a tangle of trees behind a house. Again, it was well seen through the scope, but too distant for photos. Then a third Northern Hawk Owl gave great looks and many fine photos. After tearing ourselves away from the Northern Hawk Owls, we went looking for Snowy Owls. We found one perched on a utility pole watching a couple of men uncover hay bales. While we were looking at that owl, we saw a flock of Snow Buntings flying and calling over the fields. Against the bright blue sky they looked like little bouncing jewels.

Toward the end of the day, we saw a Ruffed Grouse and a tree full of Bohemian Waxwings along the same road. The grouse was perched in a tree and eating buds. The waxwings were feasting on a crabapple tree in a field. They were skittish and we could not approach closely, but we all got great scoped views.

Day Two: The morning's highlight was a bright Snowy Owl --only the second all white one I've seen. He was found at the end of a road, perched on a old, wooden billboard support. Just beyond his perch, cars whizzed by on I-75.

Later we went to the Hulbert bog to look for Gray Jay and especially Boreal Chickadee, which had been spotted on an earlier field trip, and again by the trip leaders on their scouting day for this outing. It seemed very promising. . . . I'll cut to the chase. We did not see the Boreal Chickadee despite trying hard--a disappointment for everyone. Other birds of interest seen during the trip were Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Rough-legged Hawk, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, and Pine Grosbeak.

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society - WAS Membership PO Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113**

_____ RENEWAL _____ NEW MEMBER

Membership Dues:

_____ ADDITIONAL DONATION \$ _____

___ Individual/Household \$20

Name: _____

___ Student \$10

Address: _____

___ Senior \$10

___ Patron \$50

___ Life (individual) \$200

Phone: _____ Email: _____

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means.

Note: WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal, and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

WAS Monthly Programs

WAS monthly events usually are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Programs begin at 7:30pm at U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. Call 677-3275 if you have questions about the program.

- Wed., March 17** **Exploring the Galapagos Islands:** Join Bob Pettit for a tour of the remote Galapagos Islands. Famous as Darwin's laboratory for his theory of evolution, the islands contain unique species developed in isolation from the rest of the world. Bob Pettit teaches biology at Monroe Community College, is president of the Holiday Beach Migration Observatory, and is a board member of Whitefish Point Bird Observatory.
- Wed., April 21** **Living with Birds:** A knot-tying African grey parrot. An aggressive Muscovy duck tamed with watermelon. Bob Tarte, author of the books *Enslaved by Ducks* and *Fowl Weather*, talks about sharing his life with parrots, doves, a starling, geese, turkeys, and other birds. One continent's wild birds are another continent's pets, and even though their behavior is greatly altered by their setting, caged and domesticated birds still demonstrate shining moments of insight and intelligence. It doesn't take much of either to outsmart Bob, who assists his wife Linda raising and releasing orphan songbirds every summer for Grand Rapids' Wildlife Rehab Center, and he'll talk about some of those experiences as well.
- Wed., May 19** **Wonders of Bird Biology:** Popular speaker, field trip leader, and former Washtenaw Audubon president Michael Kielb will describe some of the adaptations made by birds as they have evolved into the most graceful and beautiful of flying creatures, including their unique skeletal system and feathers. Michael Kielb is the co-author of *The Birds of Washtenaw County*, available at your local bookstore, and teaches Biology at Eastern Michigan University.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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