



WASHTENAW AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

March / April 2018

Encounter with the Ponderosa Pine Red Crossbill

UP WAS Field Trip Write-up

by Bryn Martin

When I talk to birders around the country and the rest of the world and they ask me what kind of birds or birding is unique to Michigan, invariably it comes back to UP birding in the winter. The UP is one of the final frontiers of local birding that tests your mettle and your devotion to our special hobby. A trip to the frigid northern part of our state at this time of year means you have crossed a line from the mere dabbler to true convert.

Thirteen members of Washtenaw Audubon Society and friends crossed this Rubicon and had a thoroughly enjoyable time doing so. The weekend of January 20-21, 2018, turned out to not be nearly the icy-cold it has been in the past and we were graced with above-freezing temps. We still needed to be bundled up, but we could actually enjoy ourselves while outside and could drive with the windows down, listening for the calls of our target species. The trip officially started early on Saturday morning. Most participants arrived in Sault Ste. Marie the day before. My carload instead woke up in Southeast Michigan at 2 a.m. and made the late-night drive to arrive there at the crack of dawn. We birded all day Saturday, spent the night, and then birded most of the day on Sunday, before ending in the afternoon for our drives back home.

We first checked out the St. Marys River that creates the border with Canada. A little open water meant a few species of waterfowl, namely Common Goldeneyes and Common Mergansers. Here, we had our first Bald Eagles with one swooping down on the ducks, attempting an early-morning snack. We would have scores of Bald Eagles the rest of the trip, nearly everywhere we went. *(continued on page 3)*

President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon Members and Friends,

We welcome spring this month, in all her majesty. As birders, we notice every new species singing, while making the morning coffee, getting the mail, or driving to work. This morning, a Song Sparrow uncharacteristically sang from my yard, and try as I might, it stubbornly refused to turn into a Fox Sparrow. We are happy for the small things—a Carolina Wren singing at 7 a.m., the pair of Eastern Bluebirds that decided to pick my yard this year, a passing Turkey Vulture.

Join Washtenaw Audubon on our many field trips and programs this spring. Don't miss the Woodcock Walk in early April, our Thursday morning and weekend Arb walks, and Tuesday Evening Birders every Tuesday in May. We partner with Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy for a series of birding events, beginning with a bird walk at the Conservancy Farm on April 22. Please also considering joining us for the Stinchfield Woods census on June 2. We've had so much to cover in this issue that we couldn't include everything, so in May/June please look for a poem related to Heidi Trudell's work with Safe Passage, a word from our new Conservation Chair Cathy Theisen, and so much more.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you on the trail, by a bright and chilly pond, or in our WAS Searles Nature Preserve cutting Buckthorn and Honeysuckle. *(Photo by Juliet Berger.)*

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger



Encounter with the Ponderosa Pine Red Crossbill

(continued from page 1)

A lot of birding the Eastern UP in winter is driving the roads and seeing what you can find from the vehicle. We lucked into a few Ruffed Grouse here and there, up in trees as well as on the ground. We even had one male in full display, tail fanned, trying to impress a lady. We also found a group of 18 Sharp-tailed Grouse that took to the sky. We were only able to find one distant Northern Shrike and no Bohemian Waxwings, try as we might for both. One field held thousands of Snow Buntings flying in a fury like a mini-snowstorm. Tucked amongst this group, we were able to pick out a couple of Lapland Longspurs.

A big target for winter UP birding is owls. No Great Greys or Northern Hawk Owls this year. However, as expected, we were able to see many Snowy Owls, including one gorgeous pure white male. We also chanced upon a Short-eared Owl perched right next to the road that gave us extremely close views (and photos for some).

Any itinerary up here must include visits to a variety of yards with bird feeders. You could stumble upon good feeder activity or you could arrange your tour to hit known feeders that post to eBird what species they are seeing. We did a little of both. At these locations, we saw many species of finch: House Finch, one female Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, Pine Siskin, beautiful male and female Pine Grosbeaks, adorable Common Redpolls, and one individual that was very possibly a Hoary Redpoll.

Near the end of our tour, we visited Hulbert Bog where we encountered a few very accommodating Gray Jays, visiting the side of the road for chum that had been set out by other birders. On the way to the Bog, we stopped at a location that reported Red Crossbills. As soon as we pulled onto the side road, we had them! According to field guides, there is one species of Red Crossbill. But scientists now believe that the “Red Crossbill” is actually 12 or so different species. The problem is that they look identical and wander a lot, especially during the winter. The “different species” of Red Crossbill are distinguished from one another by their flight call notes. But who knows these? Enter Timothy Spahr, the crossbill expert from eBird. Juliet Berger, WAS president, had the foresight to record the flight call notes of the birds we were seeing. She then sent these to the expert who was able to tell us which crossbills we were hearing (and thus seeing). They were found to be Type 2 or Ponderosa Pine Red Crossbills. Apparently, this species is typically found further west and Tim was happy to have our data.

We had a couple species of nice mammals to add to our trip-list. We found an adorable porcupine wedged up high in a tree. It would have been hidden during the summertime, but with all of the leaves gone, it was in clear view. We also saw a family of coyotes at a distance on the frozen-over river. We scoped them and were able to watch the youngsters playing and wrestling just as you’d observe pet dogs doing, play-bowing and all.

We had a really good, adventurous group that remained in great spirits the entire time. Very special extra-thanks needs to be given to our trip leader Taylor Myatt who created a successful itinerary that gave us this great experience. Bonus was that we only had one vehicle get stuck in the snow! (Not naming names!) We plan to do this adventure again and when we do, we hope that you will consider joining us. (Please see the WAS Web site for more great photos from Cathy Theisen and Juliet Berger. This photo by Cathy Theisen.)



One-Road Challenge 2018

by Bryn Martin

On Saturday, March 3, 16 participants self-divided into four teams for a little friendly annual competition. The goal: To see as many species of birds as possible from any one road in Washtenaw County. Groups could start as early as they wanted, but they had to finish by 11:00 a.m., meeting for lunch, tallying, and socializing a half-hour later. Three quarters of the groups started around 5:30 a.m. for nocturnal birds, such as displaying Woodcocks and owls (one group had a Barred Owl, one group had a cooperative Eastern Screech-owl fly in giving close-up views to some who'd never seen a Screech-owl, and one group had so many Great Horned Owls that no other species of owl dared make a peep!). My group, which consisted of me and my three young daughters, decided to not go this hard-core. We started closer to 10:00 a.m.

Altogether 57 species were seen. The team that saw the most gave themselves the name the "Gackling Whet-Shrikes." They tallied 46 species. They, as well as one other group, the "Red-shouldered Hairy Tundra Vultures," birded Waterloo Road. The RsHTVs tallied 41 species. Sharon Hollow was birded by the "Little Hotties" (their name, they said, was based on the hand-warmers they needed in the early morning chill). They tallied 39 species. Lastly, the Purple Martin team birded 7 Mile Road and in our hour of birding had 33 species.

Most typical winter/very early spring birds were seen by multiple groups. The birds seen by one and only one group were as follows: Horned Grebe, Tundra Swan, Lesser Scaup, Canvasback, Redhead, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Wild Turkey, Ring-billed Gull, Barred Owl, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, Brown Creeper, Eastern Meadowlark, Brown Cowbird, and Purple Finch. And while seen by two of the groups (ours included) I think it's noteworthy to mention Red-shouldered Hawks were also seen on this day.

We'd love to see more people join in the fun next year. As my team demonstrates, you don't have to be ultra-competitive to participate. Pick a road and do a little birding.

Helping Bluebirds in Michigan

by Kurt Hagemester

The Eastern Bluebird has had an up and down history in Michigan over the last 200 years. This popular member of the thrush family was once widespread in Michigan before the industrial revolution took hold. After peaking in the later 1800s, bluebird numbers steadily declined for the next 50 years due to habitat loss, the use of farming chemicals, and intense competition from two alien bird species—the Starling and House Sparrow. Fortunately, starting in the 1960s, bluebirds started their comeback when it was discovered that large numbers of actively managed nesting boxes drastically improved their nesting success. The banning of the farm insecticide DDT in the 1970s also accelerated the recovery.

Today, the easiest way to bring these colorful, sweet-singing birds into the yard is a well-designed nest box. This is because bluebirds are cavity nesting birds, or birds that build nests in the hollowed-out cavities of trees. Nest boxes simulate these cavities, which have become in much shorter supply over the years. Bluebirds will start claiming nesting sites in March in Michigan, with nest building usually starting as early as late March or early April. Bluebirds can have two or even three broods of young in a nesting season that can last into August.

How do you know if you can attract bluebirds to your yard? If you live in a generally open neighborhood and see bluebirds on a regular basis, you have an excellent chance. Bluebirds prefer open habitats like farm fields, open subdivisions, golf courses, office parks, meadows, and metro parks.

The first thing you'll need is a quality-made nesting box of the correct dimensions. You can buy a bluebird nesting box at a store or make it yourself. Boxes should be made of 3/4" thick wood—either cedar or pine, and requires an entrance hole of at least 1 1/2" in diameter. Of absolute importance is the ability to open up the box easily via a hinged side or top for easy nest checks.

For more information about building a bluebird box, and for a beautiful photo of a bluebird, please go to the Washtenaw Audubon Society Web site. Or learn more at www.michiganbluebirds.org. *Kurt Hagemester is a WAS member and President of the Michigan Bluebird Society – a 501©(3) non-profit organization in Michigan. He been a bluebird landlord for 20 years in the Ann Arbor area.*

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The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April 2018 – June 2018)

Bryn Martin, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free of charge and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For trips with constraints on the number of participants, WAS members are sometimes given priority in registering (again, as indicated). *For trips that require carpooling, minors attending without a parent must bring a written permission statement signed by a parent.* To receive a standard form for this, contact me at the email address above. Also, if you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send it to Bryn at the email address above.

Thursdays in April and May (and March 29), 8:00 a.m.

Spring Migration Walks at the Arb

Join us on Thursday mornings on March 29 and in April and May (April 5, 12, 19, 26; May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31) at Nichols Arboretum to observe migrants making their way north. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. In addition to the birds, the Arb's trees and other plants offer delights of their own. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off Geddes Road at 8:00 a.m.; the walks will end around 11:00 a.m., but participants can leave whenever they prefer.

Friday, April 6, 7:45 p.m.

Woodcock Walk at Barton Nature Area

Leaders: Juliet Berger and Jessica Adamczyk

The American Woodcock, known for its unusual flying pattern during courtship, can be seen at dawn and dusk in the spring. Park at the Barton Dam lot on Huron River Drive, across the street and slightly north/upriver from Bird Road, and follow the trail around the building to the foot bridge. We will meet right on the other side (the dam side) of the bridge at 7:45 p.m. PLEASE NOTE: Do not park in the Barton Nature Area lot on Huron River Drive just after Main Street, or else you will have a LONG walk back to your car in the dark. Please wear good walking shoes and dress warmly. (The temperature will drop quickly at sunset.) Bring a small flashlight to assist you in exiting the park after the program ends. Plan on returning to your car around 9:15 p.m. if all goes well.

Saturday, April 7, 8:00 a.m.

Nichols Arboretum Early Migrants

Leader: Karen Markey

Early springtime walks through the Arb are productive for Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, White-throated Sparrows, Winter Wrens, Fox Sparrows, Ruby- and Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Brown Creepers. These early birds are joined by the first warblers—Yellow-rumped, Pine, Palm, and Orange-crowned. Maybe a Blue-headed Vireo will join them. We will wander the Arb's meandering gravel and dirt paths in search of early spring migrants. We will meet at the Riverview Court entrance to the Arb at 8:00 a.m. sharp. Dress appropriately for the weather including coat, gloves, scarf, hat, and sensible footwear. No strollers, dogs, or wagons please. The walk should end between 10:30 and 11:00 a.m.

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April 2018 – June 2018)

Bryn Martin, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Saturday, April 14, 8:00 a.m.

Bird Walk with the Michigan Audubon Society Membership Meeting

Matthaei Botanical Gardens

Leaders: Juliet Berger and Jessica Adamczyk

Meet at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens Conservatory Building at 8:00 a.m. for a walk with Michigan Audubon members before their meeting. Please note that the Conservatory Building will be closed until 10:00 a.m. There is a charge for parking.

Saturday, April 21, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

In Search of Salamanders at Hudson Mills Metropark

Leader: Edwin Sanchez

Join leader Edwin Sanchez at Hudson Mills Metropark in search of salamanders. Eddie is an expert on these amphibians and this will be a fun morning turning over rocks and logs to locate some of the six species known to reside in the park. Meet at the parking lot for the River Grove Shelter area located within the park (turn right after the entry kiosk, then your next left into the lot). Expect muddy grounds. In case we end up handling any salamanders, please do not use any soaps, creams, or detergents on your hands for this morning. This fun, hands-on field trip is perfect for little ones, as well. This field trip is free of charge, but a Metroparks Pass is required for admission to the park.

Sunday, April 22, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Conservancy Farm Bird Walk

Leaders: Juliet Berger and David Amamoto

Come explore the birds found in the fields and woods of Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy's Conservancy Farm, located at 8383 Vreeland Rd, Superior Charter Township. Please see the web site for more details.

Tuesday, May 1, 9:00 a.m.

Spring Bird Walk at Hidden Lake Gardens

Leader: Juliet Berger

Explore the woods and fields of Hidden Lake Gardens in Lenawee County, and enjoy mid-season migrants by sight and sound. Spring is here, and we welcome back many Warbler species nesting at the Gardens, as well as those migrating through. Northern Flicker, Baltimore Oriole, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak will be nesting here. Keep your eyes peeled for the chance to glimpse Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets and other spring migrants. Learn the song of our state bird, the American Robin, and many more. Meet at the Hidden Lake Gardens Visitors Center at 9:00 a.m. Binoculars and hiking boots are recommended for this 2-3 hour walk.

Tuesdays in May (May 1, 8, 15, 22, and 29), 6:00 p.m.

Tuesday Evening Birders

Leaders: To be announced

Each Tuesday, leaders will scout locations and scan bird reports during the day, and then in the evening take the group to where the action is. This is a carpool event with multiple stops. Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the Miller Rd./M-14 park-and-ride lot, where everyone will consolidate into fewer vehicles and prepare for a 6:15 p.m. sharp departure.

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April 2018 – June 2018)

Bryn Martin, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Sunday, May 6, 7:45 a.m.

Hudson Mills Metropark Migrants

Leader: Karen Markey

Target birds include cuckoos, woodpeckers, vireos, flycatchers, thrushes, warblers, and tanagers. Meet at the flagpole in front of the Activity Center at 7:45 a.m. The trip will last roughly until 11:00 a.m. This field trip is free of charge, but a Metroparks Pass is required for admission to the park.

Saturday, May 12

Washtenaw County May Count

Leader: Area leaders

Spring will come, and migrants will arrive, despite the wintry weather that comes and goes. Make a note on your calendars that the county-wide Washtenaw County May Count will be on May 12, 2018.

Details will be posted when we are closer to the date of the event.

Sunday, May 13

Magee Marsh and Metzger Marsh, NW Ohio

Leader: Karen Markey

Magee Marsh is an internationally renowned migrant trap where birds 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 can see there. Birders may see more than 100 species. Meet at the park-and-ride lot at Plymouth Rd. and US 23 at 5:50 a.m. to arrange carpools for a 6:00 a.m. departure. Or meet the group at the warbler sign near the boardwalk entrance at Magee Marsh at 8:30 a.m.

Sunday, May 20

Belle Isle Park

Leader: Allen Chartier

Belle Isle is the jewel of the Detroit parks system, and in spring migration the woods can be full of migrating birds. Up to 20 warbler species in a day can be seen, making this nearby locale nearly as good as famous hotspots Magee Marsh and Point Pelee, but without the crowds or border crossings.

Migration should still be going strong in the third week of May, and we'll look for flocks of warblers, thrushes, sparrows, and around the perimeter of the island any lingering water birds.

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, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113**.

<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	Membership Dues	
Additional Donation \$ _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$50

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 7:30 p.m. at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. **Please note:** *The Matthaei Botanical Gardens charges for parking at the rate of \$1.20 an hour, enforced 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm. Members of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum park for free.*

April 18 Birds and Wildlife of Ethiopia

Join seasoned traveler and birder Surprise Washtenaw Audubon Member for a look at the ecologically diverse nation of Ethiopia. Though seldom visited by American birders, the country boasts 856 bird species, of which 20 are endemic, and 31 endemic mammals. A lifelong birder, our speaker has travelled extensively in Ethiopia.

May 16 Like Father, Like Son: The Autobiography of a Birder

Current Board Chair for Michigan Audubon and a past president of WAS, Ray Stocking shares the story of his unusual introduction to bird watching some 25 years ago. During his senior year in college, with very little birding experience and no binoculars, Ray's father, Jerome Stocking, asked Ray to join him in an overnight birding trip that would alter Ray's world forever. Ray's presentation includes 25 years of father-and-son birding, some of their hundreds of life birds, travels near and far, and the day when father and son reversed their roles.

June 20 Dolph Park, Ann Arbor's Other Birding Hotspot

Join the inimitable Don Chalfant for a program on one of Ann Arbor's best birding spots. A west side park with some of the same attributes as the U of M Arb, but with the advantage that it can be birded in less than an hour, Dolph has lakes, rolling hills, a marsh, and varied tree and plant life, which draws a good variety of spring migrants. Don Chalfant has birded Dolph for many years, and found the first Washtenaw County record of the rare Kirtland's Warbler there a few years ago.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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