

North Country Notes



The Newsletter of the Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance
Marquette and Alger Counties, Michigan

April 2024

From My Perch

By Jeff Towner, Chairperson, Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance

As Frank Sinatra used to croon, it was a very good year. That is, 2023 was a very good year for our birding club. We became an affiliate of the National Audubon Society, which brings with it additional resources and capacity. We continued to provide high-quality speakers for our monthly public presentations. We maintained partnerships for installation of a Peregrine Falcon nest box in Ishpeming, installation of 20 Wood Duck nest boxes in and around Sault Sainte Marie, began a bird mural at Moosewood Nature Center, led nine birding outings for the public, participated in the International Crane Count and the Christmas Bird Count, hosted a highly successful MI Birds program Birds and Brews event, did a complete remodel of our Facebook page and website, redesigned a highly professional chapter brochure, put out informative newsletters, added many new members, and last but not least adopted our new name of Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance, which better expresses our mission.

Our Board of Directors was engaged, committed, and forward-looking. I am so proud to be a part of this Board.

The year 2024 is shaping up to be another very good year. We will build on our momentum and continue to advocate for the conservation of birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Birders are powerful advocates for conservation, and they also know intuitively that birding is not only a highly rewarding pursuit, but it is also good for a person's health. A scientific research paper published in 2018 revealed that spending time outdoors in green space has tangible health benefits, including reducing the risk of type II diabetes, cardiovascular disease, premature death, preterm birth, stress, and high blood pressure <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/07/180706102842.htm>. For these and many other reasons I encourage you to check out our website for upcoming outings and events and to participate in as many as you can.



Marquette County 2024 Sandhill Crane Report

by Cathy Waller, MQT County Crane Count Coordinator

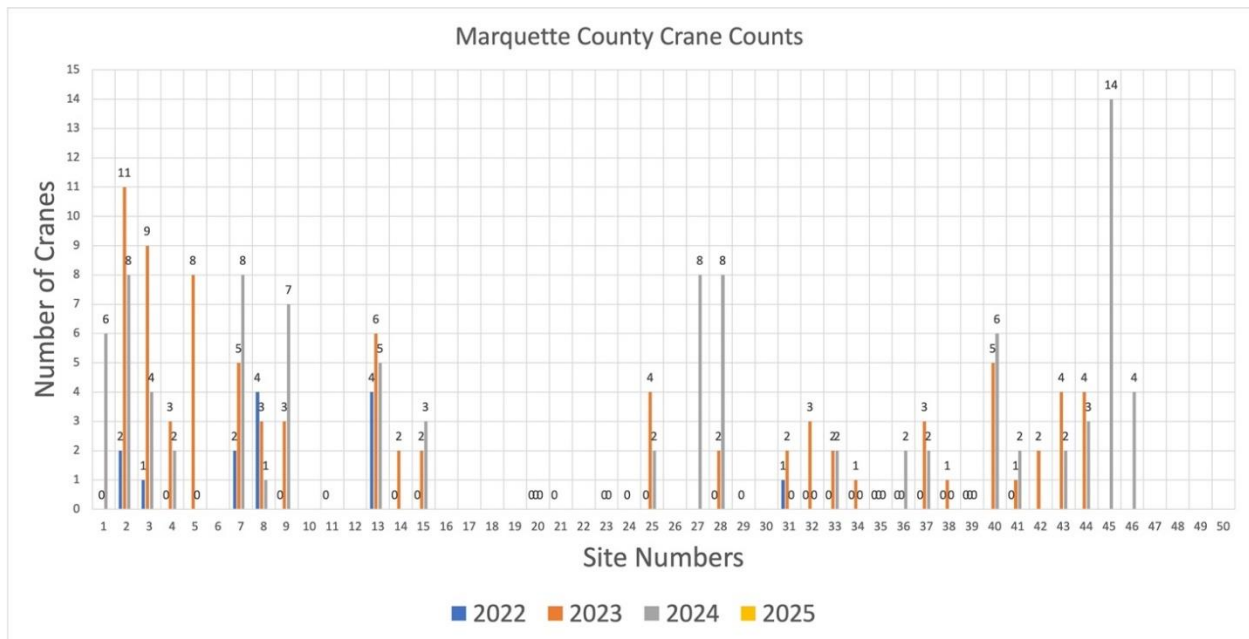
I revived the Marquette County count in 2022 with 26 fresh volunteer

counters on a brutally, cold, snowy morning. Count numbers were rather low, 14 total cranes. Last year, 36 brave counters awoke to great weather and counted an all-time record of 87 cranes. **This year, we broke the record again with 36 counters, 30 sites and 99 CRANES!**

The count was held on Saturday, April 13, from 6:30 to 8:30 AM EST. It was around 32 degrees at 6:30 AM with a slight northwest wind. Inland locations did better than lakefront sites. Some crane counters observed crane dancing and most noted unison calling by their pairs of cranes. It is a fun early morning tradition to witness the first woodcock displays or beaver activity. Last year, we met for breakfast and stories the morning of the count. It was successful enough to repeat this year. Bodega Restaurant was kind enough, once again, to host our dozen crane

counters as we shared stories over coffee and breakfast.

This annual Midwest Crane Count has been going on for 47 years. Each year, over 2000 volunteers wake early to travel to their local wetlands and favorite birding locations to participate in the annual. For Marquette County, there are count records from 2006-2010, but no count in 2011. The last organized Marquette County count was a small one with only 5 sites in 2012. There were a couple individual submissions in 2014 and 2021. It is nice to put Marquette County back on the crane map. When I took over the crane count in 2022, there were 30 established sites with the International Crane Foundation. I have been adding new sites every year. We currently have 46 sites. Here's hoping to break 100 cranes next year for Marquette County!



Birds and Brews 2024

On April 18th the MI Birds program and Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance held our second annual and very popular Birds and Brews event at the Ore Dock Brewing Company. The event included a free drink for attendees and featured a bird nerd trivia game styled after the Jeopardy game show. Door prizes were furnished by MI Birds, LWBA, and local businesses.



The turnout for the event was standing room only, greatly surpassing last year. People traveled as far as Michigamme and Escanaba to attend this Thursday evening event.



The bird trivia game pit four large teams of veteran and novice birders in a spirited contest to score the most points based on their knowledge of birds and bird biology. There were two rounds of Jeopardy. The first round required teams to identify a specific bird species from a photo in one of five categories. If a team got lucky enough to receive one of the bonus questions, their team's score might zoom ahead. This is what happened in Round Two, a round focused on general bird biology and behavior. Team 2 was trailing but got the chance to answer a very difficult four-part 50-point bonus question at the very end. They got all four parts correct, gained 50 points, and suddenly won the round. Whether a birding expert or novice, everyone had a great time.



Jeff Towner recruited a young volunteer from the audience to help draw names.

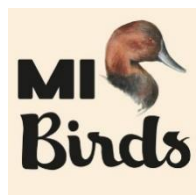
Fourteen attendees migrated home with birdy door prizes. MI Birds furnished a pair of Nikon binoculars and a *Bringing Nature Home* book. LWBA added a bird feeder, milkweed seeds, and a box of Donckers chocolate to the door prizes. The Marquette Food Co-Op, The Crib, and Contrast Coffee Company donated bags of coffee. A special drawing was held for the walking stick of well-known local birder, Lon Emerick, donated by his wife Lynn Emerick.



Door Prize winners (from left to right): binoculars, book, walking stick, & bird feeder



Door Prize winners (from left to right): chocolate, milkweed seeds, coffee



MI Birds is a public outreach and education program created by Audubon Great Lakes and Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Birders and hunters share similar conservation values but rarely cross paths. MI Birds aims to bridge the divide and increase and deepen the number of Michiganders engaged in the understanding, care, and stewardship of public lands that are important for birds and communities. MI Birds leads immersive public bird walks across the state, gives public talks on bird conservation in Michigan, engages Michiganders in stewardship activities and community science projects, and works with partner organizations to expand our reach, pool our resources, and share

our collective conservation success stories on public lands. You can check out their program and upcoming events at this link: [MI Birds | Audubon Great Lakes.](https://www.audubon.org/our-work/education-and-outreach/mi-birds) Birds and Brews is becoming an annual event on Marquette's spring calendar for all those who love birds. So, mark your calendars for next year and... Bird on, Yoope

A visit to the Sax Zim Bog

By Beth Olson

“Long known among serious birders as THE place to find northern owls and finches in winter and warblers and other boreal birds in summer, the Sax-Zim Bog is a “magic mix” of habitats that attracts a unique array of species not found in other parts of the United States.” This is a quote from “About Sax Zim Bog” page on the Friends of Sax Zim Bog website:

<https://saxzim.org/>

I traveled there with a friend, January 15th-17th 2024, making it my third visit to the bog. All my visits were in the winter, which seems to be the best time to see the northern owl species. Boreal Species can be seen there all year. The bog is about an hour drive Northwest of Duluth. It was a cold time to go. The temperatures were below zero most of the time, which kept me mainly birding from the warmth of the car.



Canada Jay



Long-tailed Weasel

The Bog has a new visitors center where you can pick up a map of the bog and its trails and get apprised of recent sightings. It has yet to have indoor plumbing but has a nice spot to sit inside and watch a few bird feeders from large windows while enjoying a hot beverage. A long-tailed weasel was romping around the snow below the feeders to the delight of those watching. A small gift shop offers some nice bird collectibles and trinkets.

After arriving, we learned that an app called “Telegram” was used to share the location of local birds and wildlife sightings. With the notifications from Telegram, we were able to locate a Northern Hawk Owl and a Great Gray Owl.

Canada Jays, Boreal Chickadees, Redpolls and Northern Shrikes were readily found around the bird feeding stations and throughout the bog. A pine

marten frequented one of the feeding stations entertaining visitors and photographers.

One evening a very handsome red fox hunted the road we birded.

Black-billed Magpie are a little more challenging to find. They hang around farms and livestock but with persistence, we finally saw some. They were worth the effort. Unfortunately, sharp-tailed grouse have become scarce in the fields maintained for them near the bog. Speculation is that predators may have wiped them out.



Great Gray Owl in the early morning light



Northern Hawk Owl

It takes a Village to Help Wood Ducks

By Jeff Towner

Members of the Ducks Unlimited student chapter at Lake Superior State University recently installed twenty wood duck nest boxes near Sault Sainte Marie. This project resulted from contributions of several partners. The nest boxes were donated by Moosewood Nature Center in Marquette. Mr. Keith Masserant, a member of Ducks Unlimited Michigan, and owner of Mid-American Group Inc. donated twenty metal mounting poles. The National Audubon Society provided a grant to cover transport of the materials. The LSSU DU students provided the local knowledge on box placement and the muscle to get the boxes up. The Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance brought the parts together and delivered the materials. A joint field trip with LSSU DU and LWBA is planned for this summer to examine benefits to wood ducks. Details to come later on the LWBA website and Facebook page.



LWBA Programs - September 11 & October 9, 2024

(Programs are held at Peter White Public Library, 217 N Front Street, Marquette)

There will be no programs May - August

September 11, 2024 (Wednesday) 7 PM - Bird Mural at Moosewood Nature Center

Location: Peter White Public Library, Shiras Room, 3rd Floor

PRESENTER: Matt Betts, LWBA Board Member

Matt Betts is a Marquette area artist with an interest in wild birds. With a small grant from the Audubon Society, he began work last year on a mural on an outer wall of the Moosewood Nature Center, depicting some of the bird species that visit the feeders and habitat near the Center. In his presentation, he will discuss what motivated the project, the process of painting the mural, and share images of the completed work.

Matt Betts received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2006 and has had many jobs in the arts since, including mural and portrait work. An interest in native birds directed him to roles with Moosewood Nature Center and Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance. He is vice-president of the LWBA.

October 9, 2024 (Wednesday) 7 PM - Forestry for Michigan Birds Location: Peter White Public Library, Heritage Room, 3rd Floor

PRESENTER: Michael Paling, American Bird Conservancy

“Forestry for Michigan Birds” is an initiative created by American Birds Conservancy and many partners, which was adapted from Audubon Vermont’s Foresters for the Birds. The goal is to provide information and educational opportunities about how we can use forest management to benefit forest dwelling birds. Active forest management is one of the largest ways that humans can impact wildlife habitat, so it’s important to understand how it can benefit wildlife.

Michael Paling has been a forester with American Bird Conservancy since 2019. His duties include working with private and public forest landowners to improve habitat for at-risk bird species, such as the Golden-winged warbler and the Kirtland’s Warbler. This includes coordinating the Forestry for Michigan Birds program to provide information about how forest management can improve habitat for bird species.

A couple more photos from Birds and Brews... because it was so much fun!



Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance Membership Form

Dues support the newsletter, programs, & local birding activities. Donations are tax-deductible.

Your name (or gift-recipient's name): _____

Street: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

(E-mail addresses are not given to other groups or commercial entities)

Annual Membership fees (please check one)

Gift membership - \$15 Regular(family) membership - \$15 OR Student - \$5.00

How would you like to receive your newsletter?

E-mail or Postal service

Are you also a member of the Michigan Audubon Society?

YES or NO

Additional donations:

\$_____ General Expenses for club projects

\$_____ Research/Conservation Grant to fund birding research/conservation in the UP

FOR GIFT MEMBERSHIPS please supply your name and the recipient will be notified of your gift: DONOR
NAME: _____

Mail this form, along with your check (payable to LWBA) to:

Cathy Waller, 201 County Road KB, Marquette, MI 49855

Marquette, MI 49855
5 Arrowhead Dr.
c/o Beth Olson

