



BIRDTRACKS

Newsletter of the Jackson Audubon Society

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www.jacksonaudubon.org

Our Newest State/County Park – Watkins

Gary Siegrist ~ photos Chuck Mekbel & Don Henise



Great Blue Heron

Dignitaries from around the state gathered to dedicate Michigan's newest park on a cold rainy day last September. In a testament to the importance of these 1,122 acres of varied landscapes, over one hundred attended, including many family members of the original landowners, Royal and Sally Carpenter Watkins. Susan Lackey, retired Executive Director of Legacy Land Conservancy said it best "the purchase of these properties helps create a nearly contiguous swath of publicly accessible lands from Hayes State Park (south of Brooklyn) to northern Oakland County." She also stated "this **Emerald Arc** of land provides varied and extensive recreational land easily accessible to the nearly five million Michigan residents living within ninety minutes of the park." Best of all with Arnold Road running right through the middle of Watkins Lake, watchable wildlife viewing can be a wonderful experience. How nice it is for anyone even with limited mobility to see the spectacle of waterfowl migration.

What makes this park special for us birders, is its one stop shopping for many sought after bird species. It's a given that in spring and fall we see large rafts of migrating waterfowl including such rarities as Ross' Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, and Little Gull. The grasslands in the future might even overshadow Watkins Lake with Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows along with large flocks of

Bobolinks, which were already being seen this fall. Ross Green had at least eleven Northern Mockingbirds at one time this fall; in Jackson County it's hard to find a pair. Birders can't wait until next spring to experience spring migration on the entire property.

I can't help but think back and reflect how long a journey it's proven to be to acquire this park. I would be remiss if I did not mention two of our own members that worked on this project for decades. Both Ron Hoffman and Lathe Claflin spent many volunteer hours, from helping record waterfowl numbers to writing grants and support letters. Thanks for all your hard work guys! So when you make your New Year's resolutions this year make sure a trip to Watkins is one of them.



Northern Mockingbird



Greater White-fronted Goose



Bald Eagle



Hooded Merganser

Austin DeVries' Benchmark

Pegg Clevenger

BENCHMARK: a standard used to judge the quality or level of other similar things

The Kate Palmer Sanctuary is a piece of land that has been well-protected by Jackson Audubon for 90 years. Over the years, attention and care paid by our stewardship to the 53 acres brings forth area citizens to add their skills to the upkeep of this special spot. Trails, boardwalk, parking improvements, roadside clean-ups of trash and fallen trees have all been carried out by volunteers.

Candidate for BSA Eagle Award, Austin De Vries, most recently came to JAS with an offer to construct two benches. The benches were completed in October. They are long and strong, built and installed by Austin and Troop 4312 to view Sandstone Creek as it meanders through the sanctuary. Austin found the perfect place to listen and look for birds on a lunch hour, at day's break or end. Once again, a benchmark.

Jackson Audubon has set a standard of stewardship for both of our properties, the Kate Palmer and Haehnle sanctuaries. We've preserved green spaces for hiking and birding and for plants and wildlife to thrive for generations.



Austin & members of Troop 4312 with one of the new benches



Visitors enjoying the new bench

Jackson County Fall Sandhill Crane Survey

Ron Hoffman

Craniacs in Jackson County this past autumn participated in U.S. Fish and Wildlife population survey of sandhill cranes. The survey has been used to monitor crane numbers in the eastern United States since 1979. It was conducted 28 October-4 November (First Period) and 9-13 November (Second Period).

During the First Period 2,846 cranes were counted at 11 locations and 5,700 cranes were reported at 10 areas during the Second Period. Most of the cranes, 82% First Period and 90% Second Period, were roosting in three wetlands along the lower end of the Portage River. One of those areas is inaccessible to the public, but cranes could be seen flying into or leaving night roosting wetlands at Hawkins Road and Dalton Road. Very few cranes spent the night at the Haehnle Sanctuary this year because the water was too deep. The increased number of cranes counted during the Second Period was because the unusually warm weather this fall delayed cranes arriving from the North until early November.

The 5,700 cranes counted this past November was the second highest count ever for Jackson County. Only the 2012 count of 6,470 cranes was higher.



HAEHNLE HAPPENINGS

Lathe Claflin

A Crane and a Bug

Most of us are familiar with some interesting characteristics of cranes. They are dancing fiends, their resonant calls and croaks are due to a double-length trachea, the "tail" plumes are actually wing feathers, and young cranes give off a plaintive chirpy warbling whistle that is completely unlike any call of an adult. But a couple of winters ago when I was walking the Nature Trail at Haehnle, I learned something I did not know. Seven odd looking cranes were flying low overhead, and I whipped up my bins and saw that they were all legless. How could this be? It was around 5 degrees Fahrenheit, but I couldn't believe their legs had frozen off. Later that day I learned that in really cold weather (for cranes at least), cranes can tuck folded legs up into their belly feathers when they fly to keep them warm. That was pretty cool.



Last fall Tom Eitniewski of the Fish and Wildlife service observed an American Oil Beetle in the area cleared of glossy buckthorn the previous winter. Not being a bug man, I had no idea what this was, even though I had seen them before. A more common name is blister beetle, a name I recognized. They are known as "oil beetles" because they release oily droplets of hemolymph from their joints when disturbed; this contains cantharidin, a poisonous chemical causing blistering of the skin and painful swelling. They are about four-tenths of an inch long and flightless. What I did not know was the early part of their life cycle. Larvae (four-hundredths of an inch) hatching from eggs laid on vegetation climb to flowers where they lay wait for

a solitary bee (a type of native bee). The larvae clamber on to the bee and ride it back to its nest. There it feeds on pollen and nectar collected by the bee for its own larvae. Sometimes they eat the bee larvae as well. Fascinating!

So what do these two creatures have in common? They can both be found at Haehnle Sanctuary. You won't see flightless cranes and oil beetles every time you visit, but keep at it and you may. A quiet walk there can reveal wonders - unbelievable sunrises and sunsets, a slow-motion whirlwind of fog rising off the marsh after dawn, river otter playing in the near waters of the marsh, the dawn chorus of bird song, just to name a few. So come on out on a regular basis and be one of those who finds something new to tell us about.



Waterloo Recreation Area Christmas Bird Count - 2016

Gary Siegrist

As the week before our December 17th count progressed, dire weather predictions made for a very uncertain count day. Amazingly, for the twenty-nine participants that came out to count on the forty-eighth annual CBC, we enjoyed mild temperatures and mostly dry conditions. Even the hardy souls that got up before daylight and listened for owls had a near perfect morning.

We had **sixty-seven** bird species recorded on count day (record of seventy-two was set in 2001). This is an extremely high count considering there was very little open water which typically means low waterfowl species. Some of the notable bird species included: the second ever recorded Eastern Phoebe (one was seen on 1980 count), Golden Eagle (1), Red-shouldered Hawk (1), Northern Shrike (1), Rough-legged Hawk (6), Fox Sparrow (3), Merlin (1), Red-headed Woodpecker (3), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (3), and Swamp Sparrow (3). We also had a few great count week bird species with both Short-eared owl and Pied-billed Grebe sightings.

All seven different kinds of woodpeckers that occur in our area in winter made the list, including a record nine Pileated Woodpeckers. Raptors were also well represented this year with ten different species seen. We did record a new high count of Red-tailed Hawk tallying seventy this year, bettering the old record sixty-nine in 1989.

One of the disappointments, continuing a sad trend, was that Ruffed Grouse and Bobwhite Quail, two old-time species, that we could count on every year. Neither species has been seen in the last few years. We also missed on Northern Mockingbird, Golden-crowned Kinglet and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Winter finches have not made the trek down the state, so no Pine Siskin or Common Redpolls were seen. We did find American Robins (199) and Sandhill Cranes (320) in good numbers and picked up a single Common Grackle, Gray Catbird, and Hooded Merganser. A couple of other good finds were Wood Duck (2), Brown Creeper (3), and Carolina Wren (2). A big thanks to all who helped with the count! Save the date for next year's Christmas Bird Count, which will be December 16th. Mark your calendars now and if anyone who is not already on the count contact list or riding in someone's car for next year's count and would like to help, please contact Gary Siegrist at gwsiegrist@gmail.com. Finally, I would like to thank Don & Robyn Henise and before them Ron Hoffman for their years of volunteering as compilers for the CBC.



Eastern Phoebe



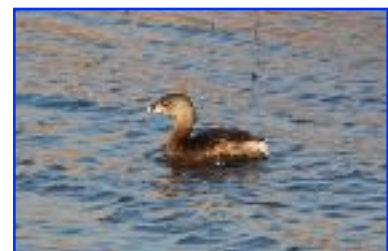
Red-headed Woodpecker



Merlin



Wood Duck



Pied-Billed Grebe

Membership Renewals Available Online

All renewals are set for January 1st each year - If you haven't already done so your renewal can be made online.

Our membership management system is now fully functional and is ready to accept online 2017 renewals. For those members who have a valid email in our system you should have already received an email letting you know your renewal is coming up.

To renew online, simply follow the link on the email and follow the instructions to renew your membership on the web site. You can also go to the JAS website at <http://www.jacksonaudubon.org/>. There is a link on the main page for renewals. You can use MasterCard, VISA, American Express, or PayPal.

If you are not registered in our system with an email, you can still renew online by going to the member page and creating an ID and providing an email. By registering in the system you will also get email reminders for programs and events throughout the year.

JAS Website is Mobile Aware

We have just completed a change to the JAS website so that it is "mobile aware". This means if you visit the site with a tablet, like an iPad, or a smartphone, the site contents will display in a format that is more readable and easier to use and navigate than before. If you are on your PC or laptop, it will still look different from our earlier site, including navigation changes, but all our previous content is the same.

As always, if you have any suggestions or comments about the site, please email jacksonaudubon@gmail.com.

Make Your Own Suet

With this vegetarian version of suet (traditionally it's made from rendered animal fat) you can provide the perfect winter substitute for birds that normally feast on insects. This lipid-rich treat can help prepare year-round residents for the long winter and is quite the draw for birds such as woodpeckers, wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice. Check out this recipe, inspired by "[The Misfit Baker](#)" blog.

Materials:

- 1 1/2 cups shortening (look for palm oil free options, or use animal fat)
- 3/4 cups nut butter (any kind)
- 3 1/2 cups wild bird seed
- 1 cup quick oats
- 1/2 cup corn meal - GMO free is best
- Ice cube tray, or save suet containers

Steps:

1. Mix the dry ingredients of bird seed, oats, and corn meal together and set aside.
2. Combine the shortening and nut butter in a separate bowl and melt. Stir until completely combined.
3. Pour the melted mixture into the dry ingredients and stir until combined.
4. Spoon mixture into the ice cube tray or suet container.
5. Freeze for one to two hours and place in your suet feeder!

Note: Not recommended for outdoor temperatures above 50 degrees .

Cornell Lab of Ornithology Resources

Project FeederWatch is a long-term citizen-science project to study bird population trends. It's also a community of backyard birders learning and sharing about the birds that brighten up their winters. FeederWatch.org

Five million people from around the world have watched birds for more than 1 billion minutes on the Cornell Lab's live web cams. Check in for an intimate look at birds like you've never seen them before, including species that most people rarely see like eagles, owls and albatrosses. AllAboutBirds.org/Cams Locally you can watch the Peregrine Falcons nesting on top of the County Tower building
[You'll have to google the 2017 Falcon cam web address because it changes]

February

Every February, the Great Backyard Bird Count engages thousands of people in reporting the birds they see. In the East, we've learned that Evening Grosbeaks used to move out of northern coniferous forest every two or three years, turning up at feeders far south of their normal range. Since the 1980's, their irruptions have been less frequent and they are rare in some areas where they were once common. BirdCount.org

April

Tree Swallows are now nesting nine days earlier than they did three decades ago. How do we know this? For decades, volunteer bird watchers have recorded birds at their nests to help scientists understand nesting behaviors and breeding success. You, too, can be a NestWatcher and witness the fascinating annual event of birds returning in spring, building nests, and raising young. NestWatch.org

For centuries, ornithologists have studied birds in one place at a time, but what if we had an omniscient view as the entire bird populations move across our plane? eBird helps you keep track of your checklists and contribute to science. Your sightings of Red-winged Blackbirds and other birds are key pieces to the puzzle of how birds are responding to environmental change
ebird.org

Wow, what a cool duck! What is it? The Cornell Lab's Waterfowl ID webinars teach strategies for identification, including tips about shape, color patterns, and the finer points of distinguishing dabbling ducks. Learners also gain appreciation for diverse waterfowl such as the beautiful seafaring Harlequin Duck, which inexplicably turned up in 2016 at Michigan Center's Grand River Spillway. Birds.cornell.edu/courses

Is it a Merlin, or a Kestrel? The Cornell Lab's free Merlin Bird ID app for your phone or tablet asks you about your mystery bird—How big? What colors? Where is it? Then delivers a list of best matches customized for your location and time of year.

AllAboutBirds.org/MerlinApp



Photos by Fai Chan

2115-16 MEETINGS/ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

Meetings and programs are held at Ella Sharp Museum, 3225 S Fourth St, Jackson, except where otherwise noted. Regular meetings will begin with a social time at 6:30 p.m. with a short meeting and program at 7:00 p.m. Bring "recyclables" (magazines, feeders, etc.) to the program.

Please note - Meetings are cancelled in the event JPS schools are closed due to inclement weather.

Meetings ~ Programs

Tuesday, January 17: Dale Kennedy, Professor of Biology at Albion College, and Douglas White, Associate Director of Sustainability and Environment at Albion will present, "Dawn Activity of Male and Female House Wrens." Their work includes 22 years of wren studies at the Whitehouse Nature Center in Albion.

Friday, February 17: Jerry Jourdan will show us images of over 10 years of "Celebrating Birds through Digiscoping." You will be amazed at the photos taken by a camera through a spotting scope! Please bring a dessert that doesn't require tableware to eat, and join us at **Vista Grande Villa** at 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 14: Doug Leffler will present "Birding in Southeast Arizona." There will be beautiful photos of many hummingbirds and Arizona scenery.

Tuesday, April 11: Bob Tarte, author of the Wall Street Journal best seller, "Enslaved by Ducks," will share stories from his humorous memoir about Michigan birding. Tarte's latest book, "Feather Brained," tells of his quest to become a birder and find a rare bird on his own. The book will be available for purchase that evening for \$24.95.

Activities/Field Trips

Saturday, March 25: Early Waterfowl field trip around the Jackson Area. Meet at east side Meijer parking lot at 9:00 a.m. Call Connie Spotts (517.230.2707) for more information.

Burke Lake Banding Station Field Trip September 6, 2016

Sandy & Doug Lefler

Six Jackson Audubon members joined Sandy and Doug Lefler to visit the Burke Lake Banding Station. Several members had an opportunity to actually follow along with the banding staff to the area where the mist nets are located. While there they watched the staff retrieve birds from the nets and of course the banding and data collection back at the station.

Ninety-two birds were captured and recorded, representing 27 species. We went to lunch at Flap Jacks restaurant afterwards. It was a fun day for all!



Indigo Bunting



Blackburnian Warbler



Northern Flicker

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Jackson Audubon Society is a chapter of Michigan Audubon Society

Jackson Audubon Society Mission:

To promote among the people of the Jackson Area an interest, knowledge and appreciation of birds, wildlife and the environment.



Michigan Audubon - Connecting Birds and People for the Benefit of Both