



BIRDTRACKS

Newsletter of the Jackson Audubon Society

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www.jacksonaudubon.org

2015 Fall Crane Survey in Jackson County

Ron Hoffman

Twenty-one people participated in the 2015 census of Sandhill Cranes in Jackson County. This annual survey that has been coordinated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service throughout eastern North American since 1979. It is used to estimate the size and trend of the Eastern Population of Greater Sandhill Cranes. Counts were made during two periods: October 28 to November 8 and November 9 to 13. Most of the counts were made at sites where cranes roost at night, but some were based on cranes seen in fields if the roosting wetland was unknown or inaccessible.

Based on 37 reports, an average of **4,255** cranes were found in the county during the survey which is about 20% higher than the previous two years, but well below the all time high of 6,469 cranes counted in 2012. During the last couple of years, the Portage River has flooded and created ideal roosting areas in Leoni Township. Those areas were dry this year because late summer precipitation was below normal. A recently restored wetland in Henrietta Township rivaled the Haehnle Sanctuary for the most roosting cranes in the county. These were the two most important wetlands for cranes this fall. Therefore, conditions at either of these two sites greatly influences the autumn number of cranes found in the county.

A comparison of the number of cranes roosting at the Haehnle Sanctuary during the survey period with that of the past few years reveals the sensitivity of cranes to water depth and vegetation. Cranes prefer to roost in expands of open water less than 10 inches deep that are free of human disturbance such as hunting. They avoid water over 18 inches deep and areas of dense vegetation. Last year less than 40 cranes were counted at Haehnle during the survey. This year water levels were down only 2 1/2 inches from 2014, but the average number of cranes jumped to about 1,500. During 2010 and 2012 when 2,700 and 5,000 cranes respectively used Mud Lake Marsh in the sanctuary, water levels were 7 inches lower than this year. Dense stands of cattails and shrubs have increased at the marsh in recent years further degrading roosting habitat. Steps are being taken to improve crane roosting habitat at Haehnle with the help of a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife Program.

Thanks go to the people who participated in the survey in Jackson County. During the past few years about 20,000 cranes have been tallied in Michigan. The Eastern Population was estimated at 83,000 in 2014. The efforts of the Jackson County volunteers will contribute to the bigger picture of understanding the status and population trend of cranes in the Great Lakes region.



Sandhill Cranes ~ photo by Tom Hodgson

Kate Palmer ~Trinity School & Neighborhood Partnership

Pegg Clevenger, Volunteer Steward



Ellen Rathbone, Dahlem Education Director & JAS Board Member presenting "Getting to Know the Kate"

Jackson Audubon Society and The Dahlem Conservancy teamed up for a program at Trinity Lutheran School and neighborhood called, "Kate and Your Backyard". Forty-five people listened to JAS board member/Dahlem Director of Education, Ellen Rathbone's presentation on the Kate Palmer Sanctuary which is adjacent to the Trinity neighborhood.

Ellen showed photos of Kate Palmer, born 156 years ago, posing in the Rose Garden of Ella Sharp Park, explaining the Victorian era interest in nature conservation as a reaction to industrialization. She enlightened the attendees about the history of the sanctuary area and displayed photos of the birds, native blooms, trees, and wildlife. She finished by showing the families how to recognize and feed winter birds. JAS President, Connie Spotts, had primed the middle school students with her presentation to them in September at Crispell Lake on the housing and feeding of birds, butterflies and native plants.

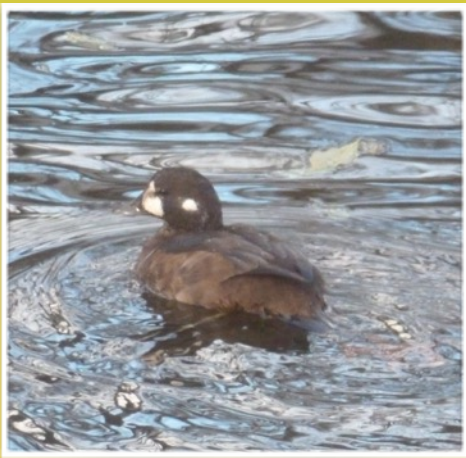
Thanks go to Connie Spotts, Barb Anderson, and Lorraine Hampton for helping with the door-prize giveaways provided by Audubon members, Michigan Audubon, and The Hobbit Place, and for helping students build pinecone bird feeders. Great appreciation also for Dorothy Huffer, Jann Krupa, Fran Parker, Irene Sonnet, Connie and Barb, who baked cookies for the event. The evening message was one of partnership so that together we can continue to protect the Kate Palmer Sanctuary for the next generation.

HARLEQUIN DUCK

Ross Green

Jackson County has become the stopover spot for a most unusual visitor this fall; a hatch year male **Harlequin Duck**. During the early morning hours of Saturday, November 21, in pursuit of a Franklin's Gull, I stopped by the 5th Avenue boat launch area on the western end of the Michigan Center Chain of Lakes and happened upon the young Harlequin Duck, rare to Michigan, swimming near shore with a group of Mallards. After doing a double take, and then taking a couple of quick photos, and then referring to my Peterson Field Guide, and then doing an Internet search, and then calling the Henises to head over and take a look, its identity was confirmed!

It has since been putting on quite a show for visitors from all over the State, swimming and diving in the rapids produced at the dam where the lake water flows into the Grand River. When it isn't diving for food, it has been observed standing or napping on the rocks near the rapids, or hanging out with the Mallards, both on the river and on the Lake (and a few times in the parking lots). A big thank you goes out to the owner of the Lakeside Convenience Store for allowing birders to access his riverside property to get a good look at the Harlequin Duck.



Young Harlequin Duck in Michigan Center ~photos courtesy Ross Green

HAEHNLE HAPPENINGS

Lathe Claflin

How Good Was It?

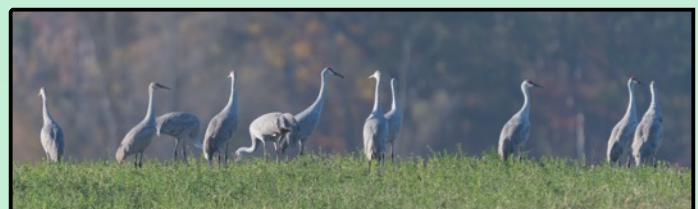
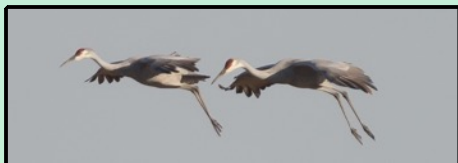
It is always in the eyes of the beholder, but to these eyes it was fantastic! Cranes everywhere you looked. Some coming down the left “chute,” others coming down the right “chute,” some from over Eagle Lake, and best of all, those coming directly overhead. On a late October or November day, it couldn’t get any better. After a two-year drought the Sandhill Cranes were back at Haehnle.

And so were the visitors. More than 770 in October and almost the same number in the first three weekends of November. And there were those who came Monday to be with the “counters”, as well as other days of the week. They were drawn by the spectacle of the gathering cranes, but most added a walk around the overlook grassland or took to the trail, and all enjoyed some incredible sunsets over Mud Lake Marsh. Visitors come from everywhere, not only from Michigan, but from across the U.S. and many other countries. Whether they arrive as individuals or in groups, a feeling of camaraderie invariably occurs as they watch those magnificent cranes fly in.

The Haehnle Sanctuary goes all out to ensure that visitors have the best experience possible. It begins with our fall work bee when we spruce up the sanctuary and Helena Robinovitz performs her magic with the crane display and five other displays at the kiosk. Gary Childs makes sure the parking lot, hill, and trails are mowed and trimmed. It continues with Gary Siegrist and crew (Don and Robyn Henise, Ross Greene, Steve Jerant) starting the Monday Night Crane Count, an important scientific effort that has been going on since 1941 (see crane count at haehnesanctuary.org). Steve posts count results to a number of birding listserves in the state and to the Jackson Audubon Society and our websites. Tom Hodgson writes articles about cranes for the Chelsea Update blog. Marsi Darwin keeps our website current and illuminating. Weekend greeters (30 different individuals this year) for the months of October and November, organized by Helena, ensure that a visit to the hill is rewarding, informative, and stimulating. A number of us, notably Ron Hoffman, Tom Hodgson, and Bill Wells, locate fields near Haehnle where visitors can view and photograph cranes up close; Tom maintains a current “crane viewing map” on our website and at the kiosk showing these locations. And Tom Hodgson, Gary Siegrist, and Bill Wells, as professionals, lead bus or car tours to see cranes and other avifauna in the area.

The signature event of the season is the Color, Cranes, and Cabernet Festival on the third Saturday of October. This is our opportunity to showcase Sandhill Cranes, with talks (Gary Siegrist), guided walks in the sanctuary (Steve Jarent, Don and Robyn Henise, Ross Greene), a drive to area fields to see cranes (Lathe Claflin), and a day-ending viewing of cranes at the top of the hill (Allen King and other committee members). More than 300 people attended the festival this year with Don Siegrist, our parking attendant, keeping an orderly flow of cars.

Am I tooting our horn? Yup. But it gives me the opportunity to recognize and thank those who make the fall crane spectacle at Haehnle Sanctuary such a special experience.



Photos by Chuck Mekbel

Eight Great Reasons To Love The Migratory Bird Stamp

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

- 1. Over \$900 million for conservation and counting.** The first stamp was issued in 1934. It cost \$1 (about \$18 in today's dollars) and sold 635,001 copies. By law, the funds raised go directly to habitat acquisition in the lower 48 states. By now, stamp sales have surpassed \$900 million and helped to protect 6.5 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat.
- 2. A 79-year tradition of beautiful wildlife art.** The Migratory Bird Stamp is a beautiful collectible and a great artistic tradition. Since 1949, the design of each year's duck stamp has been chosen in an open art contest. The 2015 stamp, showing a pair of Ruddy Ducks, is by Jennifer Miller, who is only the third woman to win the contest.
- 3. A bargain at \$25.** Ninety-eight cents of each dollar spent on a stamp goes directly to land acquisition (and immediate related expenses) for the National Wildlife Refuge System. This \$25 purchase is perhaps the single simplest thing you can do to support a legacy of wetland and grassland conservation for birds.
- 4. It's much more than ducks.** Waterfowl hunters have long been the main supporters for the program—the stamps are a requirement for anyone over 16 who wants to hunt. But the funds benefit scores of other bird species, including shorebirds, herons, raptors, and songbirds, not to mention reptiles, amphibians, fish, butterflies, native plants, and more.
- 5. Save wetlands; save grasslands.** Since 1958, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has used stamp revenues to protect “waterfowl production areas”—over 3 million acres—within the critical Prairie Pothole Region. The same program also protects declining prairie-nesting birds in the face of increasing loss of grasslands. As a result, refuges are among the best places to find grassland specialties such as Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, Clay-colored Sparrows, Sedge Wrens, and others.
- 6. The benefits are gorgeous.** Some of the most diverse and wildlife-rich refuges across the Lower 48 have been acquired with stamp funds. Check out this map—chances are there's a wildlife refuge near you that has benefited.
- 7. It's your free pass to refuges.** A migratory bird stamp is a free pass for an entire year to all refuges that charge for admission—so your \$25 could even save you money.
- 8. As bird watchers, let's get in on the secret.** Though it's long been a fixture in hunting circles, the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp is one of the best-kept secrets in all of bird conservation. **It's time to buy and show your stamp!**

The Cornell Lab is a strong supporter of the Migratory Bird Stamp, and we've often written about its value as a direct aid to conservation. You can **buy the stamp at many U.S. Post Offices**, National Wildlife Refuges, and sporting-goods stores. You can also **order the stamp online** at the USPS store and from the stamp's printer, Amplex (both stores add a charge for shipping).

RECOMMENDED READING
by JAS Members

Gary Siegrist

"Wild America"- Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher. As long time friends Peterson and Fisher decide to do maybe the first "Big Year" by taking a 30,000 mile, 100 day trip across North America, Starting in Newfoundland in spring and ending in the Pribilofs Islands this adventurous journey is well written and a great read.

"Bringing Nature Home" - How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants by Douglas W. Tallamy. Compelling argument on how the choices we make in our landscape has a propound impact on diversity of wildlife and birds-in-general, locally and globally.

"Kingbird Highway" - Kenn Kaufman

Great tale of how Kenn (considered to be one of the best birders in the world) got into birding at a early age and what lead him to publish his guide series.

Joyce Peterson

"Adventures in Birding" - Jean Piatt.

The story of Jean and his wife's quest to see 600 species of birds in North America. It is very entertaining and though it was published in 1973, listers today can identify with their journey.

Fai Chan

"Secrets to Stunning Wildlife Photography" - Steve Perry. You can order it at www.backcountrygallery.com It is an ebook.

Connie Spotts

"Butterflies in the Garden" - Brenda Dziedzic- I like this book for beginners who are interested in Michigan butterflies and their host and nectar plants.

"A Swift Guide to Butterflies of North America" - Jeffrey Glassberg

This is an easy guide to butterflies all over North America. It covers the host plants and has maps to indicate where the butterflies are located.

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Jackson Audubon Society Chapter Spotlight

by Kristin Phillips

This article appeared in the November ~ December 2015 issue of the **Michigan Audubon** magazine the **Jack Pine Warbler**.

Serving Jackson County, Michigan, Jackson Audubon Society (JAS) aims “to instill in the people of Jackson County an interest, knowledge, and appreciation of birds and other wildlife.” With 150 members, this chapter is very active and assists with management of both Kate Palmer Sanctuary and the Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary. According to its president, Connie Spotts, passionate JAS members make this work possible: “We have such an active organization and get so much done because of the dedication of our members. They really care about what's best for wildlife and they like to pass that education on to others.”

The hard work of JAS members really shines at the Kate Palmer and Haehnle sanctuaries. Established in 1926, Kate Palmer Wildlife Sanctuary is located five miles west of Jackson. Bisected by Sandstone Creek and containing a mix of upland and lowland deciduous forests, this sanctuary offers a haven for 100-plus species of birds—woodpeckers, warblers, turkeys, Barred Owls and more—as well as a getaway for nearby residents. Pegg Clevenger, the Kate Palmer steward, calls the sanctuary “an opportunity to educate younger generations in stewardship.” Recent projects include construction projects by volunteers Jim Rossman and Paul Rice to make the sanctuary more accessible via a new parking lot, and a partnership with Trinity Lutheran school and teacher Clint Genthner. After acquiring a grant from the Jackson Community Foundation, they will create an outdoor amphitheater-style classroom on the property. This project opened the door to a partnership between JAS and the Dahlem Center to present “Kate Palmer and Your Backyard” at the Trinity Lutheran school on October 5. The presentation, led by education director Ellen Rathbone, was open to the community, and focused on connecting bird feeding and activities for teachers with wildlife viewing at the sanctuary.

Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary, the largest Michigan Audubon sanctuary at over 1,000 acres, is overseen by the Haehnle Sanctuary Committee, an active 15-member subcommittee of JAS. According to Haehnle steward Lathe Claflin, the goal of the sanctuary is to “maintain this property as a bird and wildlife preserve with emphasis on Sandhill Cranes.” Two recent projects—a collaboration between JAS, Tom Eitniear of USWS, and Michigan Audubon—include restoration work to create fall roosting habitat for Sandhill Cranes after high water levels impacted the original area, and fen restoration to combat encroaching invasive buckthorn.

In addition to ongoing sanctuary work, JAS has also been active in the community through the “Don’t Feed the Cranes” project. After noticing how a local pair of Sandhill Cranes was begging food from the public, concerned citizen Krissy Kerwin contacted JAS. With combined donations from Krissy, Assistant Mayor Derek Dobie, and JAS, six “Do Not Feed The Cranes” signs were ordered. These signs were installed on July 22, and are hoped to increase public awareness about the negative impact of crane feeding.

2115-16 MEETINGS 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. In case of inclement weather, JAS programs and activities will be cancelled if Jackson College closes.

Please note that meetings are now held on the 2nd Tuesday of the month

Tuesday, January 12—Gary Siegrist will present "My Big Life." He will share travels down memory lane of fifty years of birding. Gary is a Naturalist at the Dahlem Center and he will have many photographs and humorous stories to share.

Friday, February 12—Jerry Jourdan will present "Birding the Great Migration of Africa," at Vista Grande Villa. Jerry spent two weeks in Kenya in July 2013 witnessing the great migration of Zebra and Wildebeest, along with birds and other wildlife from Tanzania into Kenya across the Mara River.
PLEASE BRING A DESSERT to share that does not require table service.

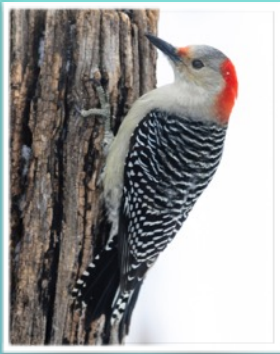
Tuesday, March 8—Ellen Rathbone, Naturalist and Education Director at Dahlem will present the study of "Ethnobotany, 101 Uses for Plants," a hands-on look at the many ways we use plants.

Tuesday, April 12—Fai Chan presents "The Little Things I Learned While Photographing Birds." He will discuss the little observations of bird behavior and his photography techniques.



JAS ACTIVITIES

Saturday, December 19 — Christmas Bird Count



You are welcome to join us, along with thousands of other birders across North America, on the 116th year of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. This marks the 47th year that we have been monitoring birds in Waterloo State Recreation Area Christmas Bird Count area, a 15-mile diameter census area centered at Mt. Hope and Seymour Roads (6 miles north of Grass Lake). The area is divided into 10 sections with an experienced leader for each section. Some groups will start listening for owls well before dawn while those less enthusiastic will join in later. Most groups count from both cars and on foot, however each leader will emphasize one method more than the others. Leaders always welcome another pair of eyes for spotting elusive birds so this is a good opportunity for novice birders to



participate.

Contrary to popular belief, many birds do spend the winter in southern Michigan. In 2014, 64 different species and at least 6525 individuals were counted in our designated Waterloo Area. Every year brings new surprises. Since 1969, 122 species have been tallied on the count. Nation-wide last year, 64,818,439 birds in 655 species and an additional 66 identifiable forms were tallied!

Apart from its attraction as a social and competitive event, CBC reveals valuable scientific data. It provides information about the winter distributions of various birds and it is vital in monitoring the status of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere. The data, 100% volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of the U.S. Government's natural history monitoring database. Count results from 1900 to the present are available through Audubon's website: www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count.
If you are interested in joining the 2015 count contact CBC Coordinator Brian Johnson at (248) 752-6000 or brian.johnson@verge-technologies.com

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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