

Festival Time

This year's Tawas Point Birding Festival was probably the best yet. This may have been because of the bad weather rather than in spite of it. Although none of us enjoyed the daily rain, we were grateful for the thunderstorm Friday night that brought in thousands of migrating birds: warblers, sparrows, thrushes, vireos and flycatchers. As Caleb Putnam described the Point tour events of Saturday morning at the Tally Rally, "The birds were dripping off the trees."

The featured speakers at the Michigan Audubon annual banquet Friday night, Lillian and Don Stokes, entertained attendees with stories of their lives as birders and, especially, with the aims and special features of their new edition of "The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America."

Tours and leaders were: Charity Island, Roger Eriksson; the *Au Sable River scenic river byway, Sue Kocsis; the Pine River Kirtland Warbler Management Area, Paul Thompson; Tawas Point State Park, Caleb Putnam, Gary Siegrist and Karl Overman; Eagle Run, Carl Racchini; Tuttle Marsh, Carl Racchini and Gary Siegrist; Wurtsmith Air Base grasslands and Clark's Marsh, Matt Hegwood,

The afternoon seminars covered subjects such as: *Kirtland's Warblers; On the Brink of Recovery*, by Chris Mensing, *Better Birding Through Journaling*, by Harold Eyster, *Getting it Right with Warbler ID*, by Roger Eriksson, *The Impact of Non-Native, Invasive Plants*, by Carolyn Henne, *Hawkwatching for Beginners*, by Gerald Wykes, and *Halos, Rainbows and Glories*, by Miles Willard.

Harold Eyster is a seventeen year old home-schooled student from Chelsea, Michigan, and the 2010 American Birding Association Young Birder of the Year.



Charity Island Lighthouse courtesy of Ruth Golm

The Charity Island Boat Tour was a new event for the Festival. Although those attending arrived at the island in a drizzle that continued for much of the morning, no one stopped birding. There had been lots of water birds in Tawas Bay; over a hundred long-tailed ducks, for instance. Many birds on the island were high

in the tall trees and were difficult to identify with the overcast sky, but sightings of fifty-five species for the trip was not bad. Lunch was served at the lighthouse. By that time the drizzle had stopped and there was a lot of avian activity along the shore. The sighting by a few of a northern goshawk was probably most memorable for them, but the long-tailed ducks that could not take off from the bay to escape the boat, probably because they had lost their flight feathers during a molt, was exciting for others.

The total number of species tabulated in the four days at all sites was 174. Of those species, 27 were wood warblers.

A happy ending

The wrap up of the Tawas Point Birding Festival took place at Wiltse's Restaurant on Thursday May 26. Peggy Ridgway and Sue Duncan lead the group through the sequence of events and all the little glitches that popped up in the mostly smooth-running four day festival were brought up by participants who also offered many excellent suggestions for improvements for next year. Peggy will forward them to Michigan Audubon.

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One hundred years later

This year will be the one hundredth anniversary of two events important in the history of the Au Sable River area. In 1911 work was begun on Cooke Dam, the first of a series of hydro-electric power generating dams on the Au Sable River. On July 11 of the same year a great fire swept through the villages of Au Sable and Oscoda wiping out the lumber mills and almost all the homes. It was the end of the logging era and the beginning of electrification in northern Michigan. On June 18, 2011 Consumers Energy will be conducting bus tours to Cooke Dam to commemorate that beginning. Au Sable Valley Audubon members have been selected to be the first group to be taken through the hundred-year-old facility. We will be leaving Lumberman's Monument at 9:00 to be bussed to the dam. Be there at least fifteen minutes ahead.

On that very same morning the regular June field trip will be one that will help us become familiar with birds we do not think of as breeding in the north woods. We have a lot of grassland at the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base that is managed to remain a grass land. Meadow larks, bob-o-links, savannah sparrows, vesper sparrows, grasshopper sparrows, and upland

sandpipers think it is managed just for them and have moved in in droves. Matt Hegwood has become familiar with all of them and will be happy to introduce you to them. Perhaps even a pair of horned larks will stick around long enough to make your acquaintance. We will meet at the Forest Service Office at the base entrance at 10:30. This should give us time to get there from the Cooke Dam commemoration.

Plans

Our new president Ruth Golm has called a meeting of the Board of Directors for June 6 at her house in Greenbush. They will be getting ready to plan next year's event schedule. Anyone wishing to have the board discuss a specific topic should email Ruth at gbgcpro@gmail.com. Members with suggestions for monthly meeting topics or field trips will be welcome at 2:30. Let Ruth know via email.



*Pine River Kirtland Warbler viewers
courtesy of Denise Willis*

Field trips may be a little different next year. They might not necessarily fall on the Saturday after the monthly meeting. We're working on a plan to make them more spontaneous and topical; like the sandhill crane and monarch butterfly events last year. Communication with members is key to this undertaking. The internet makes it possible.

Anyone with a favorite trip or event that would fit our interests should join the Board meeting at 2:30. We're thinking of trips to Hartwick Pines, Presque Isle and Thompson Harbor for dwarf lake iris and Chippewa Nature Center as field trip destinations.

Other Stuff

Some of our members have been involved in projects related to the environment. Larry Van Wagoner has been counting whip-poor-wills in the Huron National Forest along a forest road running north from Sand Lake. Matt Hegwood and Ed Cole have been counting amphibians and marsh birds at Tuttle Marsh for the Marsh Monitoring Program funded by Bird Studies Canada, the EPA and Great Lakes Sustainability Fund.