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Sandhill Cranes 2012

The last days of October are the time for some migrating sandhill cranes to congregate in Northeast Michigan before heading south for the winter. On Monday evening, October 29, many of our members met at M-55 and Sage Lake Road in Ogemaw County to follow as Larry Van Wagoner led us in our vehicles to the wetland on Mill Road near Prescott where the cranes gathered each evening this fall to spend the night in the shallow water of a large pond. As the sun was setting that evening, the birds arrived from the nearby harvested fields where they had been foraging since dawn. Larry had counted over 1,000 and reported the information to Ron Hoffman, who coordinates the count for the state.

Photo courtesy of Arno Poerner



At Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary near Kalamazoo in the evening on November 19 a new all-time record number of 8,177 cranes were counted coming to roost. Each year the number has been increasing. We must assume that this species is approaching prehistoric numbers. The restoration of wetland habitat has been a major factor. Our familiar Tuttle Marsh is just one of many breeding grounds for sandhill cranes and other wildlife that the Forest Service, Michigan DNR and groups like Ducks Unlimited have developed to restore wetlands that late Nineteenth Century ditches had drained for agricultural purposes. Tuttle Marsh restores the wetland that Tuttle Ditch eliminated.

In addition to the thousand cranes in Ogemaw County, fifth-five roosted at Tuttle Marsh for the first time in anyone's memory.

Trumpeter Swans 2012

At our November meeting at Tawas High School Library Maggie Berch reviewed the history of the reintroduction of the trumpeter swan to the Au Sable River in Alcona and Iosco Counties starting about fifteen years ago.

Then the next day twenty five of us met in Glennie and Maggie led a caravan to Alcona Dam Pond to view the area where they congregate each fall. We counted 97 swans as they foraged offshore about a quarter mile away. As the pond freezes over they will move on to open water farther south but is nice to see them come back in greater numbers each year.

We gathered again at Eagle Ridge Golf Course's restaurant for lunch. It was a beautiful November day.



Beaks and Tweets

That was the title of Peggy Ridgway's class for beginning birders at the Baptist Church in Oscoda held on three consecutive Thursdays starting in the last week of October. She was almost overwhelmed when fifty people signed up but handled it with ease.

Many new birders from that group joined us on the field trip to view the trumpeter swans at Alcona Pond and we expect them to continue to join us at our monthly meetings.



Photo Courtesy of Sharon Hegwood

CBC

This year AVA will be participating in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 15 in Oscoda and Wednesday, December 19 in Tawas.

On Saturday we will meet at Mama's Kitchen at 7:00 a.m. where Gus has reserved the meeting room for us. We will meet again at Wiltse's at 12:00 noon to hash over developments and plan the rest of the day to thoroughly cover our circle.

On Wednesday we will meet at Big Boy in Tawas at 7:00 a.m. and again at Hsing's Restaurant at 12:00 noon.

Our meeting time will be changed for this and other winter months so we will not have to drive at night. We will meet at Robert Parks Library on Skeel Street on the Wurtsmith AFB at 1:00 p.m. In addition to CBC plans we will be sharing Christmas gift ideas for our birder friends and Larry Van Wagoner and Ed Cole will bring you up to date on the newest birding websites and birding apps. I suspect luncheon at Wiltse's will be an option preceding the meeting.

Contact Larry at: ivanwago@gmail.com or 989-632-2522 or Ed Cole at: cole.edwardhcole1@gmail.com or 989-739-3151.

Looking Farther Ahead

At our January meeting we will have a review of the 2012 activities. Larry would like to have photographs of birds, flowers, landscapes or people that you have taken during the year for projected graphics to supplement his presentation.

Birdhouses

January will be the month for building nesting boxes for our various feathered friends. Bob and Larry will have something for us at the December meeting.

Anticipated Eruption

At your feeders this winter you may see some species you have not encountered previously. Don't look for a snowy owl there but you may have an evening grosbeak or a common redpoll. Pine siskins are back already. The snowy owls will be seen along the Lake Huron Shore at places like the Au Sable River mouth or Tawas Point or Point Au Gres. Matt Hegwood has already photographed one at Tawas Point. Pine grosbeaks, red crossbills, and white-winged crossbills, all of them pink to red in color, may be seen in your yards, especially if you have spruce trees. Or, they may be seen along the road eating salt the road crews have scattered to melt the snow.

Many of us have already seen snow buntings. There are forty some settled in at Tawas Point. We hope that our slate-colored juncos and horned larks stick around for the Christmas Count. Keep a sharp watch. Some of them are tricky.

Don't Forget

Our December, January and February meetings will be at 1:00 o'clock at the Robert Parks Library on Skeel Street at the former Wurtsmith AFB on F-41 in Oscoda.

Something for Nothing

You've heard of "a gaggle of geese." This is called a collective noun. Here are a few more: A charm of hummingbirds, a scold of jays, a wing of plovers, a murder of crows, a charm of goldfinches, an unkindness of ravens, a murmuration of starlings, a spring of teals, a walk of snipes, a sedge of bitterns, a chain of bob-o-links, a bevy of doves, a hedge of herons, a descent of woodpeckers.

Had enough? There are more.