

Published bi-monthly by members of Au Sable Valley Audubon, a chapter of Michigan Audubon.

Vol. III, Number 4

September/October, 2013

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The Legend Continues

At our first meeting of the 2013-2014 year, Peggy Ridgway, the featured speaker, reviewed the events of the summer on the beaches of Tawas Point State Park and updated information on L'Oreal and Lancelot, who have been identified by their unique color leg-band combinations on barrier islands off the Coast of Georgia 1,000 miles from Tawas. It is because the chicks fledged in Iosco County have been banded for several summers by Sarah Saunders and the University of Minnesota Pellston crew, that individual birds can be identified by the color bands on the legs.

As she recalled for us details of each nesting pair from May through July, she stressed the importance of the AVA members who participated in the Plover Patrol to the successful fledging of four chicks in spite of rising water levels and predation that wiped out five of the six nests; a record total in recent history at Tawas Point. She also emphasized the importance of the willing cooperation of Chuck Allen, the Park Superintendent, who helped in patrolling and protecting the beaches for the nesting birds

Pick Up for the Fall

On Tuesday September 24 eleven members met at the corner of Sand Lake Road and M-55 to begin the Fall 2013 roadside pick-up of the summer's trash along two miles of M-55 in Grant Township. It only took 45 minutes. The weather was perfect for this activity. Most of us then took advantage of an invitation to a delicious luncheon that Sue Duncan had prepared at her nearby house on Sand Lake Road.



AVA Roadside Pick-up Crew Photo Courtesy of Larry Van Wagoner



L'Oreal and Lancelot

Photo Courtesy of Phil Odum

Picnic Was Monumental

Sue Duncan organized a pot-luck picnic for AVA members on Saturday August 31 at The Lumberman's Monument pavilion. Beautiful weather and almost total local member attendance made it a happy occasion.

Exchange Meeting Coming Up in Alpena

In October our regular meeting on the second Tuesday will be held as tradition demands every other year in a joint meeting with Thunder Bay Audubon in Alpena. We will meet 12:00 on Tuesday October 8 at Jimmy Chen's Human Restaurant in Alpena across from Walmart. Please note this is a change from the date in our program brochure. The program presenter will be Scott R. Koproski, Project Leader, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alpena Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.

A Date to Save

Michigan Audubon has been awarded the Midwest Birding Symposium for **September 10 through 13, 2015**. It has in recent years been held in September every other year at Lakeside, Ohio, a community on the shores of Lake Erie but will for the first time move to Bay City, Michigan. Get ready to be involved. With less emphasis on field trips and more on seminars it has been quite different from our Tawas Point Birding Festival but with all the great autumn bird migration stop over spots around Saginaw Bay and Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge that may change. Stay tuned as this evolves.

Pull Together Gang

Donette Spiekerman has organized a group this summer for the purpose of pulling purple loosestrife and other invasive plants along the beaches of Tawas Point State Park. Eight or nine AVA members and five Huron Pines AmeriCorps volunteers have been involved on four Wednesdays in August and September. They filled 65 large plastic bags with loosestrife and spotted knapweed they had dug up along the shore and other wet spots. Still, they did not get all of it and will try again.

Acknowledgments

Peggy Ridgway feels that due to time constraints during her presentation she neglected to adequately acknowledge the major contributions of some of our members to the monitoring of the Tawas Point Shoreline during the piping plover nesting period this year.

Those members who gave of their time for which we should all be grateful were MaryAnn Wojahn, Dawn Hooper, Becky Ralls, Carl Racchini, Arno Poerner, Ed Cole, Sue Duncan, Zak Brannigan, Jean Howard, Phil Odum, Peggy Ridgway.

Bonnie Has Left Us

On Monday the sixteenth of September six of our AVA members attended the funeral service for Bonnie Bell McCauley at the Hale United Methodist Church. Bonnie died on the 13th. Bonnie and her husband Jerry have been regular members for many years. Bonnie taught science classes in Pinconning and was a qualified bird-bander in her younger years. We will miss her smile.

A Book Review

GIFTS OF THE CROW:

By John Marzluff

Reviewed by Ed Davis for Au Sable Valley Audubon

SO MUCH FOR BIRD BRAINED

A group of them is called a “murder” and were featured in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1963 horror film, “The Birds.” Corvids have a reputation for destroying gardens and eating crops (“ravenous”). Numerous communities have fought them with poison, shotguns, cannons, even dynamite. But in addition to being frequently misunderstood and underappreciated—casual birders like myself frequently take them for granted because they’re so common—they are also social, curious, resourceful, plus amazingly intelligent, with brains which are gigantic relative to their body size. They are members of what ornithologists classify as *corvide*, and two

of the best-known species are the common raven and the American crow.

Though it’s generally recognized that human and corvid cultures have co-evolved over the centuries (think “The Raven” by Edgar Allen Poe), in “Gifts of the Crow,” University of Washington wildlife professor John Marzluff goes one step further. Marzluff asserts it’s a case of cognitive processes enabling these very intelligent birds to actually “behave like humans, to consciously think.” An early chapter on neurobiology, phrenology and opioids, topics that ornithologists would probably appreciate, had me dashing for the dictionary. The many eye-opening field studies and anecdotes sprinkled throughout the book are what make Gifts a must read.

For example, Marzluff notes that corvids, like numerous higher order creatures, are given to frolic. He cites instances of ravens wind surfing by riding a strip of wood clutched in their feet, sliding sled-like down steep snowy roofs, and pulling clothespins off lines to make washing fall to the ground. He also suggests that corvids may even grieve. In one case, crows cawed wildly before settling in a tree near a crow that was dead, then silently flew away; two weeks later the dead bird was still untouched but now surrounded with a circle of sticks.

Marzluff emphasizes that crows are anything but instinctual automatons controlled by neural circuits which bypass the brain (the reason why a chicken can run and fly even after its head is cut off). Rather, crows demonstrate adaptive behavior, meaning they learn how the human world operates and plan accordingly.

One striking example involved crows that were attracted to fast food littered at a highway construction zone where a signal light controlled the stop and go of vehicles. A lookout crow perched atop a nearby pole cawed in different ways as the light changed from red to green then back again, signaling the ebb and flow of traffic and the opportunity to feed. Equally amazing, the crucial lookout position was rotated among the murder.

In another case, a thoroughly documented field study, crows dive-bombed researchers who had trapped and banded them but ignored similarly dressed researchers who had not taken part in the tag-and-release experiment. The distinction continued for years and involved many more crows than were present during the banding. Apparently, the discrimination between “bad researchers” and “neutral bystanders” was somehow communicated to other crows second-hand.

These and other cases of corvid behavior fill the pages of “Gifts of the Crow.” Serious and stunning, yet at times funny and hilarious, the many accounts make Gifts an awe-inspiring read, a book which birders of all backgrounds will find book fascinating. If you’re looking for a stocking-tuffer to give this Christmas, this is one that is sure to please.

Ed Davis

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