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## Piping Plover Patrols

It's been a busy eight weeks for some of our members who volunteered to monitor piping plover nests at Tawas Point. This year there were six separate piping plover nests. Peggy Ridgway is scheduled to present all the details of the heroic effort by members at the September meeting.

And now, as of July 21<sup>st</sup>, Sarah and Stephanie from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in Pellston have just brought three more chicks that were bred in captivity to be released to join the four that were fledged at the Point.

After the release, eight of the 2013 monitors joined Sarah and Stephanie for lunch at Big Boy. They were Peggy Ridgway, Mary Ann Wojahn, Sue Duncan, Jean Howard, Becky Ralls, Dawn and Stuart Hooper and Ed Cole.



Mary Ann, Peggy, Sarah and Stephanie Photo by Ed Cole

The above photo shows Sarah Saunders, doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota, working out of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Station at Douglas Lake near Pellston, Michigan, immediately after releasing the chicks on the beach at Tawas Point State Park. She is replacing the cage in which she and Stephanie Schubel, standing by her, had transported the three piping plovers from eggs that had been laid and abandoned at Sleeping Bear Dunes. Mary Ann Wojahn and Peggy Ridgway are busy photographing the chicks. The photographer, who is not very good at it, failed to include the chicks.

## KW Field Trip

Twelve members attended the trip to see the Kirtland's warbler at the nearby nesting area described by Carl Racchini as the Pine River area. Carl and Matt Hegwood were the guides.

The Kirtland's warblers were heard singing as the cars arrived there but none were easily seen. As the group walked down a side road to view a cowbird trap put out by the Forest Service, Kirtland's warblers were all around.

Out came a spotting scope and focus was established on a singing male so all could see the color pattern in detail and the beak movement as the male tilted his head back to sing.

Carl spoke about the work that went into establishing the local jack pine habitat required for successful breeding here and also about current habitat conservation going on in the Bahamas. He gave an account of cowbird natural history and the need for the cowbird traps in the Michigan nesting area for Kirtland's warbler breeding success. He indicated that it has recently been observed that the species is tending to nest in younger jack pine stands. Carl also showed maps of the current nesting areas and said that recent census data shows a decline in the number of nesting pairs in our area.

Matt pointed out other birds as he heard them, and encouraged everyone to look carefully until they saw them. They saw nineteen species. Although most participants had heard Kirtland's warblers previously, four saw them for the first time that day.

Perhaps the highlight of the trip was the encounter with a pair of upland sandpipers they discovered noisily protecting their brood.

### L'Oreal's Chicks Greet Their New Neighbors



Photo Courtesy of Phil Odum

# Bluebird Catastrophe

In May Donette and Gary Spiekerman had an experience that they don't want to repeat. A pair of bluebirds selected their bluebird box as their 2013 summer home. The following is an edited version to share with our more experienced birding members. Perhaps we can get some solutions to the problem so next year can be a happy one.

The saga, in Donnett's words, begins: "The Blue-Bird box that we built and posted last spring has attracted a pair of Bluebirds this spring. After much evaluating, the pair of Bluebirds decided our nest box was their choice. The nest building process began in a frenzy, lasted weeks, and then dwindled until we thought they had changed their minds. Much to my surprise, one day I opened the cleanout door and found a nested Bluebird. Since then we have discovered there are four little blue eggs. The beautiful blue color and friendly nature of the Bluebird has enhanced our birding experience this spring. And, yes, there is value in our Bluebird house activity. Oh yes, the male Bluebird aggressively chased away Cowbirds attempting to get into the nest." ~donette.

Weeks later: "Help...we are under attack by a rogue Bluebird. We have the mated pair on a nest. Also we have another pair...or single male...not certain just yet. They have been exploring our second bluebird nest box but we haven't looked inside just yet. Problem is that we have a male Bluebird that is attacking our house windows, screens and poo is everywhere...including all over the back patio ture. Right now I have printed some wacky owl pictures and am pasting those in the sunroom windows. Help! This has been going on for five days now and I'm plenty tired of it." ~donette

In answer to a question: "The two nest boxes are about 90 feet apart, but we think that isn't the problem...because the second male bluebird showed up before we put the second box out. We had built the box but didn't even think about a second nest, so we didn't put it up. The behavior started before the box went up. In fact, we put the box up because I thought it was competition that was driving the male BB to distraction. For the windows I printed out some whacky owl pictures from an on-line source to teach children how to draw owls. They're cute but not very authentic. I taped one caricature on each window pane. It seemed to have immediate effect. No, I could no longer grin and bear it...five days was trouble enough. The bird was hooking into the screens and I'm not kidding...poo was pasted all over my back patio furniture, as well as the windows, screens, and side of the house. The original nest box with eggs is a long way away... at the other end of the house. Come what may...but I'd had enough." ~donette

2nd reply..."The owl pictures worked for some hours...only. Gary's solution is to close the door on the sunroom. The constant sound of the bird hitting the window is annoying...and the poo mess is building-up once again.

I don't currently know how to handle this problem, but one rogue bird is ruining our wonderful sunroom and patio. Perhaps Donette and Gary will reconsider our bluebird nest box once this nest fledges." ~donette

"Ed! ...this is only funny to you. I have even sat out on the back patio on the bench looking for one clean spot on which to sit and sat with a garden hose, waiting to squirt the bluebird. Of course, it watched from a distance and no water hit the bird!!!

Today I am 'sitting' with my precious grandson, who had dental surgery yesterday and is recovering on a liquid/soft food diet.

Note: Jordan and I just checked the bluebird nest box...all eggs are hatched but either the chicks were soundly sleeping or the nest has failed. I have missed seeing the bluebirds enter and exit the box lately."

~donette

"I checked for the second time today and found the three little chicks are dead. It's a shame, too, because they were beginning to develop their first little wing feathers. They were perfectly formed. When I picked up the nest, lots...and I mean lots...of ants and larvae scattered about. I wonder if the male bluebird is distressed because of the failure of the nest...or the nest failed because of the distress. Note: Also last year...a pair of Chickadees built a nest in that same bluebird box and that nest failed also. Those chicks died fairly soon after hatching. Interesting thing about that: some bird built a covering over the top of the failed nest entombing the dead chicks. I did not find ants and larvae in that nest last year when I cleaned it out". ~donette

"After discovering the nest had failed we removed the nest box and buried the nest. This event caused great stress for both the male and female bluebirds. They searched everywhere. Frankly, it was puzzling because their attention had turned away from the nest by their absence and now that it was gone, they were frenzied. It was painful to watch their search. After about 2 days both bluebirds disappeared from our yard....

AND THE REST OF THE STORY IS... both a male and female bluebird eventually returned to our yard and remain. Just a few days ago we identified at least one juvenile bluebird in our yard. Mother bluebird was taking a birdbath while junior observed her actions as he sat in the grass very nearby.

So that is my story. Hope this helps."

~donette

Any suggestions from the bluebird box experts? Do we have insight into the described behavior?