

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

Vol. IV, Number 3

March, April 2014

President, Ruth Golm Vice-President, Larry Van Wagoner Secretary, Jen Gravlin Treasurer, Donette Spiekerman At Large, Kathy Swindlehurst
Contact Secretary, Jen Gravlin, jgravlin@charter.net, 989-747-0300

GBBC 2014 Results

The Great Backyard Bird Count went well this year in spite of all the ice and snow and low temperatures. For a thinly populated county we did pretty well. The left hand list shows the counties with the highest number of a) species and b) checklists submitted to eBird within the state. The right hand list shows the people who reported the highest number of species in our county.

Michigan Counties

Iosco County Leaders

1	<u>Ottawa</u>	73 125
2	<u>Washtenaw</u>	73 255
3	<u>Kalamazoo</u>	65 118
4	<u>Wayne</u>	65 181
5	<u>Barry</u>	62 137
6	<u>Kent</u>	61 254
7	<u>Oakland</u>	61 412
8	<u>St. Clair</u>	61 46
9	<u>Muskegon</u>	57 79
10	<u>Grand Travers</u>	56 142
11	<u>Calhoun</u>	55 109
12	<u>Iosco</u>	54 159

1	Wayne Shawl	37
2	Philip Odum	36
3	Peggy Ridgway	34
4	Larry VanWagoner	24
5	Jane Ruster	22
6	Gisela Vito	19
7	Howard Pawley	17
7	Mary Williams	17
9	Harriet Losey	16
10	Stuart Hooper	15

Geology for Century 21

The scheduled speaker in Tawas for our March meeting, Carl Scheffler, of Traverse City, was unable to make the journey across the state so we had as a substitution a video on “fracking,” the practice of fracturing shale and other bedrock formations deep within the earth to extract oil and natural gas. Since Michigan is a geologic basin with extensive shale and limestone deposits throughout its area, we, as residents need to understand the results of this type of drilling and its effect on our landscape and environmental health. We can invest in the drilling industry and become rich or we can try to make sure that the drilling is done responsibly without destroying our landscape and befouling our groundwater, or we could do both. Drilling is inevitable because it is profitable. Protecting our environment is not profitable. It is up to us to make sure it happens.

An Extraordinary Event

On Friday February 21st a number of members of AVA and hundreds of others attended the Second Annual Osprey Awards of the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy at the Boathouse on the Saginaw River in Downtown Bay City. The trip getting there for those of us from Iosco and Alcona Counties was a challenge with the blowing snow, but we stuck it out and it was memorable.

Each year the Board of Directors of the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy chooses one person from within the counties that surround Saginaw Bay who they feel does the most to promote and support the ideals of their organization for their highest award; The Osprey Award.



Conservation Award, 2014 Photo Courtesy Karen Rouse

Peggy Ridgway certainly fulfills those ideals and has for many years. She has lived and worked in Iosco County all her professional life as an elementary and intermediate school teacher in Oscoda and as President of the Michigan Audubon Society. Since her retirement she has been instrumental in developing the idea for and organizing the annual Tawas Point Birding Festival at Tawas Point in Saginaw Bay. This would have been a daunting task for any group but she accomplished, almost single-handedly, what would have overwhelmed a committee of experienced professional organizers. Tawas Point Birding Festival, in its ninth year, is drawing birders from around the world to the Saginaw Bay of Michigan. Congratulations, Peggy.

Next Big Thing

The Tawas Point Birding Festival is our next major event. Peggy Ridgway, Sue Duncan and Wendy Tatar of Michigan Audubon have been working on getting things lined up since last September and now we, the other members of Au Sable Valley Audubon general membership, are about to become involved. You have already been able to sign up for a job that utilizes your special skills. Make sure Sue has that. Make sure you have registered at michiganaudubon.org. Get the schedule of events there and make your choices. Hurry, the events are filling up early. Be a recording secretary for one of the expert guides on one or two of the Point field trips. Or, be in charge of the first aid equipment on one of the bus tours. You will not need any special skills except reading and writing for either of these.

Our April meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. at Oscoda High School on River Road, Room 104, the School Board Meeting Room. Our expert birding friend, Sue Malski, will help us try to improve our skill in identifying ducks.

Get Ready for L'Oreal

This is a big thing for a few. For the past three years we have been visited by our own special piping plover, L'Oreal. She hatched on the Huron Beach at Shoreline Park in Au Sable and was the only surviving chick of a nest of four eggs. Then she came back from her winter in South Carolina to mate and hatch four chicks on Tawas Point two years in a row. We hope this will be her third successful summer at the Point.

At a meeting on April 30 at the Bay Inn in Tawas City from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Vince Cavalieri of the US Fish and Wildlife Service will conduct a piping plover monitor training and educational workshop. Attendance will not commit you to monitoring. It will, however, be a great opportunity to learn more about this endangered species. If you are interested in attending, please let Peggy know by Apr. 25. Contact her at 739-5674 or rbirdlady@gmail.com

Now, all we need is for L'Oreal or any plovers to show up and find the Point beaches desirable for nesting.

Bluebird Boxes Galore

At 8:00 a.m. Tuesday, March 25 thirteen AVA members ventured out in four inches of fresh snow to meet at Richardson Elementary School in Oscoda to help sixth grade students assemble bluebird boxes that were then to be taken home to put up in their yards or nearby fields so that the soon to return birds will find a place to nest. Students arrived in the common area in two groups; thirty six at 8:10 and another thirty seven at 9:10. Both groups arranged themselves around ten tables in a very orderly way and were ready to begin. Each child was supplied with a kit containing

the pre-cut wooden parts, the nails and a hammer. Emily Kemnitz then led each group through the steps to properly assemble the boxes prior to the students assembling them with the assistance, when needed, by the thirteen AVA members. The process went very smoothly for both groups.

Bluebird box workshops for sixth graders have been annual events in Tawas, Hale and Oscoda elementary schools for many years. Last year Tawas dropped out and this year Hale also did. This may be the last. The AVA Board of Directors is evaluating its effectiveness as a conservation learning program. There may be more effective ways to involve school age children.

Other Events

Each year The Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative holds a meeting for academic type birders. It provides an opportunity for university students, conservation professionals, government agents and anyone interested in birds to get together and present the results of research, share experiences in environmental studies and find out what is going on in birding organizations around the state. This year it was held at Kettunen Center near Cadillac, a very pleasant facility for such events. It includes lecture halls, a cafeteria, motel type rooms and natural surroundings with a sled hill and a lake. Seven AVA members attended the three day event Thursday noon through Saturday noon, March 20 through 22. Among other things they learned about different approaches to carbon reduction in our atmosphere using wind and sun, differing types of fires and how each results in different environmental outcomes for wildlife and the landscape, the purple martin culture, lots of things.

It is a great way to get away for a few days with friends in late winter and learn something at the same time.

Another event involving five AVA members was a three day winter trip to Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan looking for birds that visit the Upper Peninsula each winter. They had partial success in that they were able to find the gray jay and the sharp-tailed grouse to get pretty good looks. No snowy or great gray owls, or crossbills or waxwings showed up.



Gray Jay

Courtesy of Larry Van Wagoner