

LOCAL NEWS

Birders

Continued from Page 1

"This has been really, really nice," noted Brady, with Ohren adding that it will be an experience they won't forget.

"We were amazed by the walk at [Tawas Point State Park]. You just don't realize how many birds there are until you have a good guide," he continued, referencing the tour he and Brady participated in on Friday.

The success of the event was also evident with the attendees, and AuSable Valley Audubon (AVA) representatives pointed out that there were visitors from all across Michigan, as well as Canada, Washington, West Virginia, Florida, Australia, England and more.

Also making a long trip for the occasion was David Oselett of San Diego, Calif., who heard of the event while birding in Texas.

Presented by AVA, Tawas Point Migration was held so that birders would still have an opportunity to enjoy all the sights and sounds that grace the county this time of year, since the traditional Tawas Point Birding Festival has become a biennial event which will pick back up in 2019.

Organizers maintained a number of the beloved activities birders look forward to during the festival, and Tawas Point Migration participants could get in on such happenings as field trips to Loon Lake Nature Park, Sunrise Coast Birding Trail sites and Tuttle Marsh; bird banding demonstrations and guided trips at Tawas Point State Park in East Tawas; and presentations by experts on such topics as bird identification, lessons on peregrine falcons and creating bird and butterfly gardens with native plants.

The programs were held at the Knights of Columbus hall in East Tawas, where Wings of Wonder representatives returned with their

always popular presentation on raptors, allowing the audience an up-close look at the fascinating creatures.

The Wings of Wonder birds are taken into the facility, located in Empire, because they are injured, sick or orphaned. The goal is to rehabilitate the raptors and release them back into the wild, whenever possible.

Several vendors, nonprofits and educational groups – including local artists and members of AVA and Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch – were also stationed at the Knights building, where there were hands-on activities for those of all ages, as well as a dinner.

The participating birders didn't waste any time in their search, and the state park was packed on Friday morning with those anxiously awaiting the experience.

AVA member and Tawas Point Migration volunteer Larry VanWagoner said one of the tour groups that morning counted roughly 50 species – in a single hour.

The bird banding demonstrations, led by Ed Pike, also drew in quite a crowd.

"This morning we caught as many birds as he usually gets in two days," pointed out Heidi Trudell, who helped with the demonstrations and also led one of the tours.

"As a bird person, this is on the Michigan bucket list," she added of the opportunities at Tawas Point.

For those lucky enough to have registered in time for one of the field trips in other locales, they certainly got their money's worth.

This reporter was able to tag along for a Saturday morning excursion with Peggy Ridgway, an AVA member who also started the Tawas Point Birding Festival 13 years ago.

A wealth of knowledge after having lived in the area for more than 50 years, Ridgway led a group of about 15 people to Corsair Trail in the Huron-Manistee National Forest, Westgate Scenic Overlook in Oscoda and Loon Lake Nature Park in Hale.

She not only shared information about the history of these significant birding spots, but also educated the group on the plants in the area and their impact on the wildlife, why a portion of the AuSable River is designated as an Important Bird Area for trumpeter swans and how a small piece of land such as Loon Lake Nature Park can be a haven for a number of species, if it's properly managed and protected.

Even though the rain poured down for the duration of the tour, participants were still able to see and/or hear such birds as eastern phoebes, turkey, red wings, rose-breasted grosbeaks and even a yellow warbler nest.

A final tally of the different species noted during the event was not yet available at press time but Sue Duncan, one of the event organizers, said the last check revealed that birders seen 134 species.

While the turnout was still impressive, Duncan did say that the rain on Saturday resulted in less people looking for birds.

However, the count of 134 is still a respectable number, as there were 152 species recorded during the festival last year.

"All in all, we had a very successful event," Duncan shared, adding that there was great support from the community, which made the birders feel very welcome.

For more information about AVA and any upcoming events, visit www.ausablevalleyaudubon.org.



Photo by Jenny Haglund

BEYOND BIRDS – AuSable Valley Audubon member – and creator of the Tawas Point Birding Festival – Peggy Ridgway, second from left, leads a tour at Corsair Trail in the Huron-Manistee National Forest. In addition to educating the group about the birds in the area, she also pointed out noteworthy plant species and explained the role vegetation plays in the success of surrounding wildlife.



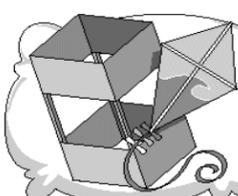
Photo by Jenny Haglund

STUNNING STANDOUT – The striking bright orange plumage of the Baltimore oriole makes this a standout species, and plenty of these birds were spotted throughout Iosco County during the Tawas Point Migration event last week.



Photo by Jenny Haglund

KEEPING WATCH – This red-winged blackbird is perched high in a tree while keeping watch over the throngs of visitors to Tawas Point State Park on Friday.



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