

WPBO THE MIGRANT

Volume 27, Number 2

Summer - Fall 2010



C. M. Neri © 2010

Mission Statement

The mission of Whitefish Point Bird Observatory is to document the distribution and abundance of birds in the Great Lakes Region, with special emphasis on migration. Research projects will focus on assessing the status of bird populations and movements. Information acquired will be used to increase our knowledge of bird migration, to encourage public awareness of birds and their environment, and to further conservation of birds.

Visit the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory Website at: www.wpbo.org



FROM THE CHAIR

Ash-throated Flycatcher south of the Point, November 19, 2010.

Photo: M. Sefton

Dear WPBO Members:

With this issue of *The Migrant*, we are setting a new course for WPBO. To keep up with the overwhelming trend towards electronic communications, to allow us to add more advanced content, and to better insure the financial viability of our organization, your board has decided to publish, starting with this issue of *The Migrant*, an electronic version only on our website. For those members who cannot access our website we will, upon written request, provide a black and white single sided printed version of the newsletter. We hope our members will appreciate the advantages this new web effort will offer, such as color for all photographs.

To review what has been happening at WPBO, we began our seasonal activities in mid-March with unusually mild weather conditions. Our Hawk Counter, Waterbird Counter and Owl Banders all recorded successful seasons and their detailed reports are available elsewhere on our website. Our Educator/ Naturalist position was filled by a volunteer graduate student this past summer and all of our offered programs were well attended.

The Summer Owl Banding crew had another good season with a number of juvenile Northern Saw-whet Owls being banded, putting WPBO in a very unique position among all other owl banding operations in North America.

Our annual members' event, Spring Fling, held the last full weekend of April, was an unqualified success this year. Over 170 attendees enjoyed all of the activities including an excellent and entertaining keynote speaker and educational workshops. Next year's Spring Fling is scheduled for April 29 – May 1, 2011, a week later than usual to avoid a conflict with Easter weekend.

The Fall season is well underway with Scott Shuette serving as our Waterbird Counter and Keith Bagnall and Wendy King, after an absence of a year, are back as Owl Banders. This appears to be a banner season with new record count numbers and unusual sightings. Fall is always an exciting time of the year at the point.

Financially, the organization remains in a fairly stable condition. In 2009, through some serious cost control by your board and staff and with the generous contributions from our members and friends, we were able to show a small financial surplus for our operations. For this year, our YTD results also indicate that we are holding our own, but we will have some unexpected expenses, as we have hired a firm to do removal of (See **"From the Chair" on p. 6**)

Cover Photo

Ace Owl Bander Chris Neri took this beautiful photo of a spectacular Northern Lights display over the Whitefish Point lighthouse on November 9, 2009.

Go to our web site for more photos:

www.wpbo.org



Editor's Note: If you have an interesting photo or article that you would like to share with the readers of the Migrant, please submit it to the editor:

The Migrant
c/o Mike Sefton
2491 Towner Blvd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Digital photos may also be sent via e-mail to: mseft@yahoo.com

Photographer or author will be credited. Copies are suggested, as submissions will not be returned.

Send correspondence for WPBO to:
Whitefish Point Bird Observatory
16914 N. Whitefish Point Rd.
Paradise, MI 49768

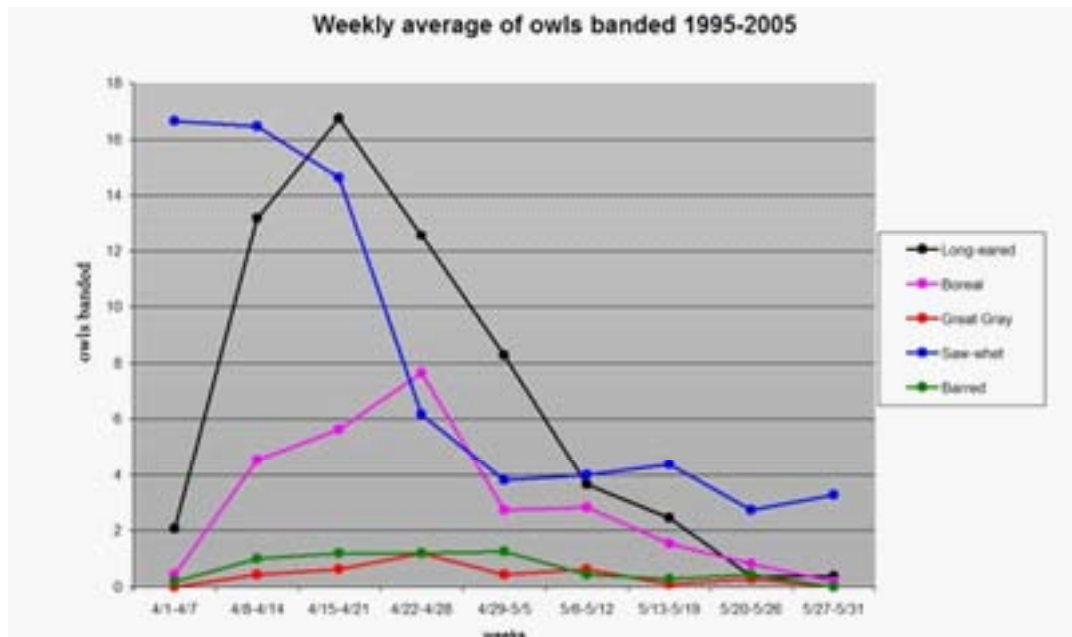
Phone: 906-492-3596
Email: wpbo.info@gmail.com

Owl Banding Spring 2010 by Chris Neri and Nova Mackentley

A total of 640 owls were banded this spring; 570 Northern Saw-whets (NSWO), 10 Boreals (10), 48 Long-eareds (LEOW), 8 Barreds (BDOW), and 4 Great Gray (GGOW). Additionally, 41 previously banded owls were captured; 37 NSWO, 3 BDOW, and 1 GGOW. We also banded 4 Whip-poor-will's and a Chuck-will's-widow. The Chuck-will's-widow represents just the second record for this species in the Upper Peninsula; the first was also recorded by WPBO. The 2010 spring owl banding season marks the 4th season since we made several changes to the spring owl banding protocol. These changes continue to significantly further our knowledge and understanding of the owl migration at Whitefish Point.

The most obvious impact the changes made in 2007 have had is simply in the number of owls banded. From 1994-2006, the most productive spring season was 1998 when 222 owls were banded. During the four seasons since we implemented the changes we have banded 834, 1192, 773, and 640 owls respectively. The average number of NSWO banded in 1984-2006 was 63, the new 4 year average is 718. Similarly, we are catching many more previously banded owls. In the four springs previous to the changes we captured 13 banded birds; 5 NSWO, 1 BOOW, 2 LEOW, 3 BDOW and 2 GGOW. In the last four springs we have captured 148 banded birds; 133 NSWO, 8 LEOW, 6 BDOW and 1 GGOW. We are naturally also getting many more reports of owls we've banded being captured at other sites. One of the most interesting is a NSWO we captured that was banded in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. That same site, which is located in the middle of the prairie, miles from trees, has captured one of our NSWO. Another one of our birds recaptured at a site of particular interest is a NSWO banded at WPBO on April 21, 2008 that was recaptured at its nest in Abitibi, Quebec on July 31, 2008. Among recaptures this spring, we were thrilled to recapture 4 NSWO that we banded as juveniles during our summer research; 1 from 2006, 1 from 2007, and 2 from 2009. Another noteworthy capture this spring was that of a banded GGOW. This bird was originally banded as an adult on January 7, 2005 in Alcona, Ontario. This means it was at least nearly 7 years old and represents the 3rd oldest wild longevity record for GGOW.

Among the changes made in 2007 was pushing the start date from April 1 to March 15. Prior to this, banding in March had been attempted in 1981, '83, '86 and '90. During this period 2,243 net hours were logged and just 3 owls were captured; 1 NSWO, 1 BDOW, and 1 BOOW. All of these owls were captured from March 28-31 and owl banding at Whitefish Point in March was deemed futile (Grigg 1991). Furthermore, two of the most comprehensive sources of information on North American owls are the species accounts in the Birds of North America from the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, and Johnsgard's book North American Owls. In Johnsgard, the spring migration in Michigan is said to begin in late April. In the Birds of North America account spring migration in Michigan is said to begin in late April and peak in early May. In 2006 Nova ran a graph of NSWO captures in 1995-2005 that showed that NSWO captures were in fact at their peak during the first week of the old banding period, spurring us to move the start date forward (see graph below).



(See "Spring Owl" on p. 6)

Members Make it Happen by Jonathan Lutz

Birding season at Whitefish Point began in odd fashion in 2010. Temperatures during the annual Spring Fling weekend were near 70 degrees, and the sun shone brightly over the Owl's Roost. Despite a lack of great bird sightings—such as the American Avocet and Snowy Owl sharing the same beach during Spring Fling 2009—the weekend was rich with WPBO member camaraderie, educational moments, and just plain fun.

Massachusetts native, Norman Smith, packed the Whitefish Township hall for the banquet dinner and his keynote address. Norm charmed member attendees with his chowder-thick accent, quirky slide projector, and recollections of watching Snowy Owls pouncing on Peregrine Falcons at Boston's Logan International Airport. Afterwards, 79 evaluation forms were collected, spanning 164 attendees. Many members articulated that Norman Smith was the best speaker they had ever seen at a Spring Fling event, and one group pointed out that emphasis on conservation education was part of what made it so enjoyable.

Throughout the 2010 field season, the Observatory benefitted from the educational spirit and birding zeal of two new volunteers: Jason Boszyk and Libby Zeman. Together, these unpaid naturalists conducted a variety of educational programs for Observatory visitors, stressing the critical value of Whitefish Point for migratory birds. Likewise, every member of the 2010 staff and volunteer corps—from gift shop to the banding lab—helped answer a myriad of questions ranging from bird-specific to bizarre. WPBO could not function without these front-line individuals.

Behind the scenes, the WPBO Board of Directors continues to make progress in leading the organization. Board members are to the Observatory as a CEO is to a corporation—they administer and fundraise, manage personnel and deal with day-to-day issues within the operation. The finances are managed by the board Treasurer; the retail operation and member database is the job of a single volunteer board member. Spring Fling continues to draw members to Whitefish Point each year, yet another opportunity made possible by WPBO's volunteer board of directors.

None of this work, though, is accomplished without the support of WPBO members. You attend Spring Fling, owl banding presentations, and field trips. You contribute to the annual bird-a-thon, quilt raffle, and annual appeals. You share the awe of Spring migration with your families, friends, and fellow birders through stories and photographs of time spent at Whitefish Point.

The Observatory will enter 2011 with terrific momentum. The summer owl banding program is producing intriguing results since it began with an exploratory research study four seasons ago. The mainstay raptor and waterbird counts bring fresh counters to the point and continue a WPBO tradition that's lasted for more than three decades. The bird count data collected at Whitefish Point is critical to understanding the migratory behavior of bird species in the region. Seasonal bird migration is a monitoring tool for everything from neo-tropical habitat loss to global climate change.

And there is more work to be done.

For over 30 years, members and volunteers have kept the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory moving forward. In 2011 and beyond, WPBO has aspirations to become an even greater presence among research institutions in the Great Lakes. Among the challenges the organization faces are: improvements to staff housing, upgrades and management of its database, hiring of an Operations Manager and grant writer, and the continuation of all existing programs.

Your continued support will make it happen.

Please consider doubling your gift to WPBO this year. Renew your membership at the next-highest level. Attend a field trip and mark the last weekend in April 2011 on your calendar today, so you can attend Spring Fling. Together, we can continue the camaraderie, educational moments, and fun at Whitefish Point.

Jonathan E. Lutz is the Executive Director of Michigan Audubon, the parent organization of the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. He can be contacted via email at jlutz@michiganaudubon.org or by calling (517) 886-9144.

Space Still Available on WPBO Field Trips

Bird some of the best hot spots in Michigan with experienced WPBO leaders. The fees for these trips support WPBO's research and education programs.

For details, go to www.wpbo.org and click on *Events and Field Trips*, or call Jerry Ziarno at (989) 832-5936 or email gziarno@aol.com



Tour members on Breeding Birds of the Eastern UP trip view a Piping Plover. Photo: Joyce Peterson

Eastern UP Breeding Birds Field Trip by Joyce Peterson

Sixteen people endured rain and swarms of mosquitoes on our annual Breeding Birds of the Eastern U.P. field trip on June 5 and 6. The payoff was life birds for many and good company for all. The trip started on Farm Truck road in Chippewa County where we found Palm Warblers, Lincoln's Sparrows, Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided Flycatchers. We then went to Vermilion road, where a singing Kirtland's Warbler had been found a few days earlier. After a little listening and searching, we found him belting out his song, trying to attract a mate. It appears he was not successful but it wasn't for lack of trying. We tried for the Red Crossbills, which routinely hang around a water hole a little further down the road, but didn't see them. Our next stop was the Point where we saw the incubating Piping Plovers. They were surprisingly hard to spot, even with the wire enclosure US Fish and Wildlife had set up around the nest.

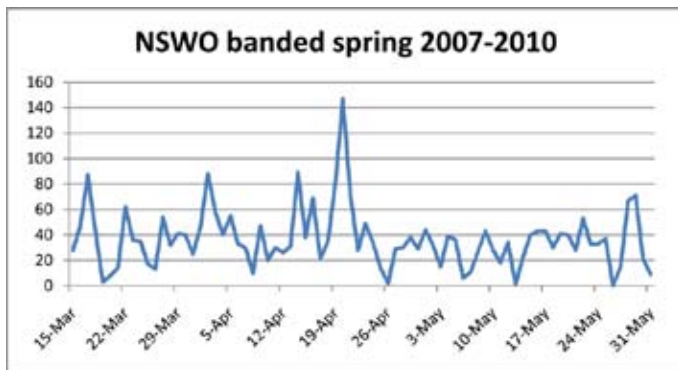
On to the Lower Tahquamenon Falls State Park to check out the boardwalk. This is an excellent spot to see nesting warblers, including Black and White, Northern Parula, Blackburnian, Magnolia, Canada, Chestnut-sided Warblers and tons of American Redstarts. Afterwards we went on the Sleeper Lake burn area and despite intense searching, we could not locate a Black-backed Woodpecker. We obtained a permit from Seney Wildlife Refuge to allow us to search for a Yellow Rail Saturday evening, so some of the group went out after dinner to get the rail. Evidently the rail had been heard calling, but stopped about a half hour before our group arrived.

The next morning we set out for the road formerly known as County Road 3344 to try for the Connecticut Warbler. We stopped at Dollarville Flooding west of Newberry first and saw Black Terns, Osprey and Bald Eagle. By the time we arrived at 3344, it was raining pretty steadily. We sat at the traditional location for Connecticut Warbler for about a half hour and never heard him sing. We then drove further down the road for the LeConte's Sparrow and Sedge Wren. We found both birds but had to work hard for them. A couple of birders had told us about a singing Connecticut they'd found on County Road 3145 so we went to find him. After some listening, we heard him in the woods and went in after him. We got some great looks!

It was a fun trip as always. Lathe and Joyce would like to thank Jacco Gelderloos for filling in as co-leader for Mike Sefton. We are looking forward to next year's trip! Go to www.wpbo.org and click on Events & Programs for information on next year's WPBO led field trips, the fees for which benefit WPBO's research.

Owl Banding Spring 2010 (continued from p. 3)

Since moving the start date from April 1 to March 15 in 2007, we have experienced varying results in March with 306, 26, 74, and 249 owls banded respectively. As was the case in 2007, more owls were banded during the last 17 nights in March than were banded in all of April or May of this spring. This season's peak occurred on March 17 when 69 NSWOW, 2 BOOW, 1 LEOW and 1 GGOW were banded. Additionally, we set early arrival dates for BOOW (March 15), LEOW and GGOW (both March 17). These results are significantly changing the understanding of the timing of spring owl migration.



In addition to providing us with a more complete understanding of the spring owl migration at WPBO, many more visitors to the owl banding are now able to have close up experiences with these beautiful birds. The educational value of these experiences for birders and non-birders alike is immeasurable. We received 494 visitors to the owl banding this spring. More folks attended the evening owl programs, but couldn't stick it out for the first net check. This spring, Nova revamped the Adopt-a-Raptor program, and we have had great success with visitors adopting owls (<http://wpbo.org/support-wpbo/>).

We would like to thank you all for your enthusiasm, encouragement and support. Also new over the last few springs is the involvement of volunteers and increased visitation by local residents. We are particularly fortunate to have had the wonderful Lepard family move to Paradise this year, we very much enjoyed their frequent visits and their friendship. We would like to thank Jason Bojczyk, Rick & Lorrie Bicknell, Betty Maxson, Lynn Carmody, Joanne Selbee, and Libby Zeman for their help this season.

See you in the spring!

From the Chair (continued from p. 2)

the bats which have established residence in our headquarters building, where some of our seasonal staff live. Some cleanup and remediation may be required. We have also determined the need for a Director/Naturalist starting next year and have applied for a grant to help fund this position. In view of these efforts, the continued generosity of our members and friends will again be needed.

The WPBO board will be losing several of our long-time board members due to term limits and, as part of that process, we will be replacing many of our current officers at the end of this year. Elections will be held at the board meeting on November 20.

Thanks to all of our members for their continued support for and interest in all of the things we do at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory.

Jerry Ziarno, Board Chair

Winners of 2010 Raffle

1st prize--Quilt--Tom Deering, Maple City, MI

2nd prize--Binoculars--Elizabeth Dapson, Kalamazoo, MI

3rd prize--Peterson Field guide--John Dole, Raleigh, NC

Winners of Seller's Raffle. Each will receive a WPBO cap:

Harold Allen--Canton, MI

Paul Berrigan--Farmington, MI

Becky Brown--Atlantic Mine, MI

Robert Swain--Grand Rapids, MI

Elizabeth Noren--Ann Arbor, MI

Kathleen George--Grand Blanc, MI

Many thanks to all who sold or purchased tickets. Your generosity helps to fund Whitefish Point Bird Observatory's research. To make additional donations, please see the form on the next page, or go to our web site at wpbo.org and click on "Get Involved." Thank you!

2011 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

It is time to renew your membership for Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. Memberships are for a calendar year, January 1 – December 31.

If your membership expires at the end of 2010, we recently sent you a letter reminding you about the renewal. If you have not already returned your membership, you may use the form below. If you did not receive a letter, you are already renewed for 2011 or you are a LIFE member.

To further show your support of WPBO, please consider upgrading your membership and providing a year end donation. More than ever, your support is essential for the continuation of WPBO's research and education programs.

If you are a Life Member or your membership is not expiring, please support our research and education programs with a generous donation.

Thank you for your continuing support. We hope to see you at Spring Fling, April 29 - May 1, 2011.

WHITEFISH POINT BIRD OBSERVATORY PARADISE MICHIGAN ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

DATE _____
 NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

Please make check payable to: **WHITEFISH POINT BIRD OBSERVATORY**
 Mail to: WPBO
 6011 W St Joseph Hwy, Suite 403
 Lansing MI 48917

www.wpbo.org

Thank you for your support

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP	
_____ INDIVIDUAL	\$25.00
_____ FAMILY	\$35.00
_____ CONTRIBUTING	\$60.00
_____ SUPPORTING	\$100.00
_____ CORPORATE	\$150.00
_____ INDIVIDUAL LIFE	\$500.00
_____ DONATION	\$ _____
TOTAL	\$ _____



C.M. Neri © 2010

Sharp-shinned Hawk and Blue Jay at the Point.

Photo: Chris Neri

Spring 2010 Hawk Count by James Butch

Hawk counting in 2010 was the 32nd consecutive spring hawk count performed by the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory. The count started on 15 March and ended on 31 May. 15,497 birds of prey were counted this season with 16 different species recorded. The 20 year average for this site is roughly 16,500 raptors, so we were slightly below average, but slightly up from our 2009 total of 15,042. This season 567 hours of observation were conducted, resulting in an average of 27.3 raptors per hour, or 201.3 per day.

The highest counts in five years were recorded this season for Turkey Vulture, Northern Goshawk, and Swainson's Hawk. The lowest counts in five years were recorded for Golden Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. It was also a poor year for Buteos with the lowest number in five years for Red-shouldered, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawk.

In total 505 Turkey Vultures were counted over Whitefish Point this spring. This is an 18.2% increase over the past five years, the average being 427.2. A total of 607 Northern Harriers were seen which is a 15.2% increase over the five year average of 526.8. We also recorded 94 Northern Goshawks this season, average is 60.8, resulting in a 54.6% increase. Finally 3 Swainson's Hawks were seen from the platform this year. This is 50% above the five year average of 2 birds per season. All three birds were seen in the month of May. May also saw the highest number of Bald Eagles in the past five years.

The 2010 raptor total of 15,497 is 19% lower than the five year average of 18,586. This difference is largely accounted for by the decrease in our four most common species. Sharp-shinned Hawk was down by 9.8% which equates to 1,055 birds below the average. Broad-winged Hawk was down by 20%, or 639 birds. Red-tailed Hawk was down by 58%, or 895 birds. Rough-legged Hawk was down by 66%, or 436 birds. Another bird which we saw less of this year, but is not a bulk species, is Golden Eagle. This species was down by 39%, or 24 birds. The total number of birds "missing" was 3,049 and with that added to the count we would have had a near average year.

One could speculate as to why fewer of the above species were seen this spring. The warmer than normal early season temperatures in the month of March may have had something to do with it. It also might be that the immature Buteos were yet to come, possibly flying through in June.

Derby Hill is another eastern Spring site that experienced low numbers this season. Derby Hill is located on Lake Ontario near Syracuse, New York. They operate their count at a similar time to WPBO. In 2010 Derby Hill had a 13.7% decrease in the raptors observed. This is similar to the 16.6% decrease that was witnessed here at Whitefish Point. Derby Hill's Sharp-shinned Hawk count was down 37%; Broad-winged Hawk down 14%; Red-tailed Hawk down 21%; Rough-legged Hawk down 54%; Golden Eagle down 31%, all compared to the last 5 year average. This may give a little weight to the argument that some birds of prey passed through at a different time this year.



WPBO field trip participants were treated to a rare UP sighting of a Kirtland's Warbler. See p. 5

Photo: Chris Neri