



The Spotting Scope

A quarterly newsletter of the Natural Heritage Program

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MICHIGAN BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

We are nearing a milestone in the development of a major conservation tool for our state. Kalamazoo Nature Center, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Michigan Audubon Society, with additional support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the University of Michigan – Dearborn, have initiated a project to map breeding birds in Michigan. The atlas is a massive undertaking.

The first edition of the *Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas* has been an important reference in bird conservation for the last 15 years having used survey work conducted from 1983 to 1988. The 2007 breeding season marks the end of data collection (2002 to 2007) for the second edition of the *Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas*, and a great deal of additional effort is needed to ensure that the results represent the



Black-capped chickadee

focus on areas near your home or work location and record what you observe during your daily routine. Concentrate on common species that you can confidently identify. Take note of birds you see while hunting, fishing, camping, just enjoying the out of doors, or the birds nesting in your own backyard. You can focus on common species: great blue heron, Canada goose, mallard duck, wild turkey, sandhill crane, killdeer, mourning dove, ruby-throated hummingbird, blue jay, black-capped chickadee, eastern bluebird, American robin, European starling, northern cardinal, red-winged blackbird, American goldfinch, and the house sparrow. There is no such thing



Killdeer

current condition of birds in Michigan.

Portions of Michigan, both Lower Peninsula and Upper Peninsula, have yet to receive the necessary level of survey work to

determine which species of birds breed here. The good news is you can help to ensure the entire state is surveyed. Some volunteers have taken on the task of surveying areas in multiple townships or counties, but even a casual wildlife-watcher can contribute valuable data. Have you seen house sparrows nesting in your birdhouses? That is evidence of confirmed breeding. Is there a marsh full of singing red-winged blackbirds in your neighborhood? That is evidence of probable breeding. Do you hear a ring-necked pheasant crowing in a field near your home? That is evidence of possible breeding. All of these observations provide valuable data.

You can help even if you do not have a lot of time to donate or do not know how to identify many different birds. Simply

as unimportant data – especially if it improves our understanding of the status of these species.

To get started, check out the *Michigan Breeding*

Bird Atlas Handbook for Casual Observers on the DNR web site. Go to www.michigan.gov/dnr, select Wildlife and Habitat, then Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas. You can also find a convenient online form there, the *Casual Bird Observations Online Form*, for submitting your data. Do not worry if you cannot tell what survey block your observations are from; just provide as much location information as you can, and the Atlas staff will try to determine the block for you.

Photographs by Dave Herr



Wild turkey hens



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Natural Heritage Program information can be found on the web at www.michigan.gov/dnr.

BACK TO THE WILD



Last summer, near Sturgeon Point in Alcona County, an eagle found trouble. A powerful storm had slammed the magnificent raptor into Lake Huron. The eagle was exhausted and weak but managed to make it to shore where Conservation Officer Warren MacNeill had been called to the scene. Officer MacNeill was able to capture the distressed bird and transported it to the Wildlife Recovery Association, a nonprofit organization in Shepherd, Michigan, which specializes in the rehabilitation of birds of prey.



On December 10, 2006, nearly five months after its discovery, a recovered healthy eagle was brought back to Sturgeon Point. With the scenic backdrop of the 1869 lighthouse, the splendid creature was successfully released back into the wild.

Our thanks to Mr. Dan Mullen, DNR Unit Supervisor, Harrisville State Park/Oscoda Field Office, who provided the photographs of this exciting moment.

More good eagle news, the 2006 surveys for nesting bald eagles in Michigan counted 482 nests! It is anticipated that during the summer of 2007, over 500 nests may be found. During the mid-sixties, the count was only 167 nests.



Top left: It takes two - carrying the eagle to the release site. Bottom left: Biologist Joe Rogers, of the Wildlife Recovery Association, prepares the eagle for departure. Center: Soaring to freedom.

GREAT LAKES WOLVES

On January 29, 2007, Deputy Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett announced that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was removing wolves in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and portions of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio from the federal endangered species list.

The federal delisting decision took effect March 12, 2007. Although the species will no longer be federally protected, wolves remain protected under Michigan law and a person may not kill a wolf except under state permit or in immediate defense of human life. Following the federal delisting decision, the DNR will now have more flexibility in how it can manage problems caused by wolves.

With legal protection under the Endangered Species Act, coupled with a favorable shift in public attitudes toward the species, wolves were able to expand into much of their former Great Lakes range. Reestablishment of a resident population in Michigan was documented in 1989 when three animals established a territory in the western Upper Peninsula. Since that time, the wolf population has grown rapidly. During the winter of 2005-2006, at least 434 wolves occurred in the state. Survey efforts to determine present population size are currently underway.





CREATURE PROFILE

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*)

Truly impressive, and unforgettable to observe, is the pileated woodpecker. The genus name (*Dryocopus*) comes from two Greek words and literally means “wood cleaver” or “wood cutter.” Anyone who has watched this large woodpecker throwing wood chips off trees as they hunt for food, knows just how accurate this name is. They need mature forests with some dead and dying trees. This is important for both feeding and cavity building. The pileated's drumming can be heard for long distances and their

presence can be easy to detect as they leave large rectangular-shaped holes up to 6 inches in diameter. Another hint that pileated woodpeckers may be living in a forested area is their loud raucous laughing call or a glimpse of a large black bird with white patches on the front half of the wings gliding between the trees.

The pileated is Michigan's largest woodpecker and one of the largest in North America. It is similar in size to the common crow (16 - 19 inches). Besides its size, one of the most prominent features of the pileated is the large red crest of feathers on its head. Like other woodpeckers, they have two toes that point forward and two toes pointing backward. This helps them perch on the sides of a tree.

Considered abundant in Michigan's forests until the turn of the century, pileated populations declined rapidly as timber



Photo by Dave Herr



Photo by Alan Dyck

removal deforested much of Michigan. Records of observations indicated that the pileated woodpecker was essentially eliminated from the Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Fortunately, as the forests recovered, the pileated woodpecker also returned. The last

statewide breeding bird survey found likely nesting in all of Michigan's northern counties and most of the counties on the west side of the southern portion of the Lower Peninsula. Current surveys indicate pileateds have expanded their presence in southern Michigan.

Pileated's diet consists primarily of grubs, ants, and other insects they find in dying or rotting wood. Insects and grubs are removed using their long barbed tongues that are covered with sticky saliva. When

available, pileated woodpeckers will also eat acorns, beechnuts, grapes, and other fruits.

During the breeding season, a pileated pair will excavate a new nest hole, which can take up to 30 days to build. The nesting cavities can be up to 30 inches deep. Both adults share in the incubation duties with the female on the day shift and the males taking over at night. The clutch is usually four eggs, which hatch after 18 days of incubation. The adults continue to feed the young even after they have left the nest.

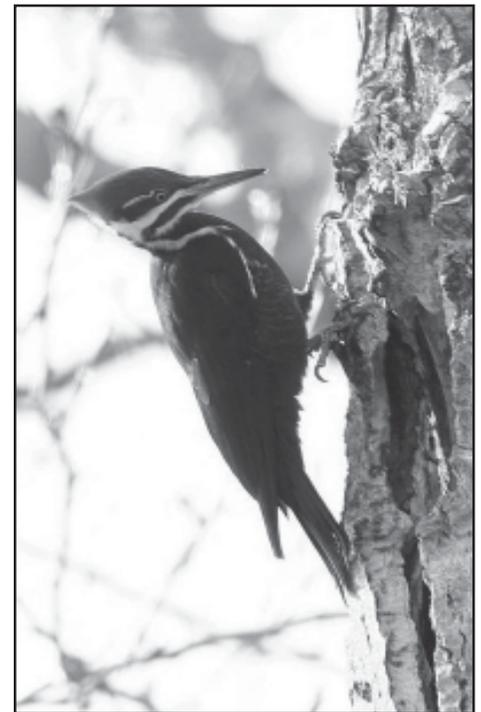


Photo by Dave Herr

The pileated is a good example of how nature can respond when we act as careful stewards of our lands and forests. Careful management of our mature forest areas, including leaving dying and dead trees, will insure that the pileated's call and drumming remains part of the diversity of wildlife in Michigan.

And, if you ever bet on how the name is pronounced, both Pie-leh-ated or Pil-eh-ated are acceptable.

11TH ANNUAL FROG & TOAD SURVEY RESULTS

After a busy spring and summer, frogs all hibernate. In order to survive the long cold Michigan winters, amphibians need to shut down all systems and take a long nap. While they were sleeping this winter, results were tallied for the 2006 annual frog survey.

This year marks the 11th anniversary of the popular Michigan Frog and Toad Survey, which is coordinated by the DNR, Wildlife Division, Natural Heritage Unit. "This is one of our most successful and largest public involvement efforts of this type in the state" says Mr. Raymond Rustem, Natural Heritage Program supervisor.

In response to the alarm that amphibian populations worldwide were experiencing declines, a statewide system of permanent survey routes in Michigan was developed in 1996. Each route consists of ten wetland sites, which are visited three times during spring and summer by a volunteer observer. At each site, the observer identifies the species present based on their calls and makes an estimate of their abundance.

Presently, there are over 300 routes throughout Michigan with routes in every county. There are still 96 of the routes that are original, meaning they began eleven years ago and continue to contribute data each year. "Due to the dedication, commitment, and knowledge of our volunteers, we have gathered significant amount of data that will help us to assess frog and toad populations. It may take several more years to establish firm trends based on these surveys," said Ms. Lori Sargent, Frog Survey Coordinator. The good news, at this point, is that most of Michigan's frog and toad populations appear to be stable, unlike what has been reported in many

other parts of the country. "The common species, like the spring peeper, are staying abundant

and the more rare species, such as the Blanchard's cricket frog, are staying uncommon", claims Ms. Sargent. "Concerns are beginning to surface about mink frogs, which are only found in the Upper Peninsula and the Fowler's toad, which is only found in the western and some southern Michigan counties". More research will need to be initiated in the future.

With continued annual help from frog enthusiasts across the state, the Michigan Frog and Toad Survey will provide a wealth of information on the status of Michigan frog and toad populations and help monitor the quality of our environment. The survey is supported by contributions to the Michigan Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund and through purchases of the Michigan Wildlife Conservation license plate. You can help this important project, and other endangered species programs, by purchasing a Michigan Wildlife Conservation license plate available through the Secretary of State's office or by sending donations. For more information on the Frog and Toad Survey or to get information on other projects supported by the Michigan Nongame Fish and Wildlife Fund, visit the DNR web site at www.michigan.gov/dnr.



INVASIVE SPECIES DRIVE BOTULISM OUTBREAK

Last year, one of the most important news items about invasive

species was not the introduction of a new species, but a Type E botulism outbreak that occurred in fish-eating waterbirds during the summer of 2006. Beginning in August, numerous dead water birds began to wash up on the shoreline of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in northwestern Lower Michigan. The botulism die-off involved grebes, mergansers, common loons, gulls and cormorants.

While botulism outbreaks have occurred in the past, this particular incident had a new and unique disease pathway. Because it was primarily limited to fish eating birds, it is

suspected that a natural upwelling of lake bottom sediments containing the botulism bacteria were filtered by zebra mussels (an invasive species) which concentrated the bacteria in their bodies. The mussels were subsequently consumed by round gobies (another invasive species), which were then eaten by birds. This theory is supported by other information including, numbers of dead gobies and other predatory fish also found in the same vicinity. Gobies were likely preyed upon or scavenged by various fish eating birds, which caused significant avian mortality. In some areas several dead mammals (raccoon, opossum and skunk) died after scavenging the bird and fish carcasses washed up on the shoreline.

Over 2,900 birds including an estimated 180 loons (state-listed as threatened) were found along the lakeshore. The total included several scoters, which feed directly on zebra mussels. Tests on a sample of bird carcasses indicated that all died of botulism poisoning.

CELEBRATE "NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE" DAY

Governor Jennifer Granholm has designated April 20th as a day to push children to play outdoors. Over the last several decades, child development experts have been documenting an alarming decline in the amount of time children spend outdoors. It seems these days children are more plugged into the Xbox or Wii video games than they are to migrations of birds. When children are outside, they are tuned into downloaded music on their Ipods and not in tune to the songs and sounds of frogs and insects in their backyard.

Many experts believe this growing chasm between children and nature can be linked to physical and mental health issues, restriction of creative capacities, lack of problem solving skills, and impeding social development. "No Child Left Inside" campaign is part of a national movement based on the conclusions of the book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* written by Richard Louv. In his book, Louv writes: "Healing the broken bonds between our young and nature is in everyone's self-interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demand it, but also because our mental, physical, and spiritual health depend upon it."

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is planning several events including free bus admission into any state parks for school groups, science standard and benchmark related programs offered at State Park visitors centers, and

providing teacher resources to "promote appreciation and knowledge of Michigan's great outdoor heritage".

On April 20th, you are encouraged to unplug the electronics and get the kids outside to see clouds reflecting on a pond, feel the wind on their face, listen to the songs of birds, smell the freshness of the earth and touch nature once again.

For more information on delivering the Michigan Conservation message to children and other planned offerings by the DNR, visit the DNR web site at www.michigan.gov/dnr, then go to "Learning Corner" and follow the "No Student Left Inside" prompts.



A tree frog visits two young explorers

Harold Mayfield: 1911 - 2007

This past January, the Kirtland's Warbler lost one of its earliest and staunchest supporters. Acclaimed ornithologist Harold Mayfield passed away at the age of 95. An amateur ornithologist, Mr. Mayfield is best remembered in Michigan for his work with Kirtland's warblers. His 1960 publication *The Kirtland's Warbler*, published by Cranbrook Institute of Science, garnered him the Brewster Memorial Award from the American Ornithologist Union. The Union recognized his work as "the most important work on the birds in the Western Hemisphere." Harold was the first to fully delineate the limited breeding range of the warbler in northern Michigan.

The Kirtland's warbler is both federally and state recognized as an endangered species. It nests only in young jack-pine forests of northern Michigan and winters in the Bahamas. Michigan has had an active program in managing for Kirtland's warblers for fifty years. The 1,478 was the estimate for the 2006 singing male Michigan. A few Kirtland's were also found in Wisconsin and Ontario.

Mayfield took up birding as a relaxing recreational activity after suffering a stroke at an early age. He began his work with Kirtland's warbler after meeting the Curator of Birds at

the University of Michigan. In 1956, along with other prominent ornithologists, Mayfield urged Michigan's Conservation Commission to dedicate three areas of state forest land for management of Kirtland's warblers. These efforts resulted in the dedication of areas in Crawford, Ogemaw, and Oscoda Counties committed to management of the jack-pine forests to preserve Kirtland's warblers. This was the first time that forest lands were dedicated for the preservation of a bird species.

Harold Mayfield was also instrumental in recognizing the significant damage that brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism was having on Kirtland's warblers. During his research, over half of the warbler nests contained cowbird eggs and, on average, each parasitized nest contained two less warbler eggs. Shortly after this, an active cowbird control program was initiated in warbler nesting areas and has greatly increased the fledging of warbler young.

We are all grateful for the efforts that Harold Mayfield and his colleagues had on setting the stage for a successful Kirtland warbler recovery action. The knowledge provided by his efforts is still being used today to ensure Michigan's favorite warbler remains part of the wildlife diversity of the state.

TIDBITS

If you are looking for a spring wildlife event, we suggest visiting Whitefish Point Bird Observatory's Spring Fling on April 27-29 in Paradise, Michigan. For information, visit the Observatory's web site: www.wpbo.org or you may want to check out the Frog Fest May 18-20, in Cedarville, Michigan. For more information go to: www.lescheneaux.net.

Improved Band Encounter Reporting Web Page

The U.S. Geological Survey Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) has announced a new and improved web site for reporting observations of birds marked with a metal federal band.

The new site will provide email confirmation that the BBL received your report. Feedback will be faster on where and when the bird was banded along with what species it is. You will also be able to print a Certificate of Appreciation from the BBL for reporting your observation. This site is for aluminum federal leg bands only.

Banding encounter data supports bird conservation, management, and science worldwide. To report a band observation, or to find easy access to other informational BBL web pages, go to: www.reportband.gov. You may also telephone reports; toll free, at 800-327-BAND.

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