

# far flowing water



Grand Haven, Michigan

January 20 - 7:30

Volume 19 ❖ Number 4  
January, 2009

## Ottawa County Parks Update

### Chip Francke

Chip is an Ottawa County Parks Naturalist and birder, will present a program on the parks greenway initiatives and give updates on several current projects including the nature education center at Hemlock Crossings, Mt. Pisgah, North Ottawa Dunes and a new Lake Michigan park that is on the horizon.



Photos from Hemlock Crossing



**Everyone is invited.  
Our programs are free.**

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**United Methodist  
Church of the Dunes**  
717 Sheldon, Grand Haven, MI

Visit the OIAS homepage at  
<http://www.oias.org>

**More Directors are needed!!!**  
**If you would like to be a Director,**  
**let Michael L know.**  
**OIAS can have up to nine Directors.**



**Programs 2008 - 2009**

- FEBRUARY 17 — From the Cutover to the Coast Guard City: A visual history of land cover change in Grand Haven, Michigan,** Erik Nordman - Department of Biology, GVSU
- MARCH 17 — Gray Wolves in the Upper Great Lakes Region: History, Ecology, and Current Status**  
Paul Keenlance - Department of Biology, GVSU
- APRIL 21— Michigan's Important Birding Areas and Update on the Search for the Ivory Billed Woodpecker** Caleb Putnam, Michigan IBA Coordinator
- MAY 19 — Annual Potluck & Members' "Show-and-Tell" Slide Show**

### **MICHIGAN AUDUBON CHAPTER CONNECTION – January 2009**

Excerpts submitted by Michael L

#### **HAPPY BIRDING NEW YEAR AT SAULT STE MARIE**

Looking to add a Great Gray Owl, Gyrfalcon, Northern Hawk Owl, Red Crossbill or Gray Jay to your Life List? Chuck and Colleen MacDonald will again be leading field trips to Sault Ste. Marie for winter birding at its best. Start your 2009 bird list off right by adding some of these northern species. Chuck and Colleen, long-time Michigan Audubon members from the Sault area, know where to find the birds in that region. There are two weekend trips planned; January 17 – 18 and February 14 – 15. These trips are limited to 15 people each and fill up fast. The fee for these trips is \$60 for Michigan Audubon members and \$90 for non-members. The fee does not include meals or lodging. To register or more information contact Wendy Tatar at 517-886-9144 or [programcoordinator@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:programcoordinator@michiganaudubon.org).

#### **MICHIGAN'S MAGNIFICENT BIRDS**

Michigan Audubon's 105th Annual Conference will be held March 6 & 7, 2009 at the Kellogg Center on the campus of MSU. The conference will begin noon Friday and run through 5:30 pm Saturday. Keynote speaker, Brian "Fox" Ellis as John J. Audubon, will bring one of America's greatest naturalists and wildlife artists to life. Attend sessions on avian botulism, birding trails, high tech birding, selecting optics, and birding by kayak. Room rates for staying at the Kellogg Center have been set at \$85. You can make your room reservations now by calling 1-800-875-5090. Be sure to tell them you are with Michigan Audubon. The deadline to make room reservations is February 4. Check our website for conference registration information and forms which will be posted soon at [http://www.michiganaudubon.org/annual\\_meeting/2009.html#registration](http://www.michiganaudubon.org/annual_meeting/2009.html#registration).

#### **BIRDATHON CHALLENGE**

The Noteworthy Naturalists, a birdathon team in Berrien County, has over the years raised funds to support publication of Michigan Audubon's science journal, Michigan Birds and Natural History. Last year they raised over \$1200 in pledges for the journal. This year we would like to challenge other teams to form across the state to participate in a friendly competition on May 16. The goal would be for each team to beat last year's Noteworthy Naturalists' Berrien County count of 137 species. Each team's pledges will help support Michigan's only journal of published bird survey data in the state. For information on forming teams and securing pledges please contact Caroline de Mauriac at 517-886-9144 or [mas@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:mas@michiganaudubon.org).

#### **BIRDS ON THE WEB**

FEEDERS AT THE LAKE BLUFF BIRD SANCTUARY

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Fjx4biPUHw>

MICHIGAN LOON PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION RECEIVES ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRANT

<http://michiganloons.blogspot.com/2008/12/association-receives-maep-grant.html>

BIRD COUNT NEWS FROM THE DETROIT AREA

<http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20081227/METRO/812270416/1409/METRO>

WILDLIFE FEEDING AND BAIT BAN

<http://www.leelanaunews.com/drupal/?q=node/2644>

Our programs are made possible, in part, by an Emilie Baker Fund for the Environment grant from the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation.

**COUNT FOR FUN!**  
COUNT FOR THE FUTURE!

12TH ANNUAL  
GREAT BACKYARD  
BIRD COUNT

FEBRUARY  
13-16, 2009

The Great Backyard Bird Count is AWESOME! I like learning about birds!  
*Janis Plummer, PA*

The GBBC was a great experience... I will be a participant for the rest of my life.  
*Donna Frost, Bird 1.4*

Participating in the bird count has given my children a little taste of what it is like to be a scientist.  
*Megan Springfield, AZ*

Discover the birds in your backyard, schoolyard, or park.  
It's fun, it's free, and it helps the birds! All ages and skills welcome.

www.birdcount.org

HOSTED BY THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY & CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

Audubon CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

For extra copies of this poster, please visit: www.birdcount.org

The **Great Backyard Bird Count FEBRUARY 13—16** is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time.

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported anywhere in the United States and Canada. See how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years.

### WHY COUNT BIRDS?

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they

are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

They need your help. Make sure the birds from your community are well represented in the count. It doesn't matter whether you report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 75 species you see during a day's outing to a park.

Scientists use the counts, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to give us an immense picture of our winter birds. Each year that these data are collected makes them more meaningful and allows scientists to investigate far-reaching questions.

### HOW TO PARTICIPATE It's as easy as 1, 2, 3!

1. Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, February 13–16, 2009. You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like—one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day. You can also submit more than one checklist per day if you count in other locations on that day.
2. Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time.
3. When you're finished, enter your results through the web page. <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc> You'll see a button marked "Enter Your Checklists!" on the website home page beginning on the first day of the count (February 13, 2009). It will remain active until the deadline for data submission on March 1, 2009. Or go to the website and download a form to mail in.

Statistics from 2008

Total Checklists Submitted:  
85,725

Total Species Observed: 635

Total Individual Birds Counted:  
9,805,216

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited.

Excerpts from: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

### FAR FLOWING WATER

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The "Send via email" box when you renew.

**White-breasted Nuthatch** *Sitta carolinensis*

Judi Manning

Europeans watching a nervous little bird wedge nuts into tree crevices and hack them open with its long bill, called it a nuthack. When Colonists on American shores watched the same bird and as the language evolved, the name became nuthatch. They are a common visitor to backyard bird feeders, especially sunflower seeds and nuts.

The White-breasted Nuthatch is a permanent resident and is commonly found in deciduous woodlands, mixed deciduous and coniferous forests near openings and edges. They also reside in wooded suburbs and park throughout most of North America, southern regions of Canada and central Mexico preferring older, more mature hardwood forests and the presence of oak trees. It is the largest and best known of the four North American nuthatches.

They walk down tree trunks head first. They can do this because they have opposing toes, two front and two rear, the same as woodpeckers. Most other birds can only walk up trees looking for food, since they have three toes forward and only one back. Strong claws help them access insects, eggs, and larvae tucked into the topsides of tree bark on the trunk and large branches, hidden from the view of birds that go up the tree. They also eat nuts, and seeds. The percentage of seeds and insects varies with the season. One study indicated they eat 68% seed in winter, 48% seed in spring, no seed in summer (100% insects) and 29% in fall. The insects they eat include weevils, tent caterpillars, ants, scale insects, spiders, wood borers, and leaf beetles.

The White-breasted Nuthatch takes one sunflower seed at a time, flying to a nearby tree, wedging the seed into a crevice and hammers it open. They hide food in bark crevices for later use.

They are normally territorial throughout the year, with pairs staying together. In winter, they join foraging flocks of chickadees or titmouse to gain protection from predators by the vigilance of other birds. One study found that if titmice were removed from the flock, nuthatches were more wary and reluctant to come to exposed bird feeders.

They are 5 to 6 inches long, weighing .64 to 1.06 ounces. They are easily identified by a white face and underparts, bluish-gray upper parts, short dark tail with white corners obvious in flight. Its straight, slightly upturned, gray bill is almost as long as the head with rust undertail coverts and sides, black eyes, and gray feet. Males have a very dark gray cap; females a lighter gray cap.

They form a monogamous pair remaining together year-round from the time of courtship and establishment of a territory until one pair dies or disappears. Courtship consists of a breeding song sung by the male, distinctive call notes, and courtship feeding occurring between early May and early June raising one brood per year.

The female builds the nest in a cavity 10 to 60 feet from the ground. The cavity is lined with fur, fine grass, hair, feathers, and shredded bark. She lays 3 to 10 eggs and incubates them for 12-14 days. The male brings food to her during incubation. After the eggs hatch, the male does most of the parental care in the first few days. As the young become more independent, both parents feed them. The young fledge in 26 days and young stay with their parents for several weeks before dispersing. We enjoy all of their chatter when the family is foraging in the trees.

These birds communicate using vocalizations and visual cues. Quiet during the summer and their breeding season, they vocalize in very early spring and winter. They sing several different songs, each consisting of several notes. Songs are used for territorial defense and assertion. They use 13 different calls: Hit and tuck, Tchup, Quank, Quank quank, rapid quank, rough quank, Chrr, Pee-oo, Squeal, Brr-a and Whine, and each have a different purpose.

The average life span in the wild is two years. Predators:

1. Adults - hawks and owls
2. Nestlings and eggs are eaten by woodpeckers, squirrels, climbing snakes.

When predators are near the nest, the adults peck and flick their wings while making "hn-hn" noises. They also use a piece of fur or vegetation to wipe around the nest opening when they leave the nest. This covers up their scent and keeps squirrels and other predators from using smell to find their nest.

White-breasted Nuthatches help to control insect populations in the summer and disperse the seeds of many plants. This species is currently slowly increasing but the removal of dead trees from forests may cause problems because they require cavity sites for nesting. They prefer to breed in natural holes, knothole, or woodpecker hole in large, dead trees but do use a bird box.

A group of nuthatches are collectively known as a "jar" of nuthatches. Red-breasted Nuthatch is smaller, has a white eye stripe and reddish underneath. Pygmy Nuthatch and Brown-headed Nuthatch both are much smaller and have brownish gray or brown crowns.

References: White-breasted Nuthatch: [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBird/BirdGuide/White-breasted\\_Nuthatch\\_dtl.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBird/BirdGuide/White-breasted_Nuthatch_dtl.html); <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i7270id.html>; Birds & Blooms, George Harrison, Oct/Nov. 2007, Pgs 7 & 8; Dewey, T. and J. Roof, 1999. "Sitta carolinensis" (On-line, Animal Diversity Web. Accessed 6/25/08 at [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Sitta\\_carolinensis.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Sitta_carolinensis.html); [http://identify.whatbird.com/obj/362/overview/White-breasted\\_Nuthatch.aspx](http://identify.whatbird.com/obj/362/overview/White-breasted_Nuthatch.aspx)



(c) 2009 Judi Manning

White-breasted Nuthatch

Red-breasted Nuthatch



(c) 2009 Judi Manning

## Red-breasted Nuthatch

*Sitta canadensis*

Judi Manning

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is a medium sized bird with blue-gray upperparts and pale rust-brown underparts. They have a white eyebrow, black eyestripe, a white throat, and a short neck. The gray bill is slightly upturned. The legs and feet are black. The male's cap is black. The female has a blue gray cap, is paler underneath, and has a narrower eyestripe. The Red-breasted Nuthatch is the only North American nuthatch with an eyestripe. They have sturdy toes and claws and a short tail. They are 3 to 5 inches long, weighing .4 oz.

They reside in mature, partly open coniferous forests of spruce, fir, larch, and cedar or mixed conifer-deciduous stands. The stands must have a tall, dense canopy and a dense understory of saplings to provide protection from unfavorable environmental conditions and predators, and provide a greater abundance of arthropods which they eat during breeding season. They are also found in suburban areas with sufficient conifers.

Instead of using their tail for support when climbing down the tree headfirst, they climb with one foot higher to hang from and the other lower for support probing crevices in tree bark. They eat egg masses and insects, including spiders, beetles, wasps, caterpillars, crane flies, moths, insect eggs, conifer seeds, and nuts. They can be found at bird feeders eating sunflower seed and nut pieces. They hoard excess food in fall and winter by wedging nuts into bark and then hammering them in with the bill or in holes and in the ground. They eat conifer seeds during non-breeding season. Young are fed only insects.

They breed across Canada from southeastern Alaska, Manitoba, and Newfoundland, south to southern California, Arizona, Great Lakes region, and northern New England, and south to western North Carolina. Many spend the winter in their breeding range. Some northern birds are migratory moving south every year. When winter food supplies are low, they make irregular irruptions outside of their normal range and can then be found along the Gulf Coast, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, northern Florida, and in the desert washes of northern Mexico. They migrate southward earlier than many irruptive species, beginning in early July, reaching their southernmost location by September or October.

The male's courtship display includes raising his head and tail, drooping his wings, and fluffing his back feathers. He then sways from side to side and sings with his back turned toward the female. During courtship, he will sing up to 50 times per minute from the top of trees and potential nest trees. He also brings food to the female during courtship. They are extremely territorial during breeding season. Pairs remain together throughout the winter to defend food territories if food is plentiful. If food is not plentiful, they will migrate and spend the winter with mixed flocks.

The female lays four to seven eggs in a cup of twigs and grass, lined with softer material in a tree cavity. The female does most of the work building the nest by filling the cavity with grasses, bark strips, moss, and pin needles, lining it with fur, feathers, fine grass, and shredded bark. Sticky conifer resin globules are applied to the entrance of the cavity. The resin is carried in the bill or on pieces of bark they use as an applicator. The male places the resin primarily around the outside of the hole while the female puts it around the inside to discourage insects, small mammal predators or competitors. They avoid the resin by diving directly through the hole. The pitch does get on the feathers, making them look messy.

This nuthatch is aggressive toward many bird species during nest building chasing away nest hole competitors such as House Wren, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Downy Woodpecker. The male will also go after Yellow-rumped Warblers

and House Finches. This aggressive behavior subsides after the nest is finished, but they remain aggressive toward potential predators and competitors.

After 12 days of incubation, the eggs hatch and fledge 18 to 21 days later. The male feeds the female while she is incubating and the female and the nestlings for the first few days. The young become independent two weeks after fledging. They are monogamous forming breeding pairs beginning in winter or spring staying together for a year or more.

Red-breasted nuthatches live 7.5 years in the wild and are longer-lived than White-breasted Nuthatches They place greater value on their own survival and future breeding than on their offspring's survival.

If they are around, you will hear a nasal bleating like a toy horn, or a series of short "annk" notes. The males and females have a broad range of other softer calls which are used less frequently.

Their populations are increasing throughout most of the range, but are declining locally in some areas. They depend on habitat with standing dead trees and a variety of species. Logging and management practices that remove dead trees or reduce plant diversity have a negative impact on their populations.

Known predators:

Adults: Sharp-shinned hawk; Cooper's Hawk, Merlins, red squirrels, and weasels.

Eggs and Nestlings: House Wren, white-footed mice and deer mice.

This nuthatch is important in seed dispersal and germination of forest trees based upon their seed caching.

References: Red-breasted Nuthatch: [http://identify.whatbird.com/obj/356/\\_Red-breasted\\_Nuthatch.aspx](http://identify.whatbird.com/obj/356/_Red-breasted_Nuthatch.aspx); [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Red-breasted\\_Nuthatch\\_dtl.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Red-breasted_Nuthatch_dtl.html); Kirschbaum, K. and C. Sands. 2003. "Sitta canadensis" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed June 25, 2008 at [http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/informatin/Sitta\\_canadensis.html](http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/informatin/Sitta_canadensis.html)

**Far Flowing Water** is published eight times per year. If you would like to contribute to the next issue, **please have your articles to me by February 1st**

## **Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society**

Judi Manning, Editor

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PLEASE FORWARD

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

**January 20**  
**Chip Francke**  
**Ottawa County Parks Update**

**February 13—16**  
**Great Back Yard Bird Count**