

Project Updates – September 2016

Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II

Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II is a 5-year citizen-science project that seeks to determine the distribution and abundance of Wisconsin's breeding birds. It replicates the methods of the first Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas (1995–2000) and makes these data readily available to support the conservation of birds and their habitats. In 2016, the second year of the project, the ranks of our atlasers continued to grow to over 1,100 participants, and checklists continued to roll in, with over 54,000 submitted to the project. The atlas has now recorded 239 bird species as at least possible Wisconsin breeders, with breeding confirmed in 220 of those species. The atlas has documented 11 species breeding now that were not breeding during the first atlas, adding Canvasback, Blue Grosbeak, and Mississippi Kite (see photo) in 2016. The Mississippi Kites, found in Rock County, represent the first ever breeding record for the state! The project has a continued need for volunteer surveyors, with coverage still needed in every corner of the state. *Photo by Scott Weberpal.* Visit wsobirds.org/atlas. Project Coordinator: Nick Anich, WI DNR



Kirtland's Warbler Monitoring and Management

The Kirtland's warbler is a federally endangered bird that has been known to nest in Wisconsin since 2007. This project is an effort to annually monitor breeding pairs and nests, control cowbird parasitism using traps, locate sites being occupied by birds that were previously unknown, and estimate population size in Wisconsin for the official census. DNR and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service staff also guide tours every spring to give project supporters a chance to see this rare species. In 2016, 28 males and 17 females (45 adults) were found in Adams (31), Marinette (9), Bayfield (4), and Vilas (1) counties. Of the 21 nests that were found, here are the results: Adams Co. (17 nests, 7 successful, 22 or 23 young fledged); Marinette Co. (3 nests, 2 successful, 10 young fledged); Bayfield Co. (1 nest, 1 successful, 5 young fledged). In total, 10 successful nesting pairs fledged 37-38 young. Eleven volunteers assisted professional staff, particularly with surveys for singing males in above-mentioned counties plus Jackson and Douglas counties. *Photo by Jack Swelstad.* Visit fws.gov/Midwest/greenbay/endangered/kiwa/. Project coordinators: Kim Grveles, WI DNR; Sarah Warner, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Davin Lopez, WI DNR



Common Loon Bio-monitoring

Wisconsin implemented mercury (Hg) emission reduction rules for coal-burning electric utilities in 2010. Laboratory and field studies conducted in Wisconsin demonstrate that common loon reproduction is negatively

impacted by exposure to ecologically relevant methylmercury (MeHg) concentrations in fish. These results have been used to establish fish and loon tissue benchmarks of MeHg toxicity for common loons. A collaborative initiative is being developed to implement a long-term monitoring plan to track the ecological response to the 2010 emission reduction rule. The plan is to identify approximately 50 lakes within the Northern Highlands Lake District and monitor Hg in common loons, prey fish, water, and air (atmospheric deposition). The results would have relevance to ecological endpoints and human health concerns. DNR is currently seeking funding partners with the objective of initiating field work during the summer of 2017. *Photo by WDNR Wildlife Health.* Visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/research/toxicology. Project Coordinator: Sean Strom, WI DNR



Bird City Wisconsin

Bird City Wisconsin, which recognizes communities for their conservation end education actions while working with them to do more, added seven new communities in 2016 with the November 1 deadline still to come. This brings the total number of Bird City communities to 99 - totaling 2.9 million residents! – in the program’s seventh year. Twenty of these communities are High Flyers, municipalities that truly go above and beyond in their commitment to birds and healthy communities. The astounding growth of the program and Bird City’s 100% community retention rate demonstrate that Bird City status is valuable to Wisconsin’s many conservation-minded residents. Thanks to Bird City communities, which



cover over 8,000 mi², Wisconsin is a hotspot for International Migratory Bird Day events. On October 27-29, 2016, Bird City hosts its second Bird City summit, *Protecting Birds through Action & Art*, in partnership with the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative. This event, featuring a reception at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum’s world-famous Birds in Art exhibit, has an outstanding lineup of speakers who will discuss threats to birds and the influence of art on conservation. *Photo by Bird City Wisconsin.* Visit birdcitywisconsin.org. Project Coordinator: Bryan Lenz, BCW Director.

Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program and Southern Forests Initiative

Conservation planning and projects for the Leopold-Pine Island IBA has continued, including habitat management planning, analysis of the 2016 bird survey data and comparisons with the 2005 and 2011 surveys, greatly expanding fall crane viewing opportunities for the public at staging/roosting areas on Wisconsin River sandbars within the IBA, and providing comments on ATC’s Avian Mitigation Plan for the Badger-Coulee transmission line. The 2016 breeding season was the first year of the statewide point-count effort for the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II, which included extra sampling points in southern forest habitats to gather better data on priority southern forest birds. The Driftless Forest Network received a multi-state Forest Service



grant targeting Driftless Area forests in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois. Part of this work will be to pilot landowner outreach in several Forest Conservation Areas (FCAs) identified by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative's Southern Forests Committee. There are also opportunities to partner with the Wisconsin Young Forest Initiative to advance landscape planning in FCAs. Finally, the project coordinator presented at two Valley Stewardship Network workshops for private landowners in the Kickapoo River valley area. She focused on current bird conservation issues and managing southern forest habitats for birds. In October, she will give a similar presentation on "Oak in the Driftless" at a landowner workshop in Monroe County, organized by UW- Extension. *Photo by Shelly Brenneman. Visit wisconsinbirds.org/IBA. Project Coordinator: Yoyi Steele, WDNR*

Whooping Crane Reintroduction

In 2016, the Eastern Migratory Population of whooping cranes expanded their breeding range to include nesting pairs in Juneau, Adams, Wood, Marathon, and St. Croix counties. The population consists of approximately 100 individuals and 29 breeding pairs. This year, a total of 46 nests hatched 23 chicks. At least two of these chicks fledged, and at the time of this update, one wild-hatched chick is still alive and with its parents on territory in Juneau County. Last year's cohort of chicks released into this population were spread out around the state (Racine, Walworth, Jefferson, Dane, Dunn, Marathon, Rock, Calumet, Winnebago, Outagamie counties), and a group also spent the summer in Randolph County, Illinois. Unlike what has been done in the past, this year's cohort of whooping crane chicks raised in captivity were not costume-reared, but instead were "parent"-reared by captive adult whooping cranes. There will be 12 chicks released mostly in eastern Wisconsin near adult whooping cranes, or "alloparents", who will teach them the migration route and appropriate wintering areas. Interns at ICF, supported by NRF, have been monitoring these adult pairs to identify release locations for the captive-raised chicks. This change in technique is in response to a high rate of chick mortality of wild-hatched whooping cranes. Hopefully, chicks raised by adult "whoopers" will learn behaviors costumed people are not able to teach them, and they will be better able to raise their chicks to fledging in the future. *Photo by International Crane Foundation. Visit bringbackthecranes.org. Project coordinator: Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership*



Wisconsin Stopover Initiative

The Wisconsin Stopover Initiative (WISI) created an educational poster titled, *Great Lakes Migratory Birds and Their Stopover Habitats: Celebrating the Centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty 1916-2016*. This poster is intended to raise awareness of migratory birds of the Great Lakes, promote protection of stopover habitat throughout the Great Lakes, and celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the signing of the Migratory Bird Treaty with Great Britain on behalf of Canada, which led to passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the cornerstone legislation for conservation of migratory birds. The 39" x 26" poster will be distributed for no cost at a Great Lakes-wide event called the 2016 State of Stopover Symposium, October 5-7. Professionals attending that event will be given multiple copies to take back to their states/provinces to share with partners and members of their organizations. Copies of the poster will also be shared with nature centers and schools in Wisconsin later this fall. It features 12 representative migratory bird



stopover habitats. Poster designed by project coordinators Kim Grveles, WI DNR and Sumner Matteson, WI DNR. Visit wisconsinbirds.org/stopover.

Wisconsin Bird Monitoring Program

In 2016, as a lead partner in the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, Wisconsin DNR has continued its coordination of three citizen-based bird monitoring programs focused on bird groups that were not adequately monitored by previous survey efforts. As part of the Western Great Lakes Owl Survey, more than 55 volunteer birders surveyed 70 roadside routes in April, detecting 226 owls of 6 species, including 118 Barred, 60 Great Horned, 20 Eastern Screech, 11 N. Saw-whet, 6 Long-eared, and 1 Short-eared Owl. In May-June, nearly 50 Wisconsin Nightjar Survey volunteers ventured to 55 routes and detected 142 Whip-poor-wills, only 18 Common Nighthawks, and a number of other night creatures such as owls, coyotes, frogs, and more. Data from this year's Wisconsin Marshbird Survey, which began in 2008 and targets rails, bitterns, grebes, and other secretive wetland species, are still being summed and analyzed. The Wisconsin Bird Monitoring Program, with the ultimate goal of long-term assessment of population trends, is pleased to work closely within the broader Midwest Coordinated Bird Monitoring Partnership and has begun the process of uploading all survey data from past and current years to the Midwest Avian Data Center, thus enhancing the reach and utility of project data and results. *Photo by Steve Brady.* Visit wiatri.net/projects/birdroutes/. Project coordinator: Ryan Brady, WI DNR



Re-foresting Critical Bird Habitat in Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula

Osa Conservation continued to manage and protect its properties in the Osa Wildlife Refuge, which serve as a natural biological corridor between the Corcovado National Park and the Matapalo Cape and surrounding forests. With this grant, Osa Conservation worked to ensure that previous tree plantings continued to thrive and provide a source of habitat and food for Osa's many resident and migratory birds. They also invested in their nursery, since rebuilding a rainforest requires on-going work such as seed collection, germination, transplant, and then subsequent maintenance, monitoring, and improvement. Other ongoing activities included monitoring 85 acres of restored forest and the thousands of trees planted in the Neenah Paper plots at Cerro Osa and the Yellow Billed Cotinga Sanctuary. OC collected basic data on biodiversity, seedling survival, and growth rates in these parcels, which are critical bird habitat for endemic species including critically endangered birds (Yellow-billed Cotinga) and also migratory birds from North America, with some 55 species that breed in Wisconsin and spend the winter in the Osa. *Photo by Osa Conservation.* Visit osaconservation.org. Project coordinator: Renee Mckeeon, Osa Conservation.



The Bird Protection Fund supports the full life-cycle needs of Wisconsin's birds. For more information, contact the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin at 866-264-4096 or visit wisconservation.org.