

### ***Birding Bonanza - 17 May 2017***

A fund-raising field trip for the Great Wisconsin Birdathon of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin

On Wednesday, May 17, the *Birding Bonanza* crew of 11 had a great day, tallying **125 species**, including several that were rare, unusual, or simply special (**bold** in the report). Some of the best highlights, though, tallied during a fine dinner at the Audubon Inn, were visiting a diversity of habitats, learning about new places to bird, sorting through the different gull and tern species at North Point in Sheboygan, and enjoying the good companionship throughout the day. Having the weather cooperate, despite a foreboding forecast, helped make the day a success, too!

#### **Our itinerary:**

- \* 5:30 a.m. Forest Beach Migratory Preserve, home of the Western Great Lakes Bird Observatory (WGLBBO)
- \* 7:50 a.m. Harrington Beach State Park
- \* 11:30 a.m. North Point, Sheboygan
- \* 12:45 p.m. Mauthe Lake, Kettle Moraine State Forest - Northern Unit
- \* 4:30 p.m. Horicon Marsh (Dike Road, Hwy 49, Auto Trail)
- \* 6:30 p.m. Audubon Inn (NOLA restaurant), Mayville

We started our day at 5:30 a.m. at Forest Beach Migratory Preserve (a new place for many) with breakfast and an introduction to the property and its significance to migrating birds by Bill Mueller, director of WGLBBO. It was a surprising 73 degrees at this early hour, cloudy and breezy. Chomping at the bit to get birding, we were greeted by the 18+ **Purple Martins** at the colony there. We found a nice pocket of thrushes (Veery, Swainson's, and Gray-cheeked) in the wet spot near the road, more Wood Ducks than we saw anywhere else, and added **Carolina Wren** to the long list of species that have been found at Forest Beach.

Brief stops at several local woods, grasslands, and wetlands yielded Northern Parula Warbler, Upland Sandpiper, Bobolinks (it was a "**Bobolink day**", as we heard them in several places throughout the day!), Eastern Meadowlark, a juvenile-plumaged Black-crowned Night-Heron, and a Green Heron.

At Harrington Beach, we found a total of 58 species. Species seen here, the only ones on the trip, included a single Common Loon, White-throated Sparrow, **Great Tit**, Indigo Bunting, Hairy Woodpecker, **Hermit Thrush**, and Blackburnian, Black-and-White, Chestnut-sided, and Canada warblers. We also found Orange-crowned and Black-throated Green Warblers; American Redstart; Yellow-throated, Philadelphia, and Blue-headed vireos; a fly-by immature Bald Eagle; and a sighting of waterbird-watcher extraordinaire, Calvin Brennan.

Taking a chance there'd be something good at North Point in Sheboygan, we spotted Spotted Sandpipers, four Dunlin shooting down the shoreline, a House Sparrow carrying a large gull feather, and best of all, three gull and two tern species close at hand. Seeing Ring-billed, Herring, and Bonaparte's gulls and Common and Caspian terns side-by-side made for excellent comparisons. Some of us may even take a second look at gulls from now on!

We enjoyed a picnic lunch at Mauthe Lake, where we found two singing **Cerulean Warblers**, rare for this location. They were hard to spot and backlit, but some of us saw them. At mid-day, the wind had picked up (south at 15 to 20) and the temperature was approaching 80. Single birds, the only ones seen/heard for the day, were Eastern Towhee, Pine Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Pileated Woodpecker.

Moving on to Horicon, we found American White Pelicans (two only), Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Black Terns, and a single Forster's Tern ("Note those flashy white wingtips, compared with the Commons!") along Dike Road. Along Highway 49, we were excited to find a whole slew of Black-necked Stilts, two **Whooping Cranes**, a **Snowy Egret** amongst several Great Egrets, Trumpeter Swans, and a single Ruddy Duck and **Sanderling**. An adult **Black-crowned Night-Heron** flew in and landed just yards away, its plume whipping in the wind, which had increased to more than 30 m.p.h. We had to hold the scopes down! On the Auto Trail, when the shorebirds all took off, we found we had seriously undercounted the Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, and Dunlin. The female **Wilson's Phalarope** was a life bird for some of us!

Altogether, we tallied **125 species** in **145 miles** of driving. In comparison, last year on May 11, we found 120 species. In 2016, we found 24 species not seen this year. This year, we found 26 species not seen in 2016.

What a great day, thanks to good companions, good birds, good places to bird, and decent weather, despite a forecast of rain, and later, severe weather, which held off until after we'd reached the cars at 10 p.m. Thank you all for coming on NRF's Birding Bonanza field trip in support of birds and bird conservation! We thoroughly enjoyed our day.

*-- Karen Etter Hale and Carl Schwartz*

