

October 27-29, 2023 – Muskegon Area

Leader: Don Burlett

The field trip began early on Friday with a group of dedicated birders. The weather was warm but cloudy without any rain, just mist during the day. Our first destination was Holland State Park where we were searching for the Purple Sandpiper reported there. We successfully found the bird where it was reported, and several birders got life birds right away. As things were quiet there, we headed to Window on the Waterfront in Holland in search of other species. We were rewarded with four Dunlin at this site along with a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Coots, a Killdeer and Mute Swans. Surprisingly, the passerines were rare and very quiet. We then went to Hemlock Crossing Park in Ottawa County. At the feeders, we noted lots of Dark-eyed Juncos and a very fat House Finch. We also notched our first White-breasted Nuthatch, confirming the status of our field trip.



Purple Sandpiper

Next, we stopped at Hofma Nature Preserve, south of Grand Haven and walked out into the marsh area. We startled a Virginia Rail on our way out and found Sandhill Cranes, American Tree Sparrows, and American Black Ducks in the area. Our last stop for the day was a quick visit to the Muskegon Waste Water Facility. This late in the day visit was rewarded with Snow Buntings, American Pipits, a Horned Grebe and the usual collection of gulls and ducks. We did note a few Common Ravens here along with a flock of Wild Turkeys along the outer area around the ponds. We then headed to the hotel and then to dinner for food and conversation.

On Saturday, we began by heading directly to the Muskegon Waste Water Facility for a complete view of the area. It was cooler on Saturday with the wind out of the northwest versus the southwest for Friday. It started out a bit cloudy, but the sun came and lightened spirits a bit. We started by working the grassy impoundments (without much water) to the north of the main

water treating area. We found lots of Canada Geese, an impoundment full of male Mallards and three Snow geese (two white phase and one blue phase). We also found lots of American Pipits,



Snow Geese (with Canada Geese)

a couple of Eastern Meadowlarks and a Horned Lark. On the ponds were the usual collection of ducks, dominated by Ruddy Ducks and Northern Shovelers. At the landfill area (southeast corner), we noted that the eastern most section of the landfill was overgrown and not active. The first section still active was covered by lots of gulls (none special), Bald Eagles, Common Ravens, and European Starlings. We also noted that a new landfill section was being created almost opposite the center road between the two main ponds. A few sparrows and many ducks made up the list for the day. We also stumbled upon a Lesser Black-backed Gull hanging on the concrete road just north of the western pond. He was stubborn, in that we had to drive up to him to get him to leave.





Lane's Landing (marsh)

After the waste water facility, we went to Lane's Landing (Muskegon SGA unit). We were rewarded by having a few of Wilson's Snipes flying around the area and a Northern Harrier (female) putting in a fine appearance flying close by. We then proceeded to Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve, where we found Cedar Waxwings and some American Tree Sparrows. Next was a stop at the Muskegon State Park piers where things were very quiet. Then it was on to the Snug Harbor trails in the park. Here, we found a Great Horned Owl being mobbed by Blue Jays as well as a Brown Creeper. We called it a day at that point.



Muskegon SP – Snug Harbor Trail

Sunday, it was colder and cloudy again with a moderate breeze. We started the day at Ottawa Sands Park near Grand Haven. Our target bird was a Red-headed Woodpecker and we were not disappointed. Having those, we moved on to Harbor Island in Grand Haven for a few more target birds. We successfully found the Trumpeter Swan that was being reported along with a few Wood Ducks. This location also had lots of Mute Swans, Canada Geese, and ducks, including some American Wigeon. Then we moved to Grand Haven State Park looking for a Long-tailed Duck that was reported earlier. It was still there for us, and we had that bird on the list. We then headed south to Holland and first visited the Stu Visser Trails where a few sparrows had been reported. We did add White-crowned Sparrow and a Rusty Blackbird at this site. Finally, we headed to the break-walls at Holland State Park. We were immediately greeted by two flocks of White-winged Scoters flying by the walls.



White-crowned Sparrow (1sr year)

That completed a solid weekend of birding on the west side of the state. We totaled 84 species for the weekend and had a great time. The complete bird list for the trip is given below.

Photo credits: Group pics – Don Burlett; Bird pics – Malissa Bossardet

Species List – 84 species

Snow Goose
Canada Goose
Mute Swan
Trumpeter Swan
Wood Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon

American Black Duck
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback

Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
White-winged Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Virginia Rail
American Coot
Sandhill Crane
Killdeer
Purple Sandpiper
Dunlin
Wilson's Snipe
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Great Horned Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker

Blue Jay
American Crow
Common Raven
Horned Lark
Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
European Starling
American Pipit
Cedar Waxwing
Snow Bunting
Yellow-rumped Warbler
American Tree Sparrow
Song Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
House Finch
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow