

**Field Trip Report – UP Weekend Trip**  
**February 9-11, 2024**  
**Leader: Don Burlett**

This year's UP trip had the traditional schedule – leave Friday morning, head north to reach the Dafter landfill before too late in the day. Of course, this year's trip took place during one of the weirdest winters I can remember. Warm temperatures, no snow and a very odd selection of birds present and non-present, these all made for quite a different trip.

We began with a stop at Hartwick Pines, but the place was closed, and the feeders were empty. Zip- zero – no birds. We then proceeded to St. Ignace where we check the waterfront to find just a handful of ducks and a few Ring-billed Gulls. No Bohemians like last year. So, we moved on farther north. We next stopped at the Rudyard Snowy Owl loop. We were depressed to not find any owls apparent to our observation. So, we moved on to Kinross to check out the traditional feeders. Here, we finally got some birds – Common Redpoll, Pine Siskins, both nuthatches, woodpecker and the first batch of many Purple Finches.



Pine Siskin  
Photo by Kayla Niner

We then headed to the Dafter landfill and found loads of Herring Gulls, one Glaucous Gull and lots of Bald Eagles, Ravens, Crows, Eurasian Starlings and one Red-tailed Hawk. At that point, it was time to head to the hotel and get ready for dinner at the Antler's Restaurant (always an enjoyable time).



Purple Finches  
Photo by Karen Kessler



Glaucous Gull  
Photo by Kayla Niner

Saturday morning, we started by driving part of the Rudyard Snowy Owl loop without success and then headed to Pickford, the hotspot this year in the UP. We arrived and immediately found a large flock of Bohemian Waxwings. We then combed the neighborhood and eventually found a couple of Pine Grosbeaks, a flock of Evening Grosbeaks and loads of Purple Finches.

As we moved on, we ran into the Michigan Audubon weekend group and consulted on birds they had seen. We tried a spot for Sharp-tailed Grouse, but they had left the fields by then. We backtracked to the Snowy Owl loop and eventually found an immature Snowy sitting in a field. Seeing that bird was a challenge, as witnessed by the photo here. As a leader, it's always particularly important and gratifying to get some of the bigger target birds on a trip, as witnessed by the accompanying photo (and, yes, that is a candy cigarette!). At this point, we then head to bird along the St. Mary's River on the east side of the area and eventually checked for ducks at the Sugar Island Ferry spot and at Aune Osborn Campground. No Harlequin Duck and only a stray Ring-necked Duck as a reward for dealing with the stiff wind in our faces. We then adjourned to get ready for dinner at the Palace Mexican restaurant.



Bohemian Waxwing  
Photo by Karen Kessler



Bohemian Waxwings  
Photo by Kayla Niner



Pine Grosbeak (female)  
Photo by Karen Kessler



Evening Grosbeaks (males)  
Photo by Karen Kessler



Snowy Owl sighting (photo with phone – Julie Kroll); reaction by leader after sighting – self-portrait

On Sunday morning, our mission was to get to the Pickford fields where there were supposed to be Sharp-tailed Grouse. On the way, hoping to avoid a Snowy Owl encounter, we took a road where they weren't being observed but we found the adult Snowy. But we didn't stop

for this but headed to the fields. When we arrived, we saw them leaving a tree and some others flying to a spot in the field. They were present but hiding in deeper grass. But a few displaying males and others scurrying in the grass were visible. We then headed back to the Snowy Owl loop and re-found the adult male owl sitting on the ground. It was a suitable ending to the trip. After that we headed home.



Sharp-tailed Grouse  
Photo by Karen Kessler



Snowy Owl (adult male)  
Photo by Karen Kessler

Amazingly, we did see 40 species of birds and found some that have been scarce all winter long. It was a fun trip with 12 people aboard. We will look forward to trying again next year, where undoubtedly, we will encounter 8 feet snow drifts and sub-zero temperatures. Sounds like fun!!

40 species observed:

Canada Goose  
Tundra Swan  
Mallard  
Ring-necked Duck  
Common Goldeneye  
Common Merganser  
Red-breasted Merganser  
Wild Turkey  
Sharp-tailed Grouse  
Rock Pigeon  
Mourning Dove  
Ring-billed Gull  
Herring Gull  
Glaucous Gull  
Bald Eagle  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Rough-legged Hawk  
Snowy Owl  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Blue Jay  
American Crow  
Common Raven  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
American Robin  
European Starling  
Bohemian Waxwing  
Snow Bunting  
Northern Cardinal  
House Sparrow  
Evening Grosbeak  
Pine Grosbeak  
Purple Finch  
Common Redpoll  
Pine Siskin  
American Goldfinch  
American Tree Sparrow