

Field Trip Report – Muskegon Area Trip – November 5-7, 2021

Leader: Don Burlett

This trip began on Friday Morning with a group of 10 birders. We met near Lansing and drove to the Coopersville area. The first stop was the Coopersville Goose field where we had several hundred Canada Geese along with 4 or 5 Cackling Geese. There were a couple of Red-tailed Hawks nearby and Bald Eagles along with a couple of Killdeer. We then moved of to the Coopersville Waste Treatment Plant and found both Mute and Trumpeter Swans and a couple of ducks. Nothing remarkable but a decent beginning.

We then drove to the Muskegon Waste Treatment Plant and began our search for a number of nice birds. The first was the Red Phalarope that had been seen previously and was at the same pipe in the east pool. He was delightfully dancing on the water doing his thing. While we were scoping hundreds of shovelers and Ruddy Ducks and Mallards, we discovered an Eared Grebe nearby. He also had been seen previously. We then proceeded to do a tour of the two ponds beginning on the east pond. We had a couple of Rough-legged Hawks in the area and an American Kestrel dining on something good.



We soon discovered another nice bird having been seen previously, a Harlequin Duck. This may be a female or immature one but it was calmly. Shortly after that, we arrived near the dump and began looking at the gulls. Lots of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls but no sign of the Iceland Gull reported earlier. We did get a Lesser Black-backed Gull at this spot. A few sparrow spiced up the back edge as we moved along and eventually a group of Wild Turkeys added to the party. The impoundments were full of many Ruddy Ducks, Northern Shovelers and some other species noted in the trip list at the end of this report.

From the waste treatment facility we headed to Black Lake Park and found things very quiet, so we headed to the hotel and then to the Texas Steak House to party over our days rewards.



The next morning, our numbers had swollen to 16 birders and we began our day by visiting the Muskegon SGA – Lane’s Landing site. This is a very nice location with lots of good habitat and good birds. We began by getting a Fox Sparrow along with a couple of sparrows and other birds. When we

emerged into the marshy area, we were rewarded with a number of nice birds. These included a Merlin, Northern Harrier, Northern Shrike and Northern Mockingbird. Our list was swelling and it was great fun. This was the second day with temps in the 50's and a bit windy. But it was well worth the visit. We then headed back to the Muskegon Waste Water treatment facility.



When we arrived back at the Muskegon WTP, we first scanned a group of geese in the grassy impoundments up front. We found two rather odd geese. One we had seen the day before and the second was new. I have included pictures for people to discuss. They were felt to be hybrids with Snow Geese but it would take more to draw a solid conclusion. One had a fairly white body with gray on the back and an orange bill while the other had a gray body and white head and neck and black bill. Judge for yourself.

Next, we scanned more grassy impoundments to see if we could catch up with reported American Pipits. We eventually did and found 30-50 of them. That was a nice observation. We then headed back to the two big ponds to see most of what we had seen the day before without the entire crew.

We then headed south to Ottawa Sands County Park in hopes of finding Red-headed Woodpeckers but the park was mostly silent and barren of birds. It was then off to dinner at Capone's Speakeasy and Pizzeria. A good time ensued for most of the group.



On Sunday morning, we drove south to Hemlock Crossings Nature Park and found a fair number of passerines to fill-in our list. We then drove to Holland Sate Park and went to the end of the north pier to look for ducks. We added a variety of ducks (White-winged Scoter, Northern Pintail, Red-breasted

Merganser and gulls – Bonaparte’s and Greater Black-backed. Some interesting gulls led us to scan Lake Macatawa from two locations but nothing unusual appeared. We ended the trip at the Windows on the Waterfront area with a group of American Coots.



We ended the long weekend with 75 species. The total list is provided below for those interested. It was a nice variety of common birds and some not so common. Lifebirds were had by a number of folks and it turned out to be a great trip. Maybe you can join us next time.

List of Species

Snow-Canada Goose hybrid
Cackling Goose
Canada Goose
Mute Swan
Trumpeter Swan
Wood Duck
Gadwall
American Black Duck
Mallard
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Canvasback

Redhead
Greater Scaup
Lesser Scaup
Harlequin Duck
White-winged Scoter
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Pied-billed Grebe
Eared Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
American Coot
Killdeer
Dunlin
Red Phalarope
Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Greater Black-backed Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Belted Kingfisher
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Northern Shrike
Blue Jay
American Crow
Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch

Brown Creeper
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
American Pipit
Snow Bunting
American Tree Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Purple Finch
House Finch
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow