

Field Trip Report – Summer UP Trip

August 7-9, 2026

Leader: Don Burlett

Summer trips to the UP are different in that the species density in the UP is slightly lower than southern Michigan and the hotspots are more widely separated. This means that a fair amount of driving is needed to get more birds to see. Also, the birding is more like collecting stones at the beach – you look at a lot of areas and enjoy the rarer finds among those birds.

The trip started early on Friday meeting at Birch Run at 8 AM. We drove to the bridge and had lunch before heading to Munuscong Potholes to look for birds. Here we enjoyed very close looks at a couple of Sedge Wrens before we were surprised by a pair of American Bitterns that had wandered to the edge of the road in the open. We got to watch them at a distance before they headed back into the high grass. A few cranes, vultures and a Bald Eagle rounded out the birds at this location.

We then headed to the Tahquamenon River mouth to continue our day. A few warblers greeted us and we began to understand things would be a bit more complicated because we were beginning to see juvenile birds, making some ID's more challenging. After that stop, we visited the Tahquamenon Falls (both upper and lower) before we headed to our hotel and dinner.

The day wasn't over, as we had arranged to visit the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory at 10:30 PM to see the owl banding. With a storm approaching, we were fortunate that a juvenile Saw-whet Owl was captured before the rain hit. It's odd that this bird observatory is one of the only ones in the US-Canada that gets the numbers of these birds. It was delightful to watch the process and the interaction of the owl with the folks there. He even sat on a young man's hands for almost 3 minutes before he decided it was okay to leave. We then headed back to the hotel, arriving at 12:30 AM



The Happy Birders



Juvenile Saw-whet Owl and its ear opening
Photos by Don Burlett

Up early the next morning, headed up to Grand Marais, hoping to hit the beach and find some shorebirds. Shortly before we reached the shore, we stumbled upon a group of Red Crossbills on the wires and road. It's always fun to find these guys, especially in the summer. At the shore, there were only gulls, as no shorebirds wanted to be seen here. We added some ducks and an Osprey while there. We then drove to Grand Sable Lake to look for birds and added some more warblers. We wound our way through the Northwoods to Munising and visited a nice spot called Cox Pond. It had nice boardwalks but was summer quiet.



Red Crossbill and American Redstart (female)

Photos by Malissa Bossardet

After lunch, we drove to Marquette to visit a couple of nice parks. The first stop was Chocolay Bayou, a UP land conservancy park which was very nice and full of interesting birds. Then we drove to Presque Isle and walked the Bog Walk. This habitat was fun and we did add a few birds to the list here. Dinner at El Santo topped the day and then we drove back to our hotels in Newberry.

Sunday morning, it was up and out early to visit Seney NWR. On the drive there, we spotted a falcon on a power line. Upon further examination it was not only one but three Merlins. Great to watch them interact while flying around that spot. We got to Seney and began adding species right away. The drive was fun with multiple stops for swans and loons. We saw about 13 loons on this trip (more than I had encountered previously) and we got to watch a group of five loons swimming together and interacting. We ended this section by spotting our third American Bittern.



Merlin and Loons

Pictures by Malissa Bossardet

At this point, we headed home and found summer traffic matched the overcrowded status of the UP. Because gas prices are up, many more than usual appeared to be headed north. The northbound traffic on the Mackinac Bridge was backed up halfway across the bridge and we took over ½ hour to get on the bridge southbound from Rt. 2. Terrible but just a hint of what I-75 was like going home.

It was a fun trip and was enjoyed by all. We observed 72 species on the trip and the list is provided below.



Photo by Don Burlett

List of Species seen or heard:

Canada Goose	Rock Pigeon
Trumper Swan	Mourning Dove
Wood Duck	Saw-whet Owl
Mallard	Chimney Swift
Lesser Scaup	Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Common Merganser	Belted Kingfisher
Red-breasted Merganser	Red-bellied Woodpecker
Ruddy Duck	Downy Woodpecker
Common Loon	Hairy Woodpecker
Double-crested Cormorant	Northern Flicker
American Bittern	Merlin
Great Blue Heron	Least Flycatcher
Great Egret	Eastern Phoebe
Turkey Vulture	Eastern Kingbird
Osprey	Blue-headed Vireo
Bald Eagle	Red-eyed Vireo
Red-tailed Hawk	Blue Jay
Sandhill Crane	American Crow
Solitary Sandpiper	Common Raven
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Tree Swallow
Baird's Sandpiper	Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Ring-billed Gull	Barn Swallow
Herring Gull	Black-capped Chickadee
Caspian Tern	Red-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Northern House Wren
Sedge Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
American Robin
Gray Catbird
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Black-and-white Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
American Redstart
Cape May Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Northern Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Black-throated Blue Warbler
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Purple Finch
Red Crossbill
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow