

January 129-31, 2021 – Upper Peninsula Trip

Leader: Don Burlett

Six intrepid explorers of the snowy north left on Friday morning to explore the eastern Upper Peninsula. Cold temperatures for the entire weekend ranged from about 8°F to about 23°F for the weekend with skies varying from partly cloudy to sunny. Snow cover in the UP was about 6-12 inches in many areas with slightly more in others.

We began our searches with a couple of hours of searching for Snowy Owls in the traditional areas of Rudyard (around Centerline and Hantz Roads) with no success. This seemed unusual but we moved on in search of other species. We soon saw a flock of Sharp-tailed Grouse fly nearby but our first good break was some Evening Grosbeak at a feeder along with some Common Redpolls. The Redpolls were “bathing” in a gutter on the side of the house. Seemed a bit cold for a batch but they were happy. We also found a group of Snow Bunting that had eluded me for several seasons in the UP.



Snow Bunting

Photo by Don Burlett

We continued and worked our way to the Dafter Dump. Here, we were limited to observed from a short distance but the birds there were incredible. We probably observed 40 Bald Eagles wither roosting in the nearby trees, flying over us or sitting on the landfill. The gulls were numerous also, including Herring, at least one Ring-billed Gull and four Glaucous Gulls (one adult and three juveniles). Common Ravens, American Crows and European Starlings made up the rest of the landfill contingent.



Glaucous Gull

Photo by Larry Urbanski

We later stopped by the Kinross feeders (now known as the Ravenstone Haven Wildlife Sanctuary). Here, we added a few common birds and 31 Wild Turkeys, stopping by for a late snack before roosting time.

On Saturday morning, we headed out looking for Sharp-tailed Grouse and Snowy Owls but were not successful with either in the early hours. We stopped at the Dafter Post Office for a second time, but an American Robin and some Pine Grosbeak were the only birds about. The food supply there was meager, having been used earlier in the winter. We head to Dunbar Forest to find “winter finch heaven”! We found large flocks



Evening Grosbeak

Photo by Larry Urbanski



Pine Grosbeak

Photo by Larry Urbanski



Common Redpoll

Photo by Bill Johnson

of both Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks along with good number of Common Redpolls. The trees were buzzing with birds calling and chirping and they fed on the trees. We also found three American Goldfinch, despite warnings that they were gone from the UP along with Pine Siskins. We also found an American Tree Sparrow on the ground with several other foraging species. Blue Jays and Common Ravens abounded in this area. Unfortunately, we could not find a Hoary Redpoll in the group.

We continued our way and stumbled upon an Ermine at someone's front porch, but he was not that cooperative. We then headed to Sault Ste. Marie to check on some

other sightings. Our first stop was at the campus of Lake Superior State University, where fruiting trees often draw Bohemian Waxwings. As advertised, we



Evening Grosbeaks

Photo by Larry Urbanski

found a large flock of about 120 Waxwings feasting on the fruit in front of the library. Great views were had by everyone as the Waxwings chattered away while they were stuffing themselves with fruit.



Bohemian Waxwing

Photo by Bill Johnson

After enjoying that sight, we drove a few blocks way to where a Northern Mockingbird was hiding in an evergreen bush between a couple of fruit trees. He quickly

appeared, flying to one tree to gobble a few berries and then to the apple tree to peck on an apple. He just as quickly disappeared back into the bush. Stories being told mentioned that he had chased a starling from one of the trees, as he defended his fruit and territory (in character as always).

We then worked the St. Mary's River near the Soo Locks, looking for ducks. A report of Harlequin Ducks had been posted but they seemed to stay near the Canadian side most of the time and we were without luck. Common Goldeneye were the most common there along with Common Merganser and Mallards. As we moved to the area near the Sugar Island Ferry, we found the four Tundra Swans that were being reported in the area. We headed back south looking for Snowy Owls and other birds, but no owls were to be found. We cashed out for the day and headed back to the hotel to lick our wounds.

Sunday morning arrived with a sense of desperation. We still needed to get the Snowy Owl, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk. Otherwise, we would have a less than desirable slate of birds. We checked listings and found that a Snowy Owl had been reported nearby so we headed to that location and were not seeing anything. As we proceeded back to a major road to head south for further searching, we spotted a Snowy Owl on a power pole, a pure white male. Finally, we had our owl. Then, Larry Urbanski spotted some Sharp-tailed Grouse flying and landing in a tree in the field beyond. We watched as they proceeded to fly to a house just around the corner from us. We went there and found them coming in to feed on some food at a feeder. Cool birds. After this sighting, we found them at a variety of places. As we turned to head south again, the male Snowy Owl flew over us and had been replaced by a female Snowy Owl on the same power pole. We now knew who rules the roost!!



Snowy Owl (female)

Photo by Don Burlett



Snowy Owl (male)

Photo by Bill Johnson



Sharp-tailed Grouse

Photo by Don Burlett

We then headed back south in search of our last two birds. Driving along Rt. 48, a Northern Shrike was spotted on a small tree along the road. Good luck was with us this morning. After some observation, we moved further south to try for the Rough-legged Hawk, which we succeeded in finding in the area noted.



Northern Shrike

Photo by Larry Urbanski

At this point, we had seen just about everything we expected to be able to find. Add a few birds seen along the way up and those there, we totaled 39 species for the weekend. It truly was a finch year in the UP. Sadly, owls were not that great this year, but we did get to see a couple of these magnificent birds. Maybe next year will be different...it always is!! A list of species seen is provided at the end of this report.

39 species seen

Canada Goose
Tundra Swan
Mallard
Common Goldeneye
Common Merganser
Sharp-tailed Grouse
Wild Turkey
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)
Mourning Dove
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Glaucous Gull
Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
Snowy Owl
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
American Kestrel

Northern Shrike
Blue Jay
American Crow
Common Raven
Black-capped Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
White-breasted Nuthatch
American Robin
Northern Mockingbird
European Starling
Bohemian Waxwing
Snow Bunting
American Tree Sparrow
Common Grackle
Pine Grosbeak
House Finch
Common Redpoll
American Goldfinch
Evening Grosbeak