



# TERN OF EVENTS

PRESQUE ISLE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER  
FEBRUARY 2014, ISSUE 14:01

*To conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the enjoyment and benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity in northwestern Pennsylvania.*

## THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH

The Snowies are coming, The Snowies are...HERE!

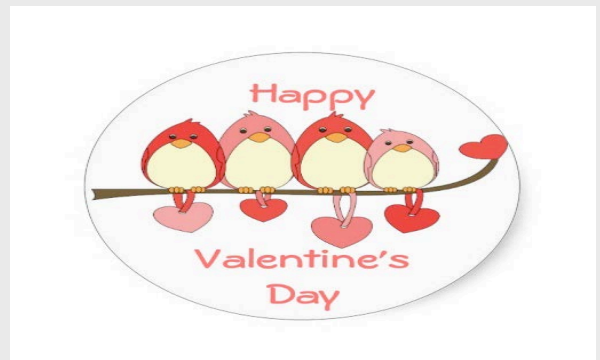


Unless you live in a cave, and even then I'm not so sure, you probably are aware of the unprecedented irruption of Snowy Owls that we're currently experiencing here in the "south". Granted, I've not been birding that long, but I can't remember such an influx of these magnificent owls into our range. In fact, these owls have been found as far south as the Carolinas with one intrepid Snowy venturing down to Bermuda! Although it is impossible to know exactly how many of these regal visitors from the Arctic have stopped over and hung out here at Presque Isle, upwards of 10-13 Snowy Owls have

been spotted on one day in December. As of this writing, there were still three Snowy Owls still being reported at Gull Point and another at Fairview Business Park.

The Cornell website refers to Snowy Owls as birds that bring even non-birders out for a look. This has definitely been the case at Presque Isle.

(Cont. on Page 2)



## FEBRUARY THINGS TO DO!

- February 4, Tuesday** - Festival of the Birds Committee Meeting, 6:00pm, Board Room
- February 6, Thursday** - Partner Update Meeting, 8:30am in the Board Room at the TREC
- February 12, Wednesday** - Strategic Planning Committee Meeting, 6:00pm at the TREC
- February 15, Saturday** - Great Backyard Bird Count, Shelter 2 at Presque Isle, 8:00am to noon (Page 5)
- February 21, Friday** - PIAS General Meeting and Program: Room 112 at the TREC  
7:00 pm - Social  
7:00 pm - Program: *The Ordinary Extraordinary Junco* (Page 3)

## 2013-2014 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH (Cont.)

One particularly sunny day here in Erie, I and several other birders and photographers, ventured out to the point before sunrise to enjoy the great light of the rising sun and, frankly, to beat the crowds. By the time we were ready to leave the point several hours later, an estimated 25 people were viewing and photographing the owls. Only one person tried to approach the owls at what we all considered too short a distance. He was quickly advised to stop his approach and complied. On our way off the point we crossed paths with many families on their way to the point.. They were going to see the Snowy Owls made famous by Hedwig, the owl of Harry Potter fame. Most had probably never made the arduous trek to Gull Point before and luckily, due to all the foot traffic, the path was packed and easy to navigate. One young man was being pulled along by his mom in a plastic sled...must be nice! We wished them luck, gave them a few pointers and asked that they respect the birds by keeping their distance. By the time we reached the parking lot of Beach 10 there were 35 cars there! Most were from PA but a good number were from neighboring states. There was even one car with Nebraska plates, certainly probably here primarily to visit family for the holidays, but still...

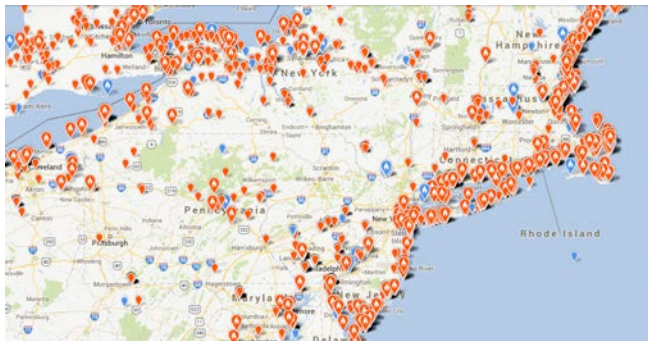
According to Cornell and other sources, Snowy Owl irruptions occur roughly every 4 years. There are a few theories as to why these irruptions happen, but none have been deemed adequate to explain the reasons, which are certainly manifold, why these irruptions occur. One common denominator in these theories, however, is a lack of food on the breeding ground during the winter months. When the prey of choice for Snowy Owls, luscious lemmings, is plentiful, Snowy Owls experience successful broods, with up to nine eggs in a clutch! (crossing myself--and I'm not even Catholic!) which leads to more mouths competing for a limited amount of prey, primarily those luscious lemmings, and, in a pinch, ptremendously ptasty ptarmigans. On the other hand, in years with an inadequate amount of prey, Snowy Owls may not even breed.

(Cont. on Page 3)

## THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH (Cont.)

If prey remains inadequate then the adult birds are driven to search for food, often to the south, including our own little sand spit.

In an effort to possibly shed some light on this unprecedented irruption, a group of independent researchers, bird banders and wildlife health professionals in collaboration with the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art and Project OwlNet, has launched Project SNOWstorm.



The map above is an eBird map of Snowy Owls reported in the northeastern US this winter. The researchers from Project SNOWstorm will be placing solar powered transmitters on the backs of several Snowy Owls. These transmitters will allow 24 hour a day monitoring of the tagged birds, possibly for years to come. To what end? You may ask, is this research being conducted. Understandable question. From the Project SNOWstorm page, *Almost nothing is known about the local and landscape-level movements of snowy owls on the wintering grounds, nor about their nocturnal hunting activity and range size.* The ability to track these birds will provide and actually has already provided never before available information about the meanderings of these owls. DCNR has been contacted by the lead researchers on this project including Scott Weidensaul who is interested in coming up to Presque Isle to tag one or more of the Snowy Owls that are frequenting Gull Point. I encourage you to visit the ProjectSNOWstorm website to learn more about the cutting edge research being

conducted and how you, if so inclined, can help.

If you don't feel up to making the long walk out to Gull Point especially on these blustery days of late, check out the breakwaters especially near Beach 10, you just might see one of these arctic beauties hanging out on the rocks just waiting for his dinner to fly or swim by.

~Michel Rundquist Franz, PIAS President

## FEBRUARY PIAS MONTHLY PROGRAM

**Hello everyone. Happy New Year!**

The February 21 PIAS program will be a screening of the film "Ordinary Extraordinary Junco". The film highlights research on a common yet amazing group of backyard birds, the Juncos.

Produced by biologists and filmmakers from Indiana University, the film covers evolution, animal behavior, ecology, and the research process. It takes the viewer to habitats across North America and brings to life more than 100 years of groundbreaking research in animal behavior, evolution, and ecology and offers fresh insights into just how much can be learned from this little backyard bird. Readily observed in backyards, city parks, and forests alike, Juncos—sometimes called "Snowbirds"—can be easily overlooked. But for scientists who study animal behavior, ecology, and evolutionary biology, the Junco is a rock star.

~Mary Birdsong, Program Chair

## SUET SALE

The annual February suet sale will take place at the monthly PIAS meeting. Chuck Kern has acquired a supply from MacDonald's Meats in Girard and will be selling it by the pound for 50 cents. He is also providing three suet feeders to be used for door prizes. When you win one, or even if you don't, purchase some suet to cut to fit your feeders. The birds will love it!

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

The following birds of note were reported from December, 2013 through January 14, 2014 from Presque Isle State Park unless noted otherwise:

**Harlequin Duck**—1 or 2; Dec. 4 to 20; Gull Point and Sunset Point (Waterbird count, WC); S.S., J.M. (See below)



**Surf Scoter**—1 or 2; Jan. 14; channel; R.D.

**White-winged Scoter**—15 (high count this late in the season); Jan. 12; Sunset Point; J.M.

**Black Scoter**—1; Jan. 14 (late); channel; J.M.

**Long-tailed Duck**—1125 (high count); Dec. 6; Sunset Point (WC); J.M.

**Sandhill Crane**—2 calling overhead; Dec. 16; Waterford; J.H.

**Iceland Gull**—total of 5; Dec. 11 to Jan 10; Lake View Landfill, Sunset Point, and Beach 11; J.M.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull**—1; Dec. 8; Presque Isle Downs Casino parking lot; J.M. 1; Jan. 4; Lake View Landfill; J.M.

**Parasitic Jaeger**—1; Dec. 2; Gull Point; S.S. (See below)



**Snowy Owl**—at least 50 birds with about 36 of those on Presque Isle S.P. alone; through the period; m.ob. This is an unprecedented invasion of Snowy Owls in Erie Co. The most ever recorded in the county prior to this season was no more than about six birds!

**Long-eared Owl**—1; Dec. 19; Pines; K.P.

**Short-eared Owl**—1; Jan. 11 to 13; Gull Point; R.D.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl**—1; Jan. 7 & 8; pines ; R.D.

**Rufous Hummingbird**—last seen on Dec. 16.; Edinboro; S.W.

**Northern Shrike**—1; Dec. 2; Thompson Circle; S.S. 1; Dec. 16 to Jan. 1; Waterford; J.H. 1; Dec. 23 to Jan 12; Gull Point; J.F., et al

**Common Raven** -1; Dec. 8; Union City; D.P.

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet**—1; Jan. 5 (late); Pine Tree Trail; J.M.

**Gray Catbird**—1; Dec. 28 (late); Gull Point Trail; J.F. 1; Jan. 10 (late); east end of Sidewalk Trail along Misery Bay; J.M.

**Lapland Longspur**—1; Dec. 1; Gull Point; G.M. 1; Dec. 12; Walnut Creek Access, Fairview Twp. (WC); J.M.

**Chipping Sparrow**—1; Jan. 1 to 7 (late); Waterford; J.H.

**Common Redpoll**—2; Jan. 7; near beach 11 parking lot; S.S. (See below)



Contributors: R.D.-Roger Donn, J.F.-Jim Flynn, J.H.-Jamie Hill, G.M.-Geoff Malosh, J.M.-Jerry McWilliams, K.P.-Kelly Parsons, D.P.-Donna Peters, S.S.-Susan Smith, S.S.-Sam Stull, S.W.-Suzanne Winterberger, m.ob.-many observers

~Jerry McWilliams, Bird Records Chair  
814-240-8594 jerrymcw@aol.com

## MEMBERSHIP REPORT

I hope everyone survived the "polar vortex". It's been quite a winter, but these things are to be expected. Anyway, the Presque Isle Audubon wants to welcome all the new members into our chapter. When you join National Audubon, you are automatically a member of our local chapter. Anyone can now join online on our website, [www.presqueisleaudubon.org](http://www.presqueisleaudubon.org).

**Erie:** Michael McCreary, Don Stack, Donald Grotkowski, Joe Reese, Diane Wagner, Julie Keiser, Norma Schmitt, Rhonda Lesh, Christopher Hatch, Steve Krajnik, Andrew Karl, Ron Rodgers, Frank Galaskewicz, James Vogt, Lynne Martin, Larry Burlingame

**Albion:** J. Bozman

**Bear Lake:** Ray Dahl

**Cambridge Sps:** Audrey Bauer

**Cochranon:** Jane Toppo

**Edinboro:** William Smith

**Fairview:** Yvonne Grate, Stanley Pakela

**Girard:** R. Miller

**Guys Mills:** Judy Spencer

**Harborcreek:** Maxine Debernardo

**Jamestown:** Leo Waskowiak

**McKean:** Kristin Mortensen

**Meadville:** Betty Reed, Andrea Thomas, Chris Lundberg

**North East:** Michael Tordoff, Paul Conrad, Audrey Fisher

**Spartansburg:** James Reilly

**Springboro:** Arlene Baker

**Titusville:** Robert McGraw

**Waterford:** Kristine Evankovich, Doris Bressler

**Wattsburg:** Butch Jones

**Warren:** Jane Branch, Connie Michell, Georgia Hudson, Walter Simpson Jon & Joyce Carlson, Judy Honey

Also, thanks and welcome to our Chapter only members, both new and renewals: Ed & Nancy Group, Linda Kierstein, Evelyn Anderson, Lois Wiley, and Caroline Reichel.

Questions about membership should be sent to ~Ron Intrieri, Membership Chairman  
[membership@presqueisleaudubon.org](mailto:membership@presqueisleaudubon.org)

## THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15 8:00 AM TO 12:00 NOON FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



The Education committee of Presque Isle Audubon, chaired by Michele Franz, will conduct the Great Backyard Bird Count on Saturday, February 15 at Shelter 2 on Presque Isle State Park. Michele will be placing seeds in feeders near the cabin during the week to attract any birds that might be on the park now. The feeders can be seen through the windows of the shelter so you can watch the birds and their behavior while staying warm. There will be fires in the fireplaces, snacks and beverages, and relevant activities for the young and young at heart.

Please join us while we take part in this very important citizen science project.



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## WATERBIRD COUNT - 2013

Sunset Point, Erie County, Pa.

By

Jerry McWilliams



Jerry and Helpers

Time in the field this year was 210 hours, which ties the highest number of hours for a waterbird count season set in 2011.

It was not a good season for **puddle ducks** with the number of birds lower than last year for nearly all species. However, **diving duck** numbers were generally higher. Probably the most notable **waterbird** event this season was the huge number of Red-breasted Mergansers that past the point: see the total below.

It was a very poor year for Red-throated Loons with the seasons total four times below the record set just two years ago in the same number of hours in the field as this year! It was the lowest season total for Red-throated Loons recorded since 2008.

Total number of waterbird species that broke season records this year was 11. They include Red-necked Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant (previous high was 12325 set in 2011 with number of birds increasing annually), Gadwall, Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Black Scoter, Common Merganser, (the high number was probably due to the early onset of winter), Red-breasted Merganser (previous high was 74286 set last year), Pectoral Sandpiper, and Black-legged Kittiwake. Total number of waterbirds species that broke daily highs this year was only four. These include Double-crested Cormorant (previous

high was 4000 in 2011), Common Merganser (previous high was 126 in 2005), Red-breasted Merganser (previous high was 16065 set in 2004), and Pectoral Sandpiper. Two new waterbird count species were added to the list this year, Whimbrel and Least Sandpiper.

The most note-worthy **non-water related bird** event this season would have to be the Snowy Owl invasion with at least six different birds, based upon plumage differences, tallied through the month of December. All Snowy Owls were moving along the shoreline, mostly in a westerly direction. A few non-water related birds also broke season or daily high records, five species to be exact. These include Osprey, Cooper's Hawk, Winter Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and American Tree Sparrow. Five new species were added to the non-waterbird count list including Snowy Owl, Purple Martin, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and House Sparrow.

**Thank you** to all of the birders who stopped by and helped at times with the count. A special thanks goes to Roger Donn, who was just as dedicated to the survey as me. Roger was consistently there every day helping me spot and count birds. I would also like to thank the staff at Presque Isle State Park, especially the Operations Manager, Harry Leslie, for giving Roger and me permission to conduct the survey, by car, from the hard pan sand ridge adjacent to Sunset Point. This site allowed us a clear 180 degree scan of the lake, and the increased elevation gave us the height needed to identify distant birds.

Below are the **most notable top ten birds from the 2013** waterbird count season. I have been conducting this survey since 1987:

Species that had the **highest season total ever** recorded on the waterbird count include Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Double-crested Cormorant, Red-necked Grebe, and Black legged Kittiwake.

This was the **first time** Whimbrel and Least Sandpiper have been recorded on the waterbird count.

The **most notable bird** has to go to Snowy Owl. This was the first season that Snowy Owl was recorded on the count with at least 6 different owls observed.



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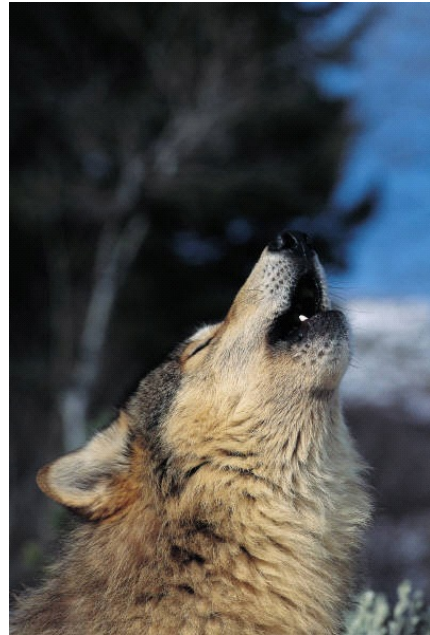
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The Presque Isle Audubon Society's newsletter, the *Tern of Events*, is published monthly, except in January and July. The deadline for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication. All published material is subject to editing.

Send submissions to Janet Price, editor, via [jrplkm@aol.com](mailto:jrplkm@aol.com) or 418 E. 36th St., Erie, PA 16504. If you have any questions, call Janet at 814-825-8394.

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