

## Audubon Board Meeting 1/22/2026

1. Meeting called to Order at 6:08 PM
2. Roll Call
  - a. Present – John Imboden, Kathy Flegel, Kathie Wiley, Jared Gugnitz, Jenny Young, Kirk Waterstripe, Ron McCullick
  - b. Absent – none
  - c. Non-Board Members in attendance: Eli Gugnitz
3. Approval of November Board Meeting Minutes
  - a. Meeting minutes accepted
4. Consideration of the Agenda
  - a. No changes
5. Misc. Email items
  - a. Daniel Bernard has been not responsive. Might need to come up another plan for April. John to follow up with Daniel this week. If that doesn't illicit a response, Jenny to follow up with Shelly Stusick on possibly presenting on invasives in April.
  - b. Birds, bikes and wine trip from Toledo is happening Saturday June 20, 2026 8AM – 2PM. They will need some local guides to help them at pre-determined birding spots.
  - c. North Sky Raptor Sanctuary is moving to Camp Greilick. There's a hike coming up in Feb on that property.
  - d. East Bay library - Kirk is heading up a Thursday evening presentation (April 30<sup>th</sup>) at the library and then Saturday morning (May 2<sup>nd</sup>) a bird walk at Mitchell Creek. Kathie to post to the website.
  - e. Fresh Coast film festival – May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Board agreed to take them up on their offer for a table at their film screening, and to help them promote their bird walks. Jared to follow up with them to get more details about the walks.
6. Treasurer's and Membership Reports - Kathie
  - a. End of year report was approved by the membership
  - b. Balances
    - i. Main – \$4282.68
    - ii. WH – \$1573.88
    - iii. CD – \$2168.57
    - iv. Total - \$8025.13
    - v. Recurring donations coming up for: Boardman River Cleanup, Boardman River Nature Center Seed Donation, National Audubon Christmas Bird Count
  - c. Membership report
    - i. 40 members outstanding (owe fees)
    - ii. First week in February, Kathie will send out a physical letter encouraging outstanding members to renew
    - iii. Treasurer's report approved
7. Events
  - a. Speaker Roster for 2026
    - i. February 12th: Native plantings with Tom Ford and Brian Zimmerman
    - ii. March 12th: Nate Crane, Matt Winkler, Jeremiah on Rio Grand Valley presentation and silent auction
    - iii. April 9th: Daniel Bernard or Shelly Stusick

- b. Field Trips
  - i. February 7th (10am to 12pm) Winter Birding – Interlochen Library & GT Audubon collaboration
  - ii. February 14: Great Backyard Bird Count start at Boardman Lake and end at Mitchell Creek
- 8. Other Items
  - a. MOTUS Tower
    - i. Kirk discussed this with Nova from Friends of Whitefish Point (details attached)
    - ii. Based on limitations of the technology and the low hit rate, the board feels like MOTUS is not an avenue that we want to pursue. Instead, we want to gain more information about newer technologies like the cell tower and satellite transmitters.
    - iii. Kirk to get more information from Nova on the costs associated with their project (see attached).
    - iv. Upcoming silent auction at the March member meeting. Funds raised will be used for a TBD project.
  - b. Loon Platform
    - i. Kathie got in touch with Michigan Loon Preservation and they might have a platform for us if the current platform ends up not being an option.
    - ii. Bridge Lake in Interlochen is available for this year.
    - iii. Kirk has a contact at Leelanau Land Conservancy that might be able to find us a lake for hosting the loon platform.
  - c. Kirk would like Walter Hastings photographs to be more prominently featured on the website, and maybe we can use some items from the WH collection on Interlochen's campus. Jared to try to find out the status of the WH museum at Interlochen. Maybe a field trip is in order?
  - d. Laptop – Audubon club owns a chromebook for presenters. It's currently at Kirk's house, but maybe should be kept at the Nature Center. Need to double check that the lock is secure before storing it there.
- 9. Upcoming Board Meetings
  - a. Feb 5<sup>th</sup> 7 PM via Zoom
  - b. March 5<sup>th</sup> in Thirlby room, 6 PM.
  - c. April 2<sup>nd</sup> in Study Room D, 6 PM
- 10. Adjournment at 7:35 PM.

Motus tower: Aaron Coolman is the person to talk to about the intricacies of the Motus tower: [asc@wctrust.org](mailto:asc@wctrust.org) is his email.

#### Pros

- Motus could really use another tower in the TC area, because that section of MI is not well covered
- you already have some parts that can be put to use.
- You all have been talking about this project for a while.
- typical cost to install a single tower is \$7000-10000 but may be a bit less depending on what you have to work with already. There is a monthly cost for the data download, I think it is maybe \$20/month, so consider that going forward (I forgot to mention that in our call).

#### Cons

- not a huge number of birds being detected at any of the northern michigan locations. Many of those locations are new, but Whitefish has only had a total of 6 detections of birds that were not part of our saw-whet connectivity project (those are birds that we put tags on in the last 2 years, so of course they would show up).
- detections can be false and it is hard to filter out what is true and what is not.
- due to your location, if you were to really go for Motus, it would be best to do three towers around the peninsula area to catch the birds that are just taking the coastal route and skipping onto the islands.
- not a lot of birds currently being tagged in your location.
- I'm not sure that I would argue that Motus will become obsolete in the next 10 years, but for certain species that have a significant amount of life history outside the motus network, it is not a good choice for how to spend research funds.

#### Sponsor a Long-eared Owl Transmitter Project:

This will be the first major research project that the Friends of Whitefish Point is undertaking since we were established last year. We wish that it would be possible to do this project using Motus tags, but unfortunately, first description research of two long-eareds that were sat-tagged showed that they actually go all the way north in to northern Canada to breed, which does not have a network of towers. It doesn't even have cell towers, leading us to decide that satellite tags are the way to go instead of cell tower activated transmitters. I'm still looking into the pricing of these tags, and I'll send you an email about that in the next week or so. As far as keeping your members engaged with a project they are sponsoring, I think this would reap some really good rewards and keep people excited about this type of research- it is essentially cutting-edge technology we are using to do something new! Due to using the satellite tracking, we would be getting points on these birds at least every two weeks, so I could keep you all in the loop about your bird(s) fairly easily. Aside from the two long-eareds tagged as an exploratory part of research, no one else has satellite tagged this

species during migration with tags to last up to two years, so this is really the first study of it's kind. I've enclosed our Research Proposal, which we wrote up earlier this winter.

Other tagging info:

- Blumorpho tags that use cell phone receivers are very limited to both being in areas where people are with their cell phones and also only have a radius of about 150 meters at the moment. They are best for birds/insects that hang out in people's back gardens, etc.

- Cell transmitter tags (like Project SNOWstorm) all use solar panels to keep the battery going. Those only give points when they ping a cell tower, which again is a problem with birds breeding up near Hudson Bay. Also, Long-eareds are much more nocturnal than Snowy Owls and tend to roost in dense trees under cover, not out in the open. So these are pretty much off the table for us.

## **Friends of Whitefish Point**

### **Unveiling the Mysteries of Long-eared Owl Movements**

Although distributed worldwide, the Long-eared Owl's life history, especially migratory movements, is poorly known in North America. Analysis of Christmas Bird Count data shows a decline of over 50% since 1970, and Partners in Flight estimates the North American population of Long-eared Owls to have declined by ~90% since 1970. A highly migratory owl species, long-eareds banded in the northern U.S. and southern Canada have been recovered as far south as Mexico. By expanding our knowledge of the life history and migratory patterns of this species, scientists and policy-makers can more accurately adjust future management and conservation plans for the Great Lakes region.

Since the early 1900s, Whitefish Point, Chippewa County, MI has been recognized as a continentally important area for bird observation and monitoring. During spring migration, the southern shore of Lake Superior acts as a natural barrier for northbound birds, funneling significant numbers to Whitefish Point. Once at Whitefish Point, the protected habitat provides a critical stopover area for these migrant birds. Whitefish Point is North America's premier Long-eared Owl migration site. During spring migration from 2016-2025, a total of 2,511 long-eareds were banded at Whitefish Point, representing 44% of all Long-eared Owls banded in North America during that period. However, only 28 (1%) of these owls have been recaptured at Whitefish Point. Furthermore, of the approximately 20,000 Long-eared Owls banded in North America from the early 1960s to 2021, only 150 (0.75%) were recaptured, demonstrating the difficulty of documenting migratory movements of this species solely through traditional banding practices. Thanks to new technology, it is now possible to track these secretive owls using more advanced methods.

The Friends of Whitefish Point plans to document migration connectivity of Long-eared Owls using advanced GPS telemetry systems. The model for this work comes from Project\_SNOWstorm, a highly successful long-term project using cutting-edge GPS/GSM wildlife telemetry with Snowy Owls. Recent technological developments have widened transmitter choices and decreased transmitter weight to the point where we can now track much smaller owls, such as the long-eared. During 2021, Christensen and Ward (2022) used these smaller transmitters to track two Long-eared Owls from central New Jersey to areas in Quebec that were well north of their known breeding limits.

We plan to place GPS transmitters on 10 Long-eared Owls during migration in 2026 & 2027.

Transmitters will be programmed to collect data for 1-2 years to document spring migration to breeding areas, summering locations, and fall migration to wintering areas. This will provide data on full migratory connectivity for Long-eared Owls banded near the center of their North American distribution. As well as providing information on the life history & migratory habits of this species, data collected may serve as indicators of the behavior of other similar species that are harder to measure. Knowing the routes individual birds take can be crucial for identifying key stopover sites and wintering grounds that declining bird populations rely on and will enable scientists and agencies to take action to better manage and conserve those areas.