

Report on Bird Survey at Outer Island - May 2010 G. Cleary & J. Youngman

Introduction

From the 14th through 20th of May 2010, Greg Cleary and Joseph Youngman spent time on Outer Island in the Apostle Islands doing a semi-structured bird survey. Our goals were to:

- look for raptor migration at both ends
- look for passerine migration at both ends
- look for waterbird migration at both ends
- make notes on any breeding we observed

We were well aware that extensive work has been done on Outer Island in the spring, looking at passerine and raptor migration. In that respect we were really just wanting to see it for ourselves and contribute small additions in species, etc. We had read almost nothing that indicated that waterbirds might use Outer as a navigational point. By waterbirds we mean : loons, grebes, all ducks. From our personal experience and research of others we know that many islands and points in the eastern 2/3rds of Lake Superior are used by waterbirds as navigational waypoints and we wondered if it occurred at Outer Island's north end. The timing of our visit was a compromise to allow looks at migration of various species and bird types – therefore it was truly a bit late for waterbird migration.

Methods

We wanted to cover both the north and south ends of the island. To that end we spent the 1st 4 days at opposite ends of the island. Youngman in the north on the 15th and 16th and then Cleary in the north on the 17th and 18th and both observers at the south end on the 19th and 20th. At the north end we tried to have early morning stationary observation points either at the lighthouse dock or at the points at the NE corner of the island. At the south end our stationary observation point was in the middle of the sandspit at a high point there. We did do some small amount of exploration of the interior of the island in the afternoons including : the Natural Area west of the lighthouse, wetlands in Sections 36, 2, 10 and 11. Short canoe paddles along the southeast shore unexpectedly yielded a few past and current breeding birds.

Results

Raptor Migration - Raptor migration was really quite minimal during our visit. We saw up to 10 raptors (probably all Sharpshins) over the NE point of the island. We did see raptors (Sharpshins) venturing out to north of island in both mornings and afternoons. We did see raptors both coming and going from the sandspit at the south end of the island. Their flights seemed to indicate they were coming from or going to Stockton Island. The numbers were quite small, species included : TUVU, NOHA, SSHA. While checking out a bog in mid-afternoon in Section 36 we had 19 TUVU overhead at one time. This was the largest concentration of “raptors” that we saw during our visit.

Passerine Migration - The passerine migration was quite visible during our visit, mainly in the form of the early AM movement of passerines southwest of the southern tip toward Stockton Island. We had read many reports about this movement so we were watching for it. We made somewhat structured counts of the southbound passerines on all mornings we were there. We either sat in a central spot in the northern end of the spit – near the campground, or we wandered

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the pathways across the spit and the beaches on each side. On the morning of the 15th, Cleary saw few passerines leaving the south end. On the 16th he witnessed just over 500 passerines leaving the spit between 6:15 and 9:15 AM. He also spent an hour walking in the forest just north of the spit and witnessed hundreds of warblers and many Rose-breasted Grosbeaks moving south through the trees. This 50 minute walk was during the peak hours of passerine movement and clearly many birds left the island during that walk that didn't get added to his count of 512. On the morning of the 17th, Youngman counted 472 passerines leaving the island between 5:20 and 10:00 AM. On the morning of the 18th, Youngman counted 113 passerines leaving between 5:12 and 10:35 AM. On the morning of the 19th, Youngman counted 83 passerines leaving between 5:55 and 9:05 AM. On the morning of the 20th Youngman and Cleary counted 159 leaving between 5:56 and 7:51 AM.

Number of Passerines seen leaving south end of Outer Island each morning

16 th	-	512
17 th	-	472
18 th	-	113
19 th	-	83
20 th	-	159

Passerine species seen leaving south end of Outer Island

Rose-breasted Grosbeak *	Northern Mockingbird
Blue Jay	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Western Kingbird	American Redstart
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Palm Warbler
Eastern Bluebird	Common Grackle
American Robin	Red-winged Blackbird
European Starling	

* Between 6:40 and 7:40AM on the 17th, 27 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks were seen going SW.

Waterbird Migration - waterbird migration past Outer Island during our trip was virtually non-existent. We had hoped that the NE tip of the island might be a navigational waypoint used by migrating ducks, loons and grebes. Our mid-May visit was well past the peak of waterbird migration but we did see a very few birds passing north, west or northwest past the north end. On the 16th two groups, 8 and then 2 small ducks were seen passing the NE tip going NW. Also on the 16th, 6 Common Loons passed the north end of Outer going NW or WNW. On the 17th, 3 Wood Ducks flew past the NE point going NW and 1 Trumpeter Swan passed going W, 6 unidentified ducks went west as well. On the 18th a Common Loon passed going NW. On the 15th, 5 American White Pelicans flew west past the south tip of Outer.

Shorebird Migration - The sandspit, especially the tip, was never without shorebirds during our visit. The tip seemed to be a place for rest and much of the beaches on each side were used for some foraging. Most days, repeated visits down to the tip would yield a complete or nearly complete turnover of shorebirds seen each visit. In some cases it was clear that our approach for observations were enough to cause birds to move on to a quieter resting spot, but many times we

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could come and go without causing the shorebirds to move at all. The most common shorebird species were Least Sandpipers and Black-bellied Plovers. The plumage changes that the plovers were going through, many times allowed for certainty that the plovers seen at the tip were not the same birds as those seen earlier in the day. The most Black-bellied plovers seen at once were 12, on the morning of the 19th.

List of Shorebirds seen at Outer Island

Black-bellied Plover*	Ruddy Turnstone*
American Golden Plover*	Upland Sandpiper*
Killdeer*	Sanderling*
Semipalmated Plover*	Dunlin*
Greater Yellowlegs	Least Sandpiper*
Lesser Yellowlegs	Semipalmated Sandpiper*
Solitary Sandpiper	Short-billed Dowitcher*
Whimbrel*	Wilson's Snipe
Marbled Godwit*	American Woodcock

* = Seen at sandspit (Actually, the Upland Sandpiper was heard only.)

Double-crested Cormorants - We kept some track of the comings and goings of the DCCO's from their apparent base at Gull Island, NE of Michigan Island. Starting early in the AM they come across the sandspit in considerable numbers and head roughly North, to the west of Outer Island. While on the north end we witnessed them coming around the NE tip of the island and heading vaguely north and northwest of Outer to feed. There seemed to be a regular schedule. Every morning, between 4:47AM and 5:07 the first DCCO would be crossing the spit on an outbound flight. As early as 6:29AM the first birds were returning toward Gull on the reverse trajectory.

Some numbers of passing DCCO's

15 th	46	(around NE point)		
17 th	143	South End	5:01 to 5:46	
18 th	75	South End	5:07 to 6:32	1 st returns – 7:05
19 th	164	South End	4:47 to 5:42	1 st returns – 6:32
20 th	139	South End	4:58 to 6:17	1 st returns – 6:29

No effort was made to keep track of them after the 1st returning birds. There never seemed to be an overlap between the last outbounders and the 1st returning birds.

Breeding Birds

We noted the following evidence of birds breeding on Outer Island.

Mallard - a female with one chick was seen on the lagoon on the 18th.

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Red-breasted Merganser - one pair, copulating just off the north beach in the evening of the 15th.

Bald Eagle - a large stick nest was found in a White Pine that leaned over the top of the bank along the shoreline in Sec. 11. There was clearly no activity in that nest this spring. It is assumed to be an eagle nest, but Osprey could not be ruled out. It clearly had some branches shading the nest in past years but those have died and perhaps that is why the nest is no longer active. Eagles were seen less than a dozen times on the island.

American Kestrel - a pair was seen on several occasions at the lighthouse yard.

Merlin - a pair of Merlins were seen near the outlet of the lighthouse creek at the north end. They gave repeated calls and on one morning a flutter-flight display was made along the beach.

Peregrine Falcon - two birds – a possible pair – were seen flying together past the NE tip of the island on the 17th.

Common Loon - spotted on nest on small island, near the eastern edge of the lagoon in Sec. 11. The bird was first noticed on the 15th and seen every day after, always on the nest. At 4:50AM on the morning of the 18th, five yodel calls were heard from the lagoon. Each morning there was always one or more adult COLO off the west side of the sandspit, resting and feeding. On a couple occasions various displays were seen there. They could well have been just random interactions between migrants, but I suspect that the “Lagoon Pair” treated that stretch of Lake Superior as their territory.

American Woodcock - heard displaying every morning and some evenings near the campsite at the south end. A nest with 4 eggs was found in Sec. 10, on the 20th.

Sandhill Crane - one was discovered on a nest with two eggs, in the slim stream/wetland in Sec. 11. First seen on the 17th and seen (from trail) on subsequent days. Two birds came south to the grassy parts of the sandspit to forage in the early AM of the 18th.

Barred Owl - heard calling to north of campsite and right at campsite on two nights.

Whip-poor-will - heard calling in the early AM of the 18th and 20th.

Bank Swallow - while paddling along shoreline of Sec. 11, near east line, a colony of Bank Swallows was discovered on the 17th. The birds were seen going in and out of the nest holes but it seems doubtful they actually had nests at that time. There seemed to be approx – 50 birds. The “bank” that they’re nesting in there appears to be one of the hardest materials I’ve seen swallows nest in.

Song Sparrow - singing every morning at the sandspit just west of the campsite. On the morning of the 20th a SOSP was seen carrying nesting material into a juniper bush there.

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Our Species List

Canada Goose	Wilson's Snipe	Gray Catbird
Trumpeter Swan	American Woodcock	Northern Mockingbird
Wood Duck	Ring-billed Gull	European Starling
Gadwall	Herring Gull	American Pipit
Mallard	Caspian Tern	Golden-winged Warbler
Northern Shoveler	Mourning Dove	Tennessee Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Barred Owl	Nashville Warbler
Ring-necked Duck	Common Nighthawk	Northern Parula
Bufflehead	Whip-poor-will	Yellow Warbler
Hooded Merganser	Chimney Swift	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Common Merganser	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Magnolia Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	Belted Kingfisher	Cape May Warbler
Common Loon	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Pied-billed Grebe	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Horned Grebe	Downy Woodpecker	Black-throated Green Warbler
Am. White Pelican	Hairy Woodpecker	Blackburnian Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant	Northern Flicker	Pine Warbler
Great Blue Heron	Pileated Woodpecker	Palm Warbler
Turkey Vulture	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Bay-breasted Warbler
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Black & White Warbler
Cooper's Hawk	Least Flycatcher	American Redstart
Northern Harrier	Eastern Phoebe	Ovenbird
Red-tailed Hawk	Great Crested Flycatcher	Northern Waterthrush
Broad-winged Hawk	Western Kingbird	Common Yellowthroat
Bald Eagle	Blue-headed Vireo	Scarlet Tanager
American Kestrel	Blue Jay	Chipping Sparrow
Merlin	American Crow	Clay-colored Sparrow
Peregrine Falcon	Common Raven	Vesper Sparrow
Sora	Horned Lark	Savannah Sparrow
Sandhill Crane	Tree Swallow	LeConte's Sparrow
Black-bellied Plover	Bank Swallow	Song Sparrow
Am. Golden Plover	Barn Swallow	Lincoln's Sparrow
Killdeer	Black-capped Chickadee	Swamp Sparrow
Semipalmated Plover	Red-breasted Nuthatch	White-throated Sparrow
Lesser Yellowlegs	White-breasted Nuthatch	White-crowned Sparrow
Greater Yellowlegs	Brown Creeper	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Solitary Sandpiper	Winter Wren	Indigo Bunting
Spotted Sandpiper	Sedge Wren	Red-winged Blackbird
Upland Sandpiper	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Common Grackle
Whimbrel	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Brown-headed Cowbird
Marbled Godwit	Eastern Bluebird	Baltimore Oriole
Sanderling	Veery	Purple Finch
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Swainson's Thrush	Pine Siskin
Least Sandpiper	Hermit Thrush	American Goldinch
Dunlin	Wood Thrush	Evening Grosbeak
Short-billed Dowitcher	American Robin	

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