

## 2016 Sheboygan AOC Point Count Surveys

Narrative report: *Jeff Baughman*

My summer of 2016 breeding bird point count surveys on the Sheboygan AOC project began on June 5<sup>th</sup> and concluded on June 14<sup>th</sup>. Most of this project was a resurvey of the points from the same sites I completed in June 2011, with additional public sites east along the Sheboygan River corridor. I had originally plotted a total 49 points for this project, but was unable to complete 11 points on Kohler property, because of a communication error with Kohler personnel. Therefore, I spent a total of eight mornings surveying a total of 38 separate survey points.

This project was split into four areas along the Sheboygan River east of Sheboygan Falls. The first area involved 24 points on Kohler company properties; areas around Blackwolf Run golf course and sites east of the course along the Sheboygan River. The remaining three areas involved public properties along the Sheboygan River corridor east of the Kohler properties. They included the Taylor Drive/Indiana Avenue Wetlands and Shoreland Habitat Project (8 points), the Wildwood Island Habitat Project (1 point), and the Kiwanis Park Shorelands Habitat Project (5 points).

Surveying these 38 points resulted in a total 987 individuals of 77 species. Comparatively, during the 2011 project I tallied 808 individuals of 70 species from 37 survey points. I'm sure the additional areas and habitats resulted in these differences. The only unusual species I encountered was a singing **Swainson's Thrush** (*Catharus ustulatus*) at a small woodlot at point #29 (N43 44.240, W87 46.045) on June 8th. I returned a few days later and did not hear this species again so suspect this was just a late migrant. I also recorded seven "Species of Greatest Conservation Need"; **American Woodcock** (*Scolopax minor*), **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** (*Coccyzus americanus*), **Black-billed Cuckoo** (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*), **Willow Flycatcher** (*Empidonax traillii*), **Wood Thrush** (*Hylocichla mustelina*), **Field Sparrow** (*Spizella pusilla*), and **Eastern Meadowlark** (*Sturnella magna*). Other notable species were; **Spotted Sandpiper** (*Actitis macularia*), **Sora** (*Porzana carolina*), **Barred Owl** (*Strix varia*), **Pileated Woodpecker** (*Dryocopus pileatus*), **Yellow-throated Vireo** (*Vireo flavifrons*), **Mourning Warbler** (*Oporornis philadelphia*), **Clay-colored Sparrow** (*Spizella pallida*), and **Orchard Oriole** (*Icterus spurius*).

Throughout this entire area all the forested areas are fragmented by various elements including; a manicured golf course, maintained hiking trails, public recreational areas and the Sheboygan River. The forest types themselves are of mixed types and ages. The deciduous forests have a few conifers mixed in at various places and there is one conifer stand, north of the golf course, which is fairly dense with little habitat diversity. For the most part, species that were encountered were those I would consider “fragmented habitat” species. They are species that don’t require large sections of contiguous habitats.

Consider the most observed species; **Northern Cardinal** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) - 47 individuals from 31 of 38 points, **Song Sparrow** (*Melospiza melodia*) - 51 individuals from 29 of 38 points, **American Robin** (*Turdus migratorius*) - 51 individuals from 27 of 38 points, **Common Grackle** (*Quiscalus quiscula*) - 40 individuals from 25 of 38 points, **Blue Jay** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) - 33 individuals from 25 of 38 points, **House Wren** (*Troglodytes aedon*) - 32 individuals from 22 of 38 points, **Red-winged Blackbird** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) - 81 individuals from 24 of 38 points, and **Red-eyed Vireo** (*Vireo olivaceus*) - 29 individuals from 22 of 38 points. Of the 987 individuals recorded, 364 were of these 8 species (37%). There were very few habitat specialists observed from the survey area.

The only grassland habitats (marginal) within the survey area were the fallow fields around the Kohler landfill (points 30-32) and just west of the golf course (points 1 , 2 & 9). The landfill area had the most diversity but was also the larger of the two sites and had fewer woody plants mixed in. The notable species recorded here were; **Eastern Bluebird** (*Sialia sialis*) using one of the nest boxes, **Blue-winged Warbler** (*Vermivora pinus*) and **Orchard Oriole** (*Icterus spurius*) along the woody edge, **Savannah Sparrow** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), **Eastern Meadowlark** (*Sturnella magna*), and several **Bank Swallows** (*Riparia riparia*) using one of the large dirt mounds as a nesting site.

The grassland habitat at the golf course site has changed dramatically since the 2011 survey. The succession of woody plants within this grassland has change the habitat a lot. There are few true grassland species present here anymore. Notably missing were **Dickcissel** (*Spiza americana*), **Bobolink** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) and **Eastern Meadowlark** (*Sturnella magna*), which were present in 2011. There are now several **Willow Flycatchers** (*Empidonax traillii*) **Yellow Warblers** (*Dendroica petechia*), **Common Yellowthroats** (*Geothlypis trichas*), **Song Sparrows** (*Melospiza melodia*) and **Clay-colored Sparrows** (*Spizella pallida*). Observed along

its edge were **American Woodcock** (*Scolopax minor*), **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** (*Coccyzus americanus*) and **Orchard Oriole** (*Icterus spurius*).

The Kohler company property is by far the most species rich area of all the sites covered simply because of its size, habitat diversity and number of points surveyed. During this year's survey, I recorded a total of 588 individuals of 69 species from 24 points. Ironically in 2011, I recorded 581 individuals of 67 species from 28 points. The species list from these two projects were very similar but missing from this year's survey were; Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*), American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), and Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*). The following species were the only ones recorded during the entire project and were from this site; **Barred Owl** (*Strix varia*), **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** (*Archilochus colubris*), a pair of **Pileated Woodpeckers** (*Dryocopus pileatus*), a pair of **Alder Flycatchers** (*Empidonax alnorum*), **Wood Thrush** (*Hylocichla mustelina*), and **Chestnut-sided Warbler** (*Dendroica pensylvanica*).

The 8 points (36-43) along Taylor Drive/Indiana Avenue Wetlands and Shoreland Habitat Project were completed on two separate days. Day one I completed 4 points by kayak because it allowed easier access to 3 of the 4 of these points. There are a couple of issues with using a kayak to do this type of survey. One is securing the kayak at one location for the 10 minute duration and the other is visibility. It is difficult to view the area all around you and the fact you are sitting low on the water limits your view. The remaining 4 points were on foot.

For the kayak stint, I launched at *Esslinger Park*. I did not complete any survey points at the park because of its proximity to some survey points I completed on the south side of the river. Although, while at the park I noticed several nest boxes; 5 Bluebird/wren/swallow style boxes and 1 Wood Duck box. Two of the Bluebird/wren/swallow boxes and the Wood Duck box were in need of repair and I would also suggest repositioning the Bluebird boxes into non-mowed areas or at the least along edge of the mowed area. One of the Bluebird boxes did have nestling **Eastern Bluebirds** (*Sialia sialis*) with both parents nearby. Another one of the boxes was being visited by House Sparrows. There were no Tree Swallows using any of the boxes while I was present. The Wood Duck box seems to be in an appropriate location, but does need some reconstruction.

The *Taylor Drive/Indiana Avenue Wetlands and Shoreland Habitat Project* area yielded 188 individuals of 49 species. Species of note from these 8 points included; **Wood Duck** (*Aix sponsa*), **Green Heron** (*Butorides virescens*), **Sora** (*Porzana carolina*), **Spotted Sandpiper** (*Actitis macularia*), **Black-billed Cuckoo** (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*), **Belted Kingfisher** (*Ceryle alcyon*), **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*), **American Redstart** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) and **Orchard Oriole** (*Icterus spurius*).

The small wetland/pond at point (#36) at the southwest intersection of Taylor Drive and Indiana Avenue, had a family group of **Canada Geese** (*Branta canadensis*), a female **Wood Duck** (*Aix sponsa*), a calling **Sora** (*Porzana carolina*), and quite likely a nesting pair of **Orchard Orioles** (*Icterus spurius*). I did not do any playbacks here so there may be multiple Soras and may be nesting here as well. The small natural area (point #40 - by kayak) along the river at the northeast intersection of Taylor Drive and Indiana Avenue, had some nice plantings but the natural area itself didn't have much in the way of birds. The Purple Martin house erected here is good and may at some point be used by Purple Martins instead of **House Sparrows** (*Passer domesticus*). Notable species from this site included; a pair of **Spotted Sandpipers** (*Actitis macularia*), **Belted Kingfisher** (*Ceryle alcyon*), **Tree Swallow** (*Tachycineta bicolor*), **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) and **Bank Swallow** (*Riparia riparia*), plus a **Baltimore Oriole** (*Icterus galbula*) carrying nesting material.

The remaining points along the Taylor Drive/Indiana Avenue Wetlands and Shoreland Habitat Project harbored nothing unusual or unexpected. The narrow, natural buffer between the river and the urban buildings simply doesn't allow for much avian diversity. Most of what was recorded among these survey points were species that use a broad range of habitats. As expected there were good numbers of **Warbling Vireos** (5), **House Wrens** (9), **American Robin** (13), **Cedar Waxwing** (4), **Northern Cardinal** (14), **Red-winged Blackbird** (18), **Common Grackle** (13) and **American Goldfinch** (10). The 6 **Belted Kingfishers** recorded along this section of the river were quite likely the same pair (male and female) flying up and down the river.

I excluded the *Wildwood Island Habitat Project* site from the kayak section because there was a place, on the north side of the river, to park and view the island from the shore. This site had the most diversity of species of all the river survey points east of Taylor Drive, with 22

species and 53 individuals. During my stay there were several species using the island in transit and a few that probably use it for nesting. The following species were using the island during the majority of my stay; was a family of 11 **Canada Geese** (*Branta canadensis*) resting on the eastern tip of the island, a **Spotted Sandpiper** (*Actitis macularia*) working the near shoreline, a **Warbling Vireo** (*Vireo gilvus*) sing high in the willows, a pair of **House Wrens** (*Troglodytes aedon*), a male **Yellow Warbler** (*Dendroica petechia*) singing from a perch on the southwest end of the island, and a singing **Northern Cardinal** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). Each of the nesting poles erected on the northeast end of the island, looked as though nesting may have been started but no birds were noted during my stay.

The 5 **Kiwanis Park Shorelands Habitat Project** survey points yielded 188 individuals of 36 species. The 75 **Ring-billed Gulls** (*Larus delawarensis*) flying over survey point #47 accounted for the majority of the individuals recorded. Again, nothing unusual or unexpected was present. The narrow prairie buffer along the river is very nice but will probably not offer enough habitat to increase diversity or numbers of individuals currently using it. The nest boxes on the south side of the park, along the river, are in good shape. One of the Wood Duck boxes (middle one of the three) was being used by a female **Wood Duck** (*Aix sponsa*), although not recorded while doing any of the point counts. The 3 Bluebird/wren/swallow boxes are placed in densely woody habitat and seem to have attracted only House Wrens at this point. I would suggest moving these boxes to sites along the fence that borders the prairie plantings if you want the potential anything other than House Wrens.

Species of note from my survey points here were; **Great Blue Heron** (*Ardea herodias*), **Spotted Sandpiper** (*Actitis macularia*), **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** (*Coccyzus americanus*), **Chimney Swift** (*Chaetura pelagica*), an **Eastern Phoebe** (*Sayornis phoebe*) nesting under the eaves of one of the south picnic pavilion, **American Redstart** (*Setophaga ruticilla*), and **Baltimore Oriole** (*Icterus galbula*).

Finally, I did try to note breeding evidence for all species while at each point, but it was not a priority. As far as I'm concerned there is quite a bit of luck necessary to have species display some type of breeding evidence when you are standing/sitting in one spot for only 10 minutes. I did enjoy working on Wisconsin's first breeding bird atlas in the late 1990's and I'm currently in several atlas blocks for the second atlas, but that type of birding is different than these point

counts. While atlasing you are able to pursue singing/calling birds and confirm breeding. Yet, I was able to confirm breeding of 17 species during this series of point counts; **Canada Goose** (Fledgling), **Wood Duck** (Occupied Nest), **Mallard** (Fledgling), **Eastern Phoebe** (Occupied Nest), **Warbling Vireo** (Carrying Food), **Tree Swallow** (Occupied Nest), **Bank Swallows** (Occupied Nest), **White-breasted Nuthatch** (Carrying Nesting material), **House Wren** (Carrying Food), **Eastern Bluebird** (Carrying Food), **American Robin** (Carrying Food), **Gray Catbird** (Carrying Food), **Yellow Warbler** (Carrying Nesting material), **Song Sparrow** (Carrying Food), **Red-winged Blackbird** (Fledgling), **Common Grackle** (Carrying Food), and **Baltimore Oriole** (Carrying Nesting material). I suspect that a large percentage of the species I encountered were breeders in the area though.

Respectfully submitted,

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