

Bird Sightings on Lake Wausau in 2013

(From Dan Belter)

2013 was another outstanding year for seeing some great bird sightings on Lake Wausau. Highlights include; **ARCTIC TERN**, both **White-winged** and **Surf Scoters**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **American White Pelican**, **Great Egret**, **Willet**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, and **Dunlin**. Also of interest was a nesting pair of Herring Gulls that I first noticed this summer close to the dam, but they may have been present in 2012 as well? The spring migration of waterfowl was very good with great numbers and a nice variety of all the normal species that pass through this part of the state.

The best sighting on Lake Wausau for 2013 was the three hour visit of an **Arctic Tern** that occurred on morning of October 5th at D.C. Everest County Park. Arctic Terns usually migrate out over both oceans and are considered very rare anywhere inland in the United States. If accepted by the records committee of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (which I sure our sighting will be due to the many photos that were taken), it will be the 30th record of one to be recorded in the State of Wisconsin. This was a “life bird” for me (and everyone else I call to view it), meaning it was the first time in my life that I have ever seen one free flying in the wild. The photo below was taken by Myles Hurlburt of Rib Mountain. Myles was one of several local birders I called to alert the presence of this rare bird. The Arctic Tern is the bird on the left, a Common Tern (in non-breeding plumage) is in the center, and a Herring Gull is on the right.



Arctic Tern (on left), photo by Myles Hurlburt, October 5, 2013, Lake Wausau

Both White-winged and Surf Scoters made appearances in October and November. The first **White-winged Scoter** sighting was reported on October 5th at D.C. Everest County Park, and again on November 11th at the same location. A **Surf Scoter** first showed up at D.C. Everest County Park (a.k.a. Everest Park) on October 6th, and then another one made an appearance at Radtke Park on November 11th. As far as I know, no more than one individual scoter of either species was seen on Lake Wausau this fall.



Surf Scoter (middle back) and two Greater Scaup, November 11, 2013, Radtke Park, Lake Wausau, photo by Myles Hurlburt

On November 11th, Mary Backus (a local birder) found a beautiful adult male **Long-tailed Duck** at Radtke Park. Myles Hurlburt and I also made it down to see this bird after Mary alerted us about it. It stayed for just one day.

Both spring and fall migrations were very good for **Red-necked Grebes** on Lake Wausau. Spring migration had a higher number of birds than what are usually reported, plus more daily sightings than what usually occurs in an average year. This may have been the result of a colder spring and lakes up north still being frozen, thus causing a backup of migrants? As for fall migrants, these are always unusual to find on Lake Wausau in any given year, so the three fall sightings we had were a nice surprise. The first spring migrant appeared on April 15th at Everest Park, and in the next few weeks sightings came from this park as well as from Radtke Park and

from an area along Country Club Road where we can view the south end of the lake. On April 23rd, an impressive number of 22 birds were sighted in several areas around the lake. This is the largest number of birds I have ever had of this species on a single day in all my years of birding on Lake Wausau. The last spring migrants were seen on May 4th. As for fall migrants, November 2nd, 6th, and 19th were the sighting dates. Two birds were sighted on the 2nd at Radtke Park, while single birds were present on both the 6th and 19th at Everest Park.



Red-necked Grebe on Lake Wausau, April 16, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt

American White Pelicans were again found on the lake in 2013. This bird species is becoming an annual visitor to the lake from spring through fall. In 2013, spring was the only season that birds appeared in. The first migrants appeared on April 24th when local birder Sarah Sabatke reported 3 birds flying down the river/lake while she was birding at Bluegill Bay County Park in Rib Mountain. Other sighting dates include; April 27th with 4 birds seen by me (Dan Belter) at Everest Park and 14 birds seen by David Dudley (whom I have never met) at Rookery View Park, and April 28th with 2 birds seen by me at the Country Club Road spot.

It was hoped that last year's **Great Egret** pair would show up again to nest in the Great Blue Heron rookery this year, so when a Great Egret showed up on April 17th our hopes were high. But as it turned out, this sighting was only a one day occurrence. Then on May 3rd, Sarah Sabatke sighted 2 birds in the marsh in front of the Gulliver's Restaurant, and our hopes

rebounded again. But, somewhat like the previous sighting, these two birds only stayed until May 5th when we did not see them after that. If these were the pair that nested last year in the rookery, and they did so again in 2013, then they somehow went undetected by us local birders.



Great Egret on north end of Lake Wausau, May 5, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt

Willetts were again seen on Lake Wausau for the second year in a row. Seven birds were sighted by Sarah Sabatke on April 29th along the east side of the causeway leading up to the County Highway N Bridge that crosses the northwest corner of the lake. Willetts are a locally rare bird for Marathon County. See photos on the next page.



Willets in flight, east of causeway on Lake Wausau, April 29, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt



Willets, photo by Dan Belter, April 29, 2013, Lake Wausau

A **Ruddy Turnstone** and 4 **Dunlins** were seen on the morning of May 20th on the sandbar just west of the Osprey platform. Both species have been sighted many years ago during spring migration when a sandbar was located just off of Everest Park, so it was a nice surprise to see both of these species again on Lake Wausau. I consider the Ruddy Turnstone to be a locally rare bird (but not rare on the statewide level), while Dunlins appear more often in other parts of the local area if the proper habitat is available.

Also of interest this summer was a nesting pair of **Herring Gulls** I first noticed on June 30th. They were present just north of the dam / paper mill on one of the small rocky islands present in this area. I first began to notice one or two gulls in this area all throughout June and I assumed that they were Ring-billed Gulls. Ring-billed Gulls will spend the summer in the area, so I really didn't think too much about this. I started getting suspicious when I noticed that there was a gull always around one of the small rocky islands every time I crossed over the Highway 29 Bridge. So I began looking for the best access points from where I could view this area. I found a small area between the vegetation down at the Rothschild Pavilion. I was able to set up my spotting scope and I first noticed that these were Herring Gulls instead of Ring-billed Gulls. Then I noticed three half grown and flightless young gulls near one of the adults. So this confirmed that nesting did indeed take place. Then I began to think back and recalled that in the summer of 2012 I also noticed some gulls that were always seen in this area. So now I wonder if these were also Herring Gulls that might have nested in 2012 as well?

Overall, the spring waterfowl migration was very good in 2013, whereas the fall migration was an average year for the usual variety of species that Lake Wausau normally has. No unusual waterfowl were reported during the spring migration, but in the fall both White-winged and Surf Scoters and Long-tailed Duck were sighted (see above write-ups). As for the spring migration, I have listed below all the species sighted, along with the date that the most number of individuals of that species were seen. All information comes from sighting submitted into eBird.com from birders who birded around Lake Wausau in the spring of 2013. Also, please see the photos at the end of this report of assorted waterfowl seen on lake in 2013.

Canada Goose; April 6th, 100+ birds

Canvasback; April 24th, 900+ birds

Trumpeter Swan; April 12th, 1 bird

Redhead; April 23rd, 900+ birds

Tundra Swan; April 16th, 15 birds

Ring-necked Duck; April 28th, 300+ birds

Wood Duck; April 23rd, 15+ birds

Greater Scaup; April 24th, 750+ birds

Gadwall; April 24th, 500+ birds

Lesser Scaup; April 23rd, 2000+ birds

American Wigeon; April 24th, 600+ birds

Bufflehead; April 23rd, 500+ birds

American Black Duck; April 22nd, 50+ birds

Mallard; April 23rd, 300+ birds

Blue-winged Teal; April 23rd, 50+ birds

Northern Shoveler; April 23rd, 350+ birds

Northern Pintail; April 23rd, 40+ birds

Green-winged Teal; April 23rd, 200+ birds

Common Goldeneye; April 23rd, 100+ birds

Hooded Merganser; April 23rd, 30+ birds

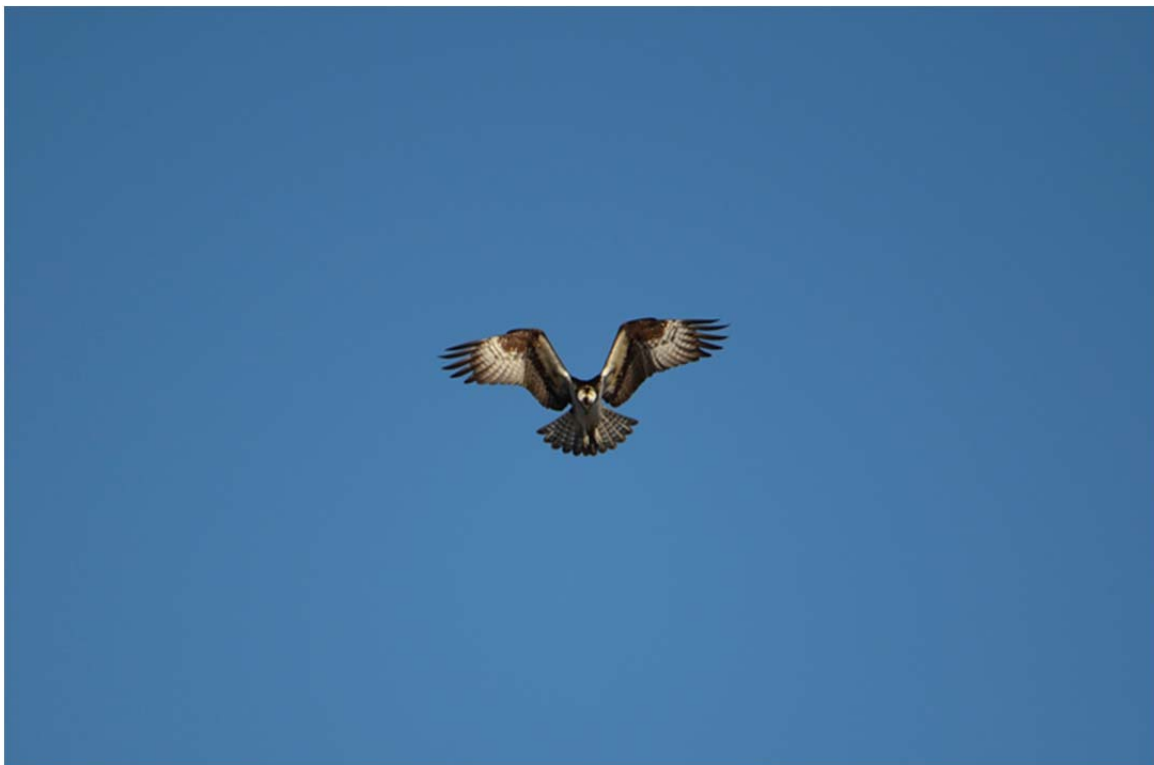
Common Merganser; April 23rd, 300+ birds

Red-breasted Merganser; May 5th, 60+ birds

Ruddy Duck; May 3rd, 150+ birds

(Note; once Lake Wausau started to open up in the spring of 2013, it opened up fast. This allowed three species of waterfowl to pass through rather quickly and not linger on the lake as what they would usually due in past years. These three species are; Common Goldeneye, and both Hooded & Common Mergansers. Normally these three species are the first to show up as Lake Wausau starts to open up. All three can number in the upper hundreds, or even over a thousand at times, as they come into roost on the lake in the evening off of Everest Park, usually in mid to late March. In 2013 the numbers did not materialize as like past years)

Ospreys again nested in 2013 on the nesting platform. The work that was done by the WDNR staff to level out the nesting platform before they returned in the spring proved successful as they fledged 2 young birds during the summer.



Osprey hovering over Lake Wausau, April 16, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt

On the morning of April 23rd, a female **Purple Martin** was observed resting on the ledge of one of the Purple Martin houses that we installed at Everest Park several years ago. We already had some of the ports open in both houses to hopefully attract martins to stay and nest in these houses, but this bird was apparently just passing through as it wasn't seen after that day. This is a good sign as it tells us that if any Purple Martins are passing through the area that they can indeed find these houses. Maybe our hopes will be better in 2014?

Other species seen in good numbers in 2013 are again listed below with the date that the maximum numbers were seen on, and the estimated numbers of birds seen on that date.

Common Loon; April 23rd, 100+ birds

Pied-billed Grebe; May 3rd, 50+ birds

Horned Grebe; April 23rd, 400+ birds

Great Blue Heron; April 23rd, 150+ birds

Bald Eagle; April 16th, 6 birds

American Coot; October 6th, 2000+ birds

Bonaparte's Gull; May 2nd, 400+ birds

Ring-billed Gull; April 25th, 125 birds

Herring Gull; April 19th, 25+ birds

Caspian Tern; April 30th, 3 birds

Common Tern; May & Oct. had single day sightings

Forster's Tern; April 22nd to 29th, single sightings

Tree Swallow; April 22nd, 300+ birds

N. Rough-winged Swallow; May 2nd, 30+ birds

Bank Swallow; May 2nd, 5 birds

Cliff Swallow; May 20th, 40+ birds

Barn Swallow; April 23rd, 30+ birds



Forster's Tern by Dan Belter, Lake Wausau, late April of 2013



Forster's Tern in flight on Lake Wausau, April 29, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt

Shorebirds were also present in 2013. Many of the sighting occurred on the little sandbar located to the west of the Osprey nesting platform. The variety was not as good in 2013 as it was 2012, but we did have three locally good species for 2013. Species present in 2013 included; **Killdeer**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, **Willet** (already mentioned above), **Lesser Yellowlegs**,

Ruddy Turnstone (already mentioned above), **Semipalmated Sandpiper**, **Least Sandpiper**, **Pectoral Sandpiper**, and **Dunlin** (already mentioned above).

Listed below are additional photos of birds seen on Lake Wausau in 2013. All photos were taken by Myles Hurlburt. Mr. Hurlburt lives in Rib Mountain.

Hopefully 2014 will be another great year of birding on Lake Wausau, and will bring many good bird sightings so all us the local birders can get excited!



Assorted waterfowl on Lake Wausau, April 22, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt



Red-breasted Mergansers on Lake Wausau, April 20, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt



Ruddy Ducks and Horned Grebes on Lake Wausau, April 25, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt



Common Loon on Lake Wausau, April 14, 2013, photo by Myles Hurlburt