

# Manistee Area

*By Brian Allen*

The Manistee area has had some of the highest Christmas Bird Counts and North American Migration Counts in the state of Michigan despite its higher and colder latitude. These surveys indicate the diversity of birds and birding habitats to be found year around in this region of Great Lakes marshes, river deltas, inland lakes, coastal dunes, National Forest lands and Great Lakes harbors. There are several good birding spots within a 15-minute drive from Manistee. Farther afield, the Manistee River Valley stretching to the east to, and beyond, the town of Mesick, provides wonderful solitude and great hiking opportunities in the Manistee National Forest, and good birding as well.

## Onekama and Portage Lake

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 65, B5. 44°22', 86°16')

**Spring: \*\* Summer: \* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\***

Portage Lake and the village of Onekama are a resort center 11 miles north of Manistee. From the intersection of M-55 and US-31 go north east 3.1 miles on US-31 and turn left on M-22 (at the sign for the Little River Casino). Take M-22 north along scenic hillsides overlooking Lake Michigan and down the hill going around Portage Lake on your left. From the US-31 and M-22 corner, it is 6.9 miles to county road 598 (or Eight Mile Rd.). Just past county road 598 (or Eight Mile Rd.) M-22 jogs hard to the left and continues west, 0.3 miles from the intersection of M-22 and Eight Mile Rd. you will pass three blocks to 5<sup>th</sup> St. On the left side of M-22 is the entrance to a small parking lot for the Farr Center and the Onekama branch of the county library. Park here to scope the wetlands and east end of Portage Lake. Mute Swans are year around residents and overwinter where a stream enters the lake directly to the south and keeps some water open. Late fall is an excellent time to see hundreds of diving ducks including Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, both Scaup species, Bufflehead, American Goldeneye, all three Mergansers, American Wigeon, Gadwall and Green-winged Teal along with usually up to 2,000 American Coots. In addition to the Mute Swans, migrating Tundra Swans and a few Trumpeter Swans are present in late October through late November. Bald Eagles often sit in the large Cottonwood trees near the point visible from the Farr Center to the south. Shorebirds are present here in low numbers, usually both Yellowlegs, Killdeer, Spotted, Least, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Plovers, Dunlin and Pectoral.

To return to Orchard Beach State Park or Manistee take M-22 south 2.1 miles to Crescent Beach Rd. Turn right or west on Crescent Beach Rd. and go past the summer resort colony of Red Park to an intersection of a gravel road at 1.8 miles. This is the continuation of Crescent Beach Rd. as the paved road curves to the south as Lakeshore Rd. For a side trip to a small migrant trap in spring continue on the gravel road for 0.5 miles and park on the side of the road. This forest is on a point between Lake Michigan and Portage Lake (labeled Williamsport on some maps). All the land is private here but birding along the road is easy and safe with little traffic. Warbler watching is excellent during the first through third

week of May as birds concentrate along the lakeshores.

To return to Manistee follow the gravel portion of Crescent Beach Rd. back to its intersection with Lakeshore Rd. Lakeshore Road is a scenic winding drive along the Lake Michigan shore and through dunes and forests. There are many good spots to stop and watch along the road side, but watch for traffic. Despite the posted 35 mph speed limit the road looks like a drive in a television sports car add, and people drive like they're in one! A good spot to stop initially is at 2.6 miles from the intersection of Crescent Beach and Lakeshore. On the right and left are good dune side forests that attract flocks of migrants. Another spot where migrants seem to congregate is at mile 3.9. At 5.2 miles from the Crescent Beach Rd. intersection you will pass a beach on Lake Michigan on the right. This is a good place to stop and scan the lake for waterfowl. On the left side of the road is a small wetland that drains Bar Lake. During the months from late May through early August Black Terns are frequent here. 0.2 miles uphill on the right from the stop on the beach is the entrance to the Lake Bluff Audubon Center (see below).

### **Orchard Beach State Park**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 66, B4. 44□17', 86□19')

**Spring: \*\* Summer: \*\* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\*\***

From the intersection of M-55 and US 31 travel south to the intersection of M-110 (Lake Shore Rd.) 0.9 miles (*correct*) south of M-55. Turn right (north) on M-110 and go 1.4 miles to Orchard Beach State Park. This is a seasonal park open from March through November. There are trails through mature beech-maple forests on the east side of M-110 with migrant warblers and breeding birds similar to the Lake Bluff Center (NW-33). The more mature forest here sometimes attracts Blackburnian Warblers in summer and Barred Owls and Pileated Woodpeckers in winter. The main birding attraction at the state park, though, is across the road on the top of the bluffs along the Lake Michigan shore. The best observation point is directly west of the entrance station. During the winter huge flocks of Common Goldeneye and Buffleheads along with Greater Scaup and Long-tailed Ducks are more easily seen here than any other place along the northwest Michigan lakeshore. In mid February through mid March upwards of 5,000 to 20,000 Long-tailed Ducks are present. Other birds often seen here are Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, White-winged Scoters, Horned Grebes, and occasionally Red-necked Grebes, Surf and Black Scoters. During winter it is best to park at the closed front gate keeping off the shoulder of M-110.

### **Lake Bluff Audubon Center**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 66, B4. 44□17', 86□19')

**Spring: \*\*\* Summer: \*\* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\*\***

One half mile north of Orchard Beach State Park (1.9 miles north of US-31) on M-110 is the Lake Bluff Audubon Center. Watch for the entrance sign on the left. Turn into the drive and park near the house making sure not to block the driveway for others.

The Michigan Audubon Society owns the Lake Bluff Audubon Center, an area of forest,

meadows, and thickets with a beach on Lake Michigan and the Gray Family Home now used for local Audubon Society meetings and state society events. The 60-acre preserve is open to the public seven days a week. During the summer months there are tours of the grounds and the home.

The grounds around the home on the west side of Lakeshore Rd. are managed as an arboretum. Several interesting and state champion trees are here including the Sycamore Maple, a Mediterranean tree that survives here due to the moderating influence of Lake Michigan, and several Redwoods planted in the late 1950's but already starting to tower above the other trees. Some of the plantings are attractive to fruit eating birds in winter. Bohemian Waxwings are seen here in most winters and unusual birds such as Varied Thrushes have been found along with Michigan's first Ash-throated Flycatcher found just down the road in this area with loads of berry producing shrubs.

There are several loop trails mostly through second growth forests and edges. Across M-110 are the Jack Fern Trail and the Ridge Trail, with maps available at the trailhead. The longer Jack Fern loop is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile long over gently rolling hills. The best time to visit Lake Bluff is in mid-May during the peak of spring migration. The passage of a warm front with strong easterly winds, or a stalled cold front with fog, can produce fallouts as birds pile up along the Lake Michigan Shoreline. On one memorable May day the author saw 15 species of warblers in one small birch tree! In April warm days with strong easterly winds are also excellent for hawk migration, which is best viewed from the field directly east of the Gray home across M-110.

Summer resident birds found along the trails include Black-throated Blue Warblers, Yellow Warblers, Black-throated Green Warblers, Hermit and occasional Wood Thrushes. During the winter months the bluffs are an excellent area for viewing flocks of Common Goldeneyes and Buffleheads in Lake Michigan. All three species of Scoters have been seen here as well as Long-tailed Ducks and Red-necked and Horned Grebes. During the late spring from February through March there are often huge flocks of Long-tailed Ducks offshore as noted above at the state park, that can be viewed with a scope, as they tend to stay from a few hundred yards to a mile or more offshore.

## **Manistee North and South Pier**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 64, B4. 44°15', 86°21')

**Spring: \*\* Summer: - Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\*\***

Manistee's North Pier, jutting out into Lake Michigan, can provide interesting birding opportunities, though birders visit the South Pier more frequently. To reach the North Pier from the intersection of M-110 and US-31, take US-31 south. At 0.5 miles on the left or east side of US-31 is the Arthur St. Boat Ramp. This is a good stop in March to scan the ice edges of Manistee Lake for unusual gulls including annual Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. This can be a good spot to check for waterfowl but there is often fishing boats here that keep the waterfowl distant. At 0.7 miles south of the M110/US-31 intersection is Monroe St. Turn right or west on Monroe St. and continue across Washington St. at the stop sign west. 0.5 mile from the US-31/Monroe St. corner is Dune Dr. on the right. If you turn right here there is an entrance to a small park 0.1 mile from the turn on the right. There is a grove of oak trees and dense shrubs, an island of habitat for migrants in spring and fall. There is also access here to Man-made Lake and the Lake Michigan Beach. Continue on to a traffic circle at the Harbor Village development at 0.7 miles and continue to the right for until at 1.2 miles you will see a stop sign just before the US Coast

Guard Station. Turn right and park here or in the lot immediately to the left. Follow the base of the pier out to the lake. Shorebirds occasionally forage on the beach next to the pier. This pier has steel sides and does not attract shorebirds and as many ducks and gulls like the south pier but is a good platform for watching migrating gulls and ducks.

Manistee's South Pier is a cement and rock pier that juts out about 300 meters into Lake Michigan. Its rocky sides are covered with algae and recently invading zebra mussels. The pier is a magnet for passing shorebirds and waterfowl following the otherwise long open beach of Lake Michigan. During August Buff-breasted Sandpipers are often found at the base of the pier along with the more common Sanderlings, Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. Farther out past the "elbow" of the pier Baird's Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstones and Spotted Sandpipers like to probe the rocks. Piping Plovers have been seen here in August but this is not a nesting area. During late August and September many juvenile sandpipers stop here and it's a great spot for photographing these rather tame birds. The beach here is clean, and is wonderful for swimming after birding or as a diversion for non-birding spouses and families.

If you come in late November or early December forget the swimming, but be prepared for good birds! Thanksgiving weekend is the time that Purple Sandpipers often show up here and along the other piers of Lake Michigan and Harlequin Ducks may also join them. Wear very warm clothing and step carefully if there is freezing spray on the piers.

To reach the South Pier, from M-55, take US-31 south across the drawbridge and to the second stoplight at 2.2 miles to First Street, (three blocks south of the bridge over the Manistee River). Turn right (west) on First Street and go past the stoplight at Maple St. and to the end 1.2 miles from US-31 at a parking lot next to the beach. It is a short walk to the South Pier of the Manistee harbor.

### **Magoon Creek Natural Area**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 64, C4. 44°11', 86°23')

**Spring: \*\* Summer: \* Fall: \*\* Winter: \***

From the intersection of M-55 and US 31 in Manistee, drive south on US 31 for 4.0 miles and turn right on Red Apple Rd. As you travel west on Red Apple Road you will see the district office of the Manistee National Forest on the right of the road 0.2 miles west of US 31. Maps of all National Forest sites are available here as well as additional information. The entrance lobby is open 24 hours and the main lobby is open from 9:00 a.m. till 5:00 p.m.

Stay on Red Apple Road crossing Maple Rd. and at 2.0 miles from US-31 as it veers to the left (south) and continue 1.9 miles farther until you see the entrance sign and gate for Magoon Creek Natural Area on the right. Magoon Creek is another access to Lake Michigan for hikers and beach goers. Trails lead from two parking lots down to the beach on Lake Michigan and through second growth mixed oak-pine forests and hillsides planted with Autumn Olive that attract frugivorous birds in late fall and early spring. This is another excellent site to watch warblers and other spring passerines in mid May on days when they move up the shoreline due to weather.

### **Manistee State Game Area**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 65, B4. 44□15', 86□16')

**Spring: \*\*\* Summer: \*\*\* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\***

From the intersection of state highway M-55 and US 31 in Manistee, travel southeast on M-55 about ½ mile until you cross the bridge over the Manistee River. [Brian: M-55 goes southeast here it appears, not directly east, possibly causing some confusion on directions.] The first pull-offs on both side of the highway after the bridge end at gates for dikes that extend into the marshes of the Manistee State Game Area. The dike on the southwest side of M-55 goes about ½ mile to the west before bending to the south. The first ¼ mile borders a cattail marsh on the left and a shallow canal on the right that often has Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal and Green Herons in spring through fall. Alder and willow shrubs on the left of the dike are excellent places to find Willow Flycatchers in June. Just before the dike bends to the left west the dike briefly follows the Manistee River channel. In winter, early spring, and late fall the water remains open here and the sandbars present are loafing sites for gulls and ducks. Bald Eagles are regular visitors here and throughout the Manistee State Game Area. American and Least Bitterns and Marsh Wrens are found annually in the cattail marshes viewed especially to the left of the dike after it bends away from the Manistee River. It has been years since King Rails have been found here, but Virginia and Soras are still found and hopefully the King Rail will return.

Directly across the road from where you park the car there is another dike and path to the northeast. If this dike is followed for about 1/3 mile it ends at an observation tower built with funds from the local Audubon Society. This tower has a good view of wet meadows and the river. This is an excellent area for Sedge Wrens. [Brian: Is this the only area in the whole Game Area worth birding?] yes, other sections are too private for public access. BA

About one mile east of M-55 and US 31 is N. Main Street. Turn right (west) and travel about ½ mile through what looks like a tunnel of willows lining either side of the road (locals call this "Frog Alley") until you see a road to the right. This is the entrance to Penny Park, a boat launch and campground with a good vantage point looking over Manistee Lake and the delta of the Manistee River. Park in the lot adjacent to the guardrail next to the lake. Lake Michigan's water level affects the water level of Manistee Lake. At present there are excellent mudflats visible from this spot. Recent interesting records here include Plegadis Ibis sp. and both species of Godwits. Large rafts of American Coot, Ruddy Duck and Lesser Scaup are often seen here during migration with the help of a scope off the point visible directly west of Penny Park.

### **Manistee National Forest**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 65-66)

**Spring: \*\* Summer: \*\*\*\* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\***

(see locations on map)

### **(A) North Country Trail**

(DeLorme: p. 66, B1. 44□17', 85□52')

From the intersection of M-55 and US-31 in Manistee take M-55 east 15.3 miles to the

intersection of County Road 669 (High Bridge Road). Turn left (north) and go 5.4 miles to the village of Brethren, where there is gas and food, and where High Bridge Road intersects Coates Highway (just a two lane paved road) at the old high school. Turn right (east) on Coates Highway and go 7.1 miles to the parking area for a trailhead on the left side of the road, (left side of road?) of the North Country Trail, marked by a blue capped post. The trail to the north runs about 11 miles to the trailhead at Beers Road (NW-38) and links with the north end of the Manistee River Trail (see C below) by a pedestrian suspension bridge over the Manistee River. In spring and summer common birds along the trail include Scarlet Tanager, Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Hermit and Wood Thrush, Black-throated Green and Pine Warblers, and occasional Cerulean Warblers.

### **Red Bridge area**

(DeLorme: p. 66, B1. 44□17', 85□52')

The forest of the Red Bridge Area is a remnant of the once vast transition forest that covered northern Michigan. This area is attractive for its wooded hilly terrain with crystal clear streams and even some small waterfalls and especially for its breeding warblers including Blackburnian, Pine, Yellow-rumped, Cerulean, Mourning, and Golden-winged, and both Northern and Louisiana Waterthrushes.

Please prepare for any late spring or early summer trips by having insect repellent, hats and long sleeved clothing as this is an area with many black flies.

From the North Country Trail parking area, continue east on Coates Highway 0.6 miles to the intersection with Upper River Road. This dirt road travels north (Upper River Road – see D below) and south near the Manistee River, and is excellent in late spring and early summer for a mix of northern and southern warblers including Blackburnian, Mourning, Cerulean, and Louisiana Waterthrush on territory in May through June. The best way to find the warblers is to look for good habitat along the road and try to park well to the side. There are several streams descending steep ravines in the area that have singing Louisiana Waterthrushes. It is possible to hear both waterthrushes at once here if you stop next to a wooded swamp near one of the ravines. Along the road to the south (right) for a distance of 1.5 miles the forests on either side have been reliable for Cerulean Warbler for the past several years.

From the intersection of River Road and Coates Highway travel east 0.6 miles downhill to the parking lot at the bridge over the Manistee River. Locals call this spot “Red Bridge” named after the first old bridge on the spot. This is a scenic area with tall ridges rising up above the valley floor. The forest here is oak-pine northern transition on the ridges and cedar-red maple-yellow birch in the low river valley.

Hinton Creek flows into the Manistee River just south of Red Bridge. From the parking lot at Red Bridge cross the bridge and follow the two track on the south (right) side of the road to Hinton Creek. A rough path follows Hinton Creek to the east (left) and up a steep ravine. Here tall pines and hemlock and cedar shade the stream that tumbles down rapids and is home to foraging Louisiana Waterthrushes in early summer. Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Yellow-rumped, and Pine Warblers are all summer residents along the streamside. Blue-headed Vireos and Red-eyed Vireos are also common here from May until September.

### **(C) Manistee River Trail**

(DeLorme: p. 66, B1. 44□17', 85□51')

The Manistee River Trail trailhead is 0.3 miles east of Red Bridge, and covers the eastern half of a 22-mile hiking trail loop with the North Country trail. Maps of the trails are available at the Manistee National Forest Ranger station in Manistee ph. (231-723-2211) address 412 Red Apple Rd. Manistee, MI 49660.

In addition to the warblers mentioned above common birds seen along this trail during summer include Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Scarlet Tanagers, Bald Eagles, Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks and occasional Northern Goshawks.

### **(D) Upper River Road**

(DeLorme: p. 66, B1. 44□20', 85□51')

Upper River Road (labeled River Road in DeLorme) goes from the Coates Highway northeast to Hodenpyle Dam (NW-38) through an extensive forest, and is one of the best areas in northwest Michigan for breeding warblers. Although the area is scenic with high hills and valleys, Upper River Road is more utilitarian with a corridor for a high-tension electric line alongside. The birding here in late spring and early summer is excellent. An interesting mix of southern warblers such as Louisiana Waterthrush and Cerulean Warbler, with northern warblers including Blackburnian and Nashville, occurs here. The shrill calls of the Brown Creeper and drumming of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers adds to the interest of the area. Upper River Road is usually passable by most vehicles but may be difficult to travel in early spring after snowmelt and after heavy rains, as it becomes very potholed and muddy. It is not maintained or plowed in winter.

Upper River Road runs north from Coates Highway to its end at Hodenpyle Dam Road, a distance of 6.7 miles. There are a number of interesting areas, listed below by distance from Coates Highway.

- Mile 0.1:** On the left side of the road is the trailhead for the North Country Trail connector, with maps available.
- Mile 0.5:** A trail into the woods on the right and along the ridge is good for Blackburnian Warblers in the breeding season and excellent for migrating warblers in early to late May.
- Mile 0.6:** Going down a hill you can pull off the side of the road and listen for Veeries and Hermit Thrushes singing in the early morning or late evening from the tamarack forest in the valley below the left side of the road.
- Mile 0.9:** Mourning Warblers are found along a stream and the trail that follows it to the right.
- Mile 1.4:** The forests on either side of the road here can be checked for Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Brown Creeper.
- Mile 1.6:** A trail goes into the forest to the right of the road into an area with breeding Blackburnian Warblers and Blue-headed Vireos.
- Mile 2.7:** A clearcut with regenerating aspen that is good for Golden-winged Warblers, Chestnut-sided Warblers, and Nashville Warblers.
- Mile 3.1:** Another clearcut with similar habitat and birds as at mile 2.7.
- Mile 4.4:** Marilla Road comes in from the left. Stay to the right.
- Mile 4.7:** A good spot to check for Louisiana Waterthrush at the creek.
- Mile 5.1:** An extensive and older pine plantation with breeding Pine and Yellow-rumped Warblers and

Red-breasted Nuthatches.

**Mile 5.9:** An overlook of the river on the right is good for Bald Eagles in most months, and for waiting and watching for Broad-winged Hawks during summer months.

**Mile 6.3:** The road crosses Woodpecker Creek and there are pull-off parking areas on both sides of the road. Louisiana Waterthrush, Mourning Warbler and Red-shouldered Hawks have been found along the streamside here in late spring to early summer.

**Mile 6.7:** Upper River Road intersects the road to Hodenpyle Dam.

### **Hodenpyle Dam area**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 66, A1. 44°22', 85°49')

**Spring: \*\* Summer: \*\*\* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\***

From the north end of Upper River Road where it comes to a T intersection with an unmarked gravel road, turn right and go 0.2 miles to a parking area at the end of the road at the Hodenpyle Dam. Park here and walk up the steps to the portage site for a view out over the reservoir. In late fall diving ducks, Pied-billed and occasionally Horned Grebes can be seen here. Another trail goes to the down river portage and here flocks of Cliff Swallows that nest on the dam can be seen foraging over the river in spring and summer months.

Backtracking along the gravel road, continue straight ahead for 0.4 miles past Upper River Road on the left to a T intersection with Hodenpyle Dam Road. This road passes through second growth forests, home to Golden-winged and Mourning Warblers in May and June. Near the intersection with Hodenpyle Dam Road there is a wetland on the left. A power line crosses the wetland and provides perches for Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks in spring through fall and Rough-legged Hawks most years in late fall through March. American Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe can be heard here calling in the evenings in early April through May.

At Hodenpyle Dam Road, turn left and go 0.7 miles (the road becomes Beers Road as you cross into Manistee County) where you can access the Morilla Trailhead of the North Country Trail. As previously mentioned, this trail goes 11 miles south through hilly deciduous forests and ends at Coates Highway one mile from Red Bridge.

### **Mesick Area**

*By Brian Allen*

(DeLorme: p. 66, A2. 44°24', 85°42')

**Spring: \*\* Summer: \*\* Fall: \*\*\* Winter: \*\***

For most people traveling through northwest Michigan the Mesick area is either a beautiful, hilly (mountainous for us Midwesterners) portion of their drive, or a small town to pass through with an unusual name. The name Mesick (pronounced mee-sick) was not uttered by a stricken frontiersman but was the last name of the trappers that settled the area. Some of the last wild wolves in the Lower Peninsula were trapped here in the late 1800's. The annual Mesick Mushroom Festival attracts hundreds of tourists in early May as they search the forest floor for morel mushrooms just when birders are checking for the first wave of migrant warblers to pass through the wooded hillsides here. The main birding attraction in Mesick

is not in the hills but rather the valley of the Manistee River.

From Hodenpyle Dam Road, where it intersects the unmarked road to the dam, go northeast (a right turn from the dam) along Hodenpyle Dam Road 4.5 miles to M-115. Turn right onto M-115 and go up the steep hill. Just after crossing the Manistee River (0.6 miles) you will come to an attractive little park, Veteran's Memorial Park on the right (south), on the east bank of the Manistee River. There is a parking area with port-a-johns and picnic tables next to the roadside and a covered deck about 100 yards across an open grassy field to the south. The observation deck is a good spot to scope the sandbars and mudflats of the river for ducks, shorebirds and often Bald Eagles. There are Bald Eagle nests along the Manistee River in this area and the eagles frequently forage in the bend of the river visible from the deck. Mute Swans are permanent residents and may be easily seen in the winter when they are concentrated in the open unfrozen pools of fast flowing water.

Another good vantage spot for viewing riparian wetlands is at the Glencary Marsh. From Veteran's park drive east about 0.4 miles to the intersection of M-115 and M-37. Continue another 0.3 miles to Eugene Road on the north (left) side of M-37. Turn left and follow Eugene Road as it winds its way downhill to the ponds and marshes at 0.5 miles from M-37. Be careful to pull far off the road when parking, as cars often drop down the hill and travel down the road at high speeds. The ponds and marshes here are attractive to ducks and Mute Swans, and occasional American and Least Bitterns. The waters here in some of the ponds are spring-fed and stay open later in the winter.

To return to Manistee, take M-37 south to M-55 west.