

# The Birds and Waterfowl of the Chain of Lakes

By Raburn Howland

The Chain of Lakes and its adjacent land provide a wonderful area for bird watching. The Huron River, with its many lakes and tributaries, neighboring woodlands and fields has one of the most diverse collections of habitats in this area of Michigan. It is a remarkable region that makes it a great place to visit and explore, especially with children who might get a chance to see some spectacular birds, up close and personal.

For bird watchers, an added bonus is that the Huron runs between two of the best birding sanctuaries that one could wish for, and they quite accessible. The first is Hudson Mills Metro Park on North Territorial Road just east of Dexter Pinckney Road. It has miles of walking and hiking trails and is often referred to as a “warbler trap” by local birders, given the number of these very colorful birds that can be seen in and around the park. Just recently a paved path was completed along the river from Hudson Mills to Dexter that provides many wonderful views of the river as well as the local wildlife including wandering flocks of wild turkeys, Sandhill Cranes, Turkey Vultures, and local raptors including Bald Eagles and Red Tail Hawks.

The second area is the large and heavily wooded Stinchfield Woods, a University of Michigan preserve just west of Hudson Mills along and north of North Territorial road. There are many trails, some of which can be challenging but worth the effort because it is a major nesting area for a variety local birds.

The Huron River with its many lakes, large and small, provides habitat for many waterfowl such as Mallards, Canada Geese, Wood Ducks, Great Blue Herons, and Kingfishers to name a few of the more common ones. They all can be easily seen from anything that one can find to float down the river in, including inner tubes! The current is gentle, the depth is quite shallow in most areas and the water is warm, most of the time.

During migration seasons in the early spring and late fall/early winter these waters are major stopping off places for a much greater variety of birds and waterfowl as they participate in one of truly special spectacles of our natural world. On Portage Lake and Baseline Lake there are often flocks of many hundreds of Canada Geese, and several dozen different varieties of ducks. They are often being



*White Heron*

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*Heron*

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*Hummingbird*

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## Birds identified on the chain:

By Paul & Zara Rivera

- Common Loon
- Horned Grebe
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Canada Goose
- Mute Swan
- Trumpeter Swan
- Gadwall
- Mallard
- Common Pintail
- Wood Duck
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Lesser Scaup
- Greater Scaup
- Black Scoter
- Common Goldeneye
- Barrow's Goldeneye
- Bufflehead
- Ruddy Duck
- Common Merganser
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Hooded Merganser
- American Coot
- Herring Gull
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret
- Black Crowned Night Heron
- American Bittern
- Sandhill Crane
- Killdeer
- American Woodcock
- Common Snipe
- Wild Turkey
- Ring-necked Pheasant
- Red-Tailed Hawk
- Bald Eagle
- Osprey
- Turkey Vulture
- Mourning Dove
- Belted Kingfisher
- Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
- Rufous Hummingbird
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Common Flicker
- Red-Bellied Woodpecker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Barn Swallow
- Tree Swallow
- American Crow
- Northern Raven
- Blue Jay
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
- White-Breasted Nuthatch
- Eastern Bluebird
- American Robin
- Yellow Warbler
- Red-Winged Blackbird
- Common Grackle
- European Starling
- Northern Oriole
- Northern Cardinal
- American Goldfinch
- Red-Breasted Grosbeak

watched from the sky and shoreline by resident Bald Eagles looking for a meal. This especially true during freeze up when the open water on the lakes is greatly reduced concentrating the waterfowl into ever shrinking pools of water. In the depths of winter when everything freezes and some of the Mute Swans don't survive the cold they become food for the eagles, hawks and crows.

One of the later migrants is the Common Loon. One or two spend several days in May and November on Portage Lake. For me their haunting call is without equal. One of the things that make being on the Chain of Lakes so special.



*Sandhill Cranes*

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*Eagle Banded*



*Pileated Woodpecker*

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