

Birders Break Michigan Record for “The Big Sit!” at Shiawassee Refuge

October 12, 2008

A team of five birdwatchers called the Shiawassee Blue Geese set a new Michigan record for the most birds seen on “The Big Sit!” The team, comprised of Saginaw Valley Audubon Society members and refuge volunteers Larry Abraham, Steve Gasser, Jeff Sommer and Carolyn Szaroletta, and refuge manager Steve Kahl, were stationed atop Grefe Tower at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge. The team recorded 78 species, surpassing the previous record of 72. Especially noteworthy finds on the count include trumpeter swan, bald eagle, short-eared owl, barred owl, and Lincoln’s sparrow.



Grefe Tower is Shiawassee Refuge’s “Big Sit” location. Steven F. Kahl; 10/2008

Bird Watcher’s Digest organizes this global bird count described as “birding’s most sedentary event.” The object is to find as many bird species as possible during the calendar day from within a 17-foot diameter circle. Grefe Tower is an optimum location for the refuge’s circle because it overlooks thousands of acres of marsh, open water, grasslands, croplands and forest. Further, it affords excellent views of the horizon and open sky.

The primary purpose of Shiawassee Refuge is “for use as an inviolate sanctuary for migratory birds.” The refuge is recognized as an Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy and BirdLife International and it is a top destination for birders in the Midwest. Importantly, the refuge is not located in a flyway in which birds are concentrated into a small area because of a geographic funnel. In fact, the great diversity and abundance of birds found here is a consequence of the quality of habitat that the refuge provides. Thus, the long list of birds found on this event is encouraging to the refuge, because it demonstrates that our efforts are approved of by the birds.



Hooded merganser is one of 16 species of waterfowl found during the 2008 “Big Sit” at the refuge. Kim Le Blanc; 2006