

Flocks of WBCI volunteers spotted in La Crosse

by Ryan Brady, WBCI Bird Monitoring Coordinator

The Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI) recruits hundreds of volunteers annually to conduct priority statewide surveys for bird groups with information gaps, including nocturnal birds such as owls and whip-poor-wills and secretive marshbirds like rails and bitterns. On 6-7 November 2009, their dedicated efforts were recognized during a two-day celebration along the Mississippi River near La Crosse.



Dozens of WBCI volunteer bird monitors enjoyed a Friday evening of camaraderie and prizes while learning how the data they've collected fits into the bigger picture of bird conservation. WBCI staff gave overviews and updates on the various surveys, and volunteers used the opportunity to share stories, ask questions and provide comments about survey protocols and improvements. By night's end, a few lucky volunteers also left better equipped for birding thanks to generous donations from Eagle Optics.



Saturday's featured event was a field trip on the Mississippi River, where everyone was treated to one of the greatest migration spectacles in the Midwest. Thousands of whistling Tundra Swans greeted us at the Brownsville overlook, including one bird with a neck collar that was originally marked on the north slope of Alaska! Most participants saw more Canvasbacks in Pool 9 south of Lansing than they had in their lifetimes, with nearly 100,000 birds staging here. Throw in an unexpected Long-tailed Duck, a

fantastic migration of eagles that included several Golden's, and 70-degree sunshine and the result was a truly special day of November birding.

By all accounts, the 2009 WBCI Volunteer Birder Celebration was great fun and a big success. Here's a sample of what some participants had to say:

"Mark and I really enjoyed hearing all of the what's, why's, and what if's that you've put together. I've just printed a copy of the 2009 Owl Survey results and, as always, am completely impressed with what just a few hours of our time can morph into. I'm sure we're not the only ones to give you a huge thank you for keeping us up to date on all the latest...and offering new opportunities too!! Thank you again, so very much for letting us help."

"Thanks for coordinating the bird conference this past weekend, it was a blast. I had never seen so many swans and canvasbacks before. Amazing."



WBCI would like to thank all of the many volunteers who collectively donate thousands of hours toward monitoring each year. Bird conservation continues to benefit from your efforts.

For more information, please visit the WBCI Bird Monitoring website at <http://wiatri.net/projects/birdroutes/index.htm> or contact WBCI Bird Monitoring Coordinator, Ryan Brady, at 715.685.2933 or ryan.brady@wisconsin.gov.