

## **BIRD SONGS**

Newsletter of the  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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### **Officers**

John Randolph, President  
David Foster, Secretary  
Carne Andrews, Treasurer  
Jim Krakowski, Program Chair  
Linda Dunn, Membership



## **President's Message**

By John Randolph

Karin and I have been members of the Bird Club for four years, and so appreciate what we have been helped to learn, observe, and enjoy. For us, the slow process of reliably recognizing and remembering various bird songs is quite challenging, though we're hoping for long-term pay-offs. Our youngest daughter had urged us to study and learn a second language so as to stave off development of dementia, and I would like to think that hearing and identifying songbirds will qualify.

Having just begun a term as president this month, I want especially to express gratitude to Judy and Jon Cassady for their dedicated leadership and sustained hard work on behalf of the club. Judy's enthusiasm and positivity have set a welcoming and pleasant tone for our meetings and activities, and Jon's substantial contributions have been many, varied, and ongoing. Though they have completed their three years on the Bird Club Board, their presence and influence will continue to be a strong plus for us.

There is an Ad Hoc Committee working on revisions of the Club "Regulations" and "Policies and Procedures", prompted by an effort to comply with the North Lakeland Discovery Center's "Affiliate Organization Policy". Guy David has done considerable work in putting together draft revisions; other members of the committee are Jon Cassady, David Foster, and John Randolph. While the Board has the duty of reviewing and approving revisions, these matters will be discussed at some future club business meetings. Meanwhile, our wonderful birding outings continue.

## **Life List Quarterly**

By Guy David

### **Life List**

In the May Life List Quarterly I reported that the club life list stood at 237 species, which I consider to be a very noteworthy record. Since that time we have added 3 new species thanks to fortunate observations made during outings outside our immediate area. June was a very good month in this respect.

The club ventured on a trip to the Grantsburg, WI area and the Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area during the first weekend in June. Waiting for us there were sightings of life species number 238, Red-necked Grebes. We enjoyed full views through our spotting scopes. It would be easier to see this species in Canada at that time of year so being able to see that species in Wisconsin was a special and rare treat for all participants.

On the same day that the Red-necked Grebes were observed the club members also gathered for an evening trip to Crex Meadows in pursuit of other new life species for the club. That effort proved to be worthwhile because as we spent some quiet time listening for clues for the night vocalization of certain marsh dwellers, the group was treated to the calling of a Whip-poor-will, life species number 239. We drove a few miles of dikes and stopped often that night to listen for more new hard to find species while using an electronic device to broadcast species specific calls, but our efforts failed for the other targeted species. All the more reason to go again next year!

Species number 240 was encountered on June 30, 2011 during the club's trip to the Ashland, WI area. While birding in one of our usual areas a white swan was spotted and the immediate thought was Trumpeter Swan. But, when the bird came into full view, it could be seen that the swan's bill was not black but orange in color with a black knob which identified it as a Mute Swan!

### Annual List

As with the club's life list, we also are making great progress with our annual list. Last year the club recorded 193 species for the year which made 2010 a record breaking year for the club. So far for 2011 the club's annual list includes 157 species. Hmmmm. That makes 36 species to find and it already is August! Could be tough! Could be doable!

A fall trip to Ashland (Cackling Goose, Gadwall, Widgeon, Canvasback, Horned Grebe, shorebirds) Wisconsin Point (Jaeger, gulls, and terns), and Hawk Ridge (Sharp-shinned Hawk, Golden Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk) will help to add some of the

missing species compared to last year. Birding during the peak of fall migration will help since there are many species of birds of record (Swainson's Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Dark-eyed Junco) that are not usual summer residents. In addition, WINTER is coming. Yes, I said that! Winter residents that may be recorded during events like our Christmas bird counts such as Northern Shrike, Evening Grosbeak, Crossbills, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Bohemian Waxwing also will help. Maybe our field trip organizers will get us out there some evening in an open area around Labor Day to enjoy the annual fall migration of Common Nighthawks and maybe even come up with a Great-horned Owl. All of these species are missing from our annual list this year, so there is hope with some effort.

So, we have at least 36 reasons to keep at it for the rest of this year! That's enough for me. How about you? Can you lead us to a Red-headed Woodpecker? Black-backed Woodpecker? Boreal Chickadee? Horned Lark? Shorebirds galore?

## **“Birding by the River”: La Crosse WSO Convention, May 2011**

By Cynthia Krakowski

Jim and I attended the annual Wisconsin Society for Ornithology Convention this year held in La Crosse, WI. The event usually includes 2 full-day birding field trips, 2 half-day field trips, a half-day of indoor presentations, and an evening banquet. There are many choices for the field trips. The trips are always led by top-notch birders who have scouted the areas for the unique birds everyone wants to see. About 160 people from all over Wisconsin attended the event this year.

We elected to arrive one day late (missing 1 full-day field trip), but then participated in as many events as possible. On the Friday May 13 field trip, one could go north by car (Trempealeau NWR) or south by bus (Wyalusing SP). Since our dog “Meli” was with us, we took the north route. Jeff Baughman led our group; he has fantastic ears and

eyes for finding birds. The first stop was the refuge's grasslands for sparrows, followed by the lake for waterfowl, then the forest for warblers and other passerines. We continued to car caravan from one habitat to another throughout the day. We had great looks at a Black-billed Cuckoo, Red-headed Woodpecker, 12 Common Nighthawks day-roosting on tree branches close to the road, and numerous warblers



Prothonotary Warbler: 1 of only 2 cavity-nesting warblers.

Photo courtesy of Cynthia Krakowski

The next morning, Saturday May 14, we went on the Amsterdam Grasslands trip led by Dan Jackson. We learned about the grassland restoration efforts here and had great views of Henslow's, Field, Vesper, and Savannah Sparrows. Jim spotted a Harris's Sparrow and everyone had an opportunity to view it. This was an unexpected find and the only Harris's Sparrow found during the convention period! We also had good views of a Bell's Vireo, which is fairly common in this part of the state, but rare elsewhere.

The Saturday afternoon presentations started with "**Bird City Wisconsin**" by Carl Schwartz. Manitowish Waters was mentioned several times during the presentation and it was nice to see photos of the MW presentation ceremony. Next, the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Joel Trick gave the program "**Kirtland's Warblers in Wisconsin,**

**2007-2010**". In addition to the successful nests in Adams County, new sightings in Douglas and Bayfield Counties bring hope that this bird will return in numbers to Wisconsin. Then WIDNR biologist Andy Paulios gave an informative and entertaining program "**Nest Boxes, Mosquitoes and Humidity**" (**Prothonotary Warblers**). Andy reviewed the success he had using nest boxes for the cavity-nesting prothonotary warbler in the southwestern part of the state. Lastly, Noel Cutright gave a program on "**The New Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory**". Noel explained plans to develop a regional bird observatory at this Ozaukee County site.

During lunch we sat next to a group from the Plymouth Bird Club. We exchanged information about how our club's operated: field trips, programs, projects, etc. We told them our club might one day visit the Kettle Moraine State Forest, which is in their backyard.

## **Crex Meadows Field Trip a Big Success**

By Guy David

In what arguably was the club's most productive field trip so far for 2011, we outdid ourselves when we visited the Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area near Grantsburg, Wisconsin, just west of the St. Croix River.

After working so hard on Bird Fest 2011 and enjoying the very successful outcomes of that event, fourteen club members treated themselves to a weekend birding outing to a very special place we hadn't visited as a club before. Crex Meadows presents a unique wildlife habitat for Wisconsin because it occupies a portion of what is called the Northwest Wisconsin Pine Barrens. The area contains extensive sedge marshes and uplands with a thin, poorly developed topsoil over 100-300 feet of sand.



The Bird Club at Crex Meadows  
Photo by Guy David

Two hundred and seventy species of birds use the property along with nearly every mammal found in Wisconsin and a good variety of reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. One of the highlights of Crex is the number of endangered and threatened species. Crex has breeding populations of osprey, eagles, trumpeter swans, Karner blue butterflies, Bandings turtles, and Red-necked Grebes.



Jon Cassady studies the Crex Meadows landscape\*

It is notable that during our time spent in the field at Crex that club members enjoyed locating and identifying 97 of the species of birds residing in the

area on June 2 and 3, 2011. In one brief visit we found almost 36% of the species of birds to historically be found there!

Part of the trip included an evening outing organized and lead by Jim Krakowski as we tried to locate specialty birds like the Yellow Rail and Le Conte's Sparrow. Both species would have been 'lifers' for the club but we struck out on those. However, listening to a Whip-poor-will vocalizing and having a Barred Owl announce its presence over the din of the chorus of singing frogs made the evening outing a special experience for all who participated.

A number of birds were recorded that may represent the only opportunity for the club to observe them during 2011. Included were Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-necked Grebe, Caspian Tern, Black-billed Cuckoo, Whip-poor-will, Yellow-throated Vireo, Purple Martin, Brown Thrasher, Golden-winged Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, and Vesper Sparrow.



Black Tern at Crex Meadows\*

The popularity of birding at Crex is attributed to the large size of the property, spectacular, unobstructed vistas, a great diversity of bird species, and a system of well-maintained roads, observation areas and rest area which provide excellent access and abundant opportunities for viewing wildlife and the landscape.

Because of these factors, combined with the tremendous birding we enjoyed, it is highly likely the club will be planning another trip to Crex in the

not-so-distant future. After all, there still are about 173 species of birds to be found there yet!

[Additional note from David Foster]:

Two special moments of the Crex trip stand out for me. First, early in the morning of our second day as we prepared to leave the motel, a Black-Billed Cuckoo began calling just across the parking lot in Grantsburg. I have not heard a cuckoo since I moved to the northwoods a few years ago, so this was a real treat.

The other high point for me came in our multiple sightings of Bobolinks, which swooped over the grasslands frequently as we traveled the narrow hard-surface roads throughout the preserve. Bobolinks are a declining species not often seen in the northwoods, making their appearance in Crex Meadows a major feature of our day's spotting.

## NLDC Bird Signs Go In!

By David Foster



### Gen. Roche Instructs the Troops on Bird Signs\*

After several years of hard work, the Bird Club's goal of designing, constructing, and installing bird signs on the Discovery Center trails has been completed. The club has donated many hours of volunteer labor to the Center to achieve this goal. The project represents a strong collaboration

between Bird Club members and NLDC staff to design, produce and emplace the signs.



### Common Yellowthroat Sign on NLDC Trail\*

Featuring species from woodland birds to waterbirds, the array of signs can be found at strategic places on all NLDC trails. Printed on plates made of composite weatherproof materials and mounted on debarked wood posts, the signs explain how to identify the birds, describe their habitats and behavior, and map their range.



### Gen. Cassady Reviews Bird Sign Terrain \*

The signs were planned and designed by bird club members, who followed a “Look, Listen, Learn” pattern as they wrote the information for the signs.

Club member Guy David contributed many of the photographs on the signs, while the range maps came from the Cornell University Ornithology Lab.

Sarah Johnson, Director of the NLDC, patiently worked and reworked the graphic solutions needed to produce the signs.

Ryan Whalgren, NLDC Grounds Coordinator, worked with Jon Cassidy, Jim Krakowski, and David Foster to set the posts and attach the signs.

The Bird Club is now at work developing a descriptive brochure which will orient hikers to the locations and content of the signs.



The bird-sign installers at work\*

\*Photos in this issue by David Foster unless otherwise noted.