

# BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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## Officers

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Carne Andrews, Treasurer  
Jim Krakowski, Program Director  
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## President's Message

By John Randolph

The May 9 and 10 Northwoods' Birding Festival was again a most pleasing success, with a total of 94 bird species seen and heard during early morning Warbler Walks and subsequent field trips to a variety of beautiful habitats. I thought the programs were excellent, and believe that the Club did our customary great job with the hors d'oeuvres for the Friday evening social.

This year we have been graced with a number of strikingly lovely bird pictures from northwoods photographer Dave Franzen. (See his photo of a Manolia Warbler to the right.) Dave presented "A Photo Gallery of the Birds of Phelps, WI" at our July Bird Club meeting, which included an astounding variety of species, often in fascinating behavioral poses.

In the interest of balance, I think I should note what for me is the dark side of birding. Despite self-reminders, I find myself wanting to be first to utter the name of a bird seen or heard on our Club outings, constantly forgetting the price to be paid

in abject humiliation when my identification attempt is off mark. Thankfully, this is just internal, as Club members are kindly tolerant and generously instructive. Actually, the skills of our members regularly produce enjoyable and satisfying experiences each time we go out. For me, the joys of having a good look at a singing bird never seem to fade.

This morning, a goodly number of Club volunteers, under excellent direction from creator/builder Jim Krakowski, helped prepare the foundation of a Chimney Swift Tower, pouring water into and hoeing/shoveling mass quantities of cement mix. It will be very exciting to see the Swifts come.



## Southwest Birding, 2014.

by Guy David

Once again Bonnie and I were privileged to be able to go to Green Valley, AZ for the month of March, 2014. We have a lot of reasons to enjoy our trip there but, for me of course, it means finding some birds!

At home in Lac du Flambeau our birds were going through significant quantities of sunflower seed but our daily fare for species observations amounted to only about 10 species. I bet most of you could name them: Black-capped Chickadee; White-breasted Nuthatch and Red-breasted Nuthatch; Hairy, Downy and Pileated Woodpecker; Blue Jay, American Crow, occasional Common Raven, and hoards of American Goldfinch! We really enjoy having all of that life around us during the winter months but my heart was beginning to desire more variety. We headed south and found it!

On the way to AZ we usually stop and spend a day at the Bosque del Apache NWR and we got to do that this time too. My day out there was extremely windy and dusty, which hampered birding some, but it always is a reliable hotspot. After 10 species a day at home, finding 55 species in one place in one day was thrilling! Adding to the excitement was the discovery of 2 new species for my Life List. Volunteers at the Visitors Center informed me that a Golden-crowned Sparrow had been visiting their bird feeders right outside their picture window. So, I stayed around and watched for a while, as I ate my lunch, and it showed! How convenient! The bird was very secretive and nervous so I failed to get a documentary photo of it, but that's OK!

The other lifer I didn't even realize I had observed until a few days later when I had a chance to review my photos from the day. I found a lot of sparrows hanging around in some

shrubs and I got busy photographing them and didn't work hard to identify them on the spot. When I reviewed the photos I then realized that I had captured some photos of a Cassin's Sparrow, another life species for me. Two lifers, now that is a great day of birding!

The rest of the species at the Bosque del Apache were familiar from previous visits but it was so good to become reacquainted with so many species of waterfowl, raptors, and sparrows.

In Arizona I was able to visit many of the hotspots I was already familiar with as well as some new ones. For a couple of days we even had some bird club friends join us on some excursions. Duanne and Ann Swift were camping in the area for a few days and I was so excited that we were able to get together and have a great time!

During the month in AZ I tallied 101 species of birds. That was a little below my average annual production for down there but it wasn't for lack of effort. It was more of a case of lack of opportunity because a couple of hotspots, especially for waterfowl, were closed for construction work this year. It also was a very dry year in southeast AZ so some species weren't present in certain areas because of that.

One new species that I reported in eBird led to a challenge from the local eBird reviewer for the area. I reported a Cordilleran/Pacific-slope Flycatcher. The reviewer indicated that my report for the species was earlier in the season than expected so he wanted more documentation. No problem, I was able to send some very nice photos. It turned out that the two species can only be distinguished by their song, not by visual differences. The bird that we observed was very busy looking for food and not vocalizing, so it eventually was recorded as a Western Flycatcher because of my documentary photos.

It was a busy birding month. I know that because I recorded 26 checklists in eBird during the trip. Having used eBird every year that I have traveled to the area I know that my Life List for Arizona now includes 177 species, all from the southeast region of the State. My Life List for New Mexico includes 101 species now and all of those have been recorded at Bosque del Apache, only during the month of March when many migrants haven't begun to arrive yet.

So, of course, I spent some time looking for species I haven't seen before, which led to some frustration this year. I watched the local birding reports and there was a reliable Sinaloa Wren showing up at a well-documented spot. I did spend one morning to go and look for it but did not get lucky. There were other birders coming and going, each of them asking, "Did you see it? Did you see it?" I don't think that the Wren recognized "Did you see it" as a tantalizing Sinaloa Wren call so it stayed hidden. That bird still is being reported in that area so I simply missed it and didn't have time to go back again.

Another reliable report was that of a Rufous-capped Warbler in a canyon by Green Valley. Great! A birding friend of mine who lives in Tucson belongs to a local bird club and his club was going there to find it. So I joined in with great anticipation thinking what a great opportunity to go with birders who are experienced in the area! So the day came, we hiked up the mountain side on a rough and rocky trail, kicked up a lot of dust, got very tired, and found a lot of good birds but no Rufous-capped Warbler! Never mind the missed opportunity; we did have a lot of fun trying. Sound familiar for our NLDC Bird Club outings?

And then there is my personal perennial nemesis bird, the Elegant Trogon. I missed on that one again too, so I have several good reasons to go back again next year. There was one being reported in the area where we went to look for the Rufous-capped Warbler. One big highlight of that

outing was observing a Coopers Hawk soaring high in the sky. While watching it soar it set its wings to go into a power dive and appeared to be heading straight for us. As I watched it through my binocular it set its "landing gear" and got to be so close it over filled my binocular field, so I put the binocular down and continued to watch it dive down into the tree filled canyon. That was so thrilling to watch! It was absolutely the best raptor dive I ever had witnessed.

So, my birding friends just had to comment: "Yeah, I bet that Coopers Hawk just nailed that Elegant Trogon you have been searching for!"

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Photo by Guy David

Question: Why didn't the birds use the nest box?

Answer: Because the Paper Wasps got there first!

## NLDC Bird Club Chimney Swift Tower Project

By Cynthia Krakowski

The Chimney Swift is a tiny (5 ¼ inch) bird with a cigar shaped body that flies aloft all day long. Even the twigs they gather for nest material are broken from branches on the fly! Chimney Swifts roost at night. They are unique in that they cannot perch or stand; swifts must cling to a vertical surface to rest. Ninety- nine percent of the Chimney Swift population breeds in the United States; the other one percent in southern Canada. They winter in northwestern South America. The swift's nest is a half cup of twigs glued from the bird's saliva to the inside of a vertical shaft.

Before Europeans arrived in North America, Chimney Swifts used hollowed out snags in old growth trees for roosting and nesting. As our nation grew and became industrialized, the Swifts lost most of their natural roosting and nesting sites, but found brick chimneys were a suitable substitute. Unfortunately, the Chimney Swift population has been on the decline since the mid 1960's. The loss of roosting/nesting sites is believed to be the cause of this decline. The destruction or plugging of large, brick chimneys; the change to metal-lined chimneys (swifts cannot cling to them); and the transition to heating by electric and gas have all contributed to a drop in the Chimney Swift population by more than 65%!

Chimney Swifts feed exclusively on flying insects and a single swift will eat more than 1,000 mosquito-sized insects each day. We certainly need more of these birds in northern Wisconsin!

The National Audubon Society, the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology and Bird City Wisconsin

are all requesting that people do what they can to help this species. Building a tower specifically for Chimney Swifts is one way to help. Our Bird Club recently did just that: on July 12, 2014 members completed the construction of a Chimney Swift tower on the NLDC grounds!

Jim Krakowski proposed the project and members enthusiastically agreed upon it. The project was to construct a 12 foot wooden tower following the guidelines in the book, "Chimney Swift Towers – A Construction Guide" by Paul and Georgan Kyle. This book explains clearly how to build a tower. The authors stress that site selection is a critical component to make the tower attractive and safe for swifts. Jim located a suitable site at the Discovery Center adjacent to the main building with the help of NLDC staff member Heather Lumpkin. The location was approved by NLDC.



Cynthia Krakowski (left) and Isabella Weiss

Many Bird Club members assisted with the construction project. Jim K. acquired all the materials from various vendors and constructed some of the preliminary components. New member, Isabella Weiss, designed the artwork for the outer tower "skin". Isabella painted one large, detailed Chimney Swift and she & I painted the

silhouettes. Then two dates were scheduled for the onsite construction. The concrete foundation work was accomplished on Wednesday, 7/9/14 and required the most heavy labor. Bird Club members showed up in force at 8 am and the first section of the inner tower, secured in the concrete foundation, was completed by midmorning. This was after one mishap, when an irrigation line was severed during excavation for the concrete box requiring a new box location to be dug adjacent to the old one. After waiting 2 days for the concrete to harden, members met again on Saturday, 7/12/14 and completed the tower. Members who helped one or both days were: Katie Foley, Tom Etheridge, Amy Sheldon, Duane Swift, Jon & Judy Cassady, Carne Andrews, David Foster, John Randolph, Linda Dunn, Donna Roach, Barb Kaufman and Jim and me. In addition to our members, NLDC's Ryan Wahlgren played a major role in the construction process on both days. We are thankful for all his cooperation.



Crew for the foundation work

Now we have to be patient and hope some swifts fly near the tower and find it to their liking. This year's nesting season has most likely ended, but some swifts might be looking for roost sites later in the summer. However, there are not many Chimney Swifts in the Northwoods. We see small populations of Chimney Swifts living in Minocqua and Ashland and our Club saw a single swift fly over the Presque Isle ponds on a June field trip this year. Even if Swifts do not occupy The NLDC Tower, it will serve as an educational tool and model to inspire other people to assist in the conservation of this special, insect-eating bird.

There are only 12 towers in Wisconsin and The Clubs' tower is the furthest north. Minnesota has more than 100 towers. Retired Minnesota Audubon biologist, Ron Windingstad, reported to Jim K. that Minnesota has used playback calls to successfully attract CHSWs to new tower locations. Our Bird Club may wish to devise a plan to use this tool. In the near future, the Club would like to add a Chimney Swift information plaque near the base of the tower.



Bird Club President John Randolph and Board member Carne Andrews mixing. Three wheelbarrows were used to mix 21 bags of sacrete.



Ladder-work was required for the 12' tower.

Our plan to build a Chimney Swift Tower was submitted as part of the 2014 Manitowish Waters-Bird City Wisconsin application. This project has earned a Bird City Wisconsin “High Flyer” rating for the Town of Manitowish Waters!



Completed CHSW Tower. Bring on the swifts!!

## Wails in the Night

by Donna De Pape

We have been hearing the loud territorial yodeling of the common loon on Anvil Lake the last few nights. There’s a possible territorial dispute and it hasn’t been settled.

Anvil Lake has the fortune to be the home to two nesting loon families. For many years now, since the artificial nesting platforms were installed, loons have been successfully nesting and raising their chicks.



Artificial nesting platform with eagle guards, chick ramps and a single egg. By Donna De Pape

In recent years, floaters or rogue loons have also spent time on the lake and have attempted, sometimes with success to take over the territories. The territorial shouting matches are combined with very physical attempts to displace the other loon, which can end in death. One year the adult pair in the north east bay were challenged by a new pair and both established loons were ousted. We found one loon resting in the shallows in our bay, as far from the nesting platform as possible, utterly exhausted.

This spring the platforms were placed in the bays at ice out and the loons nested early. We were pleased...until it became evident that the loons were not staying on the nests and the eggs were

unprotected for longer periods of time. DNR loon specialist, Mike Meyer, shared the information that black flies specific to loons were causing numerous nest failures in Vilas County....and our two pairs were among those affected. Because the nesting platforms were designed to reduce natural predation, the abandoned eggs needed to be removed by the rangers. Then the female loons would hopefully have sufficient time to build up calcium reserves to lay a second set of eggs. On Anvil Lake that was the case; both pairs successfully hatched a single chick on their second attempt. Joan Galloway also reported a successful second nesting attempt on Clear Lake.

As loon rangers, Ingrid and I apprenticed to help Sandy Gillum, Anvil Lake's first loon ranger, along with a large group of eager" loonatics" on our lake. Sandy designed the artificial nesting platform widely used in Wisconsin.



Parent feeding one of the 2014 Anvil Lake chicks  
Photo by Steve Friebert

## **Squirrel Olympics?**

Some of you may be dealing with squirrels at your bird feeder. To get a sense about what you are really up against you might want to study this link sent from Elizabeth Stone. <http://youtube/DsuVLsDyln4>