

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the
Discovery Center Bird Club

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[Editor's Note: This issue includes reports on members' birding experiences in Florida in the early months of 2012].

President's Message

By John Randolph

Karin and I met Jon and Judy Cassady in 2007 at a Discovery Center birding hike at the Presque Isle ponds, led by David Foster. That outing led to our joining the Bird Club, which has been a major continuing highlight of our retirement up north. This February, Jon and Judy invited us to spend a week with them in Sebastian, Florida, as they were renting a place for most of the winter, which had an extra bedroom.

Jon made serious (and greatly productive) plans for each of the five full days we were there. We visited a range of parks and preserves, plus had the advantage of excellent views of various egrets, herons, Wood Stork and others in and around the pond directly below their windows. Of the seventy-three species we counted, my favorite is the Little Blue Heron (we also saw Tricolored, Green, and Great Blue Herons). In the bright sun, there is a mauve or purplish cast to the head and neck feathers of the Little Blue; his



gorgeous blue contrasts beautifully with light green legs and feet. Jon and I went kayaking on the Sebastian River, and were treated to a lovely and extended view of a soaring Swallow-tailed Kite, showing striking contrast between white head, breast, belly, underwing coverts, and black forked tail, primaries and secondaries.



Wood Stork Photo by John Randolph

On our last full day, the four of us joined members of the Pelican Island Audubon Society for an

outing. Zipping along at highway speed, Judy and I saw a Crested Caracara among several Black Vultures on the side of the road. Once there, the expert birders guided us to a very good look at an Orange-crowned Warbler, as well as many other warblers that we see up here, and other birds. On two different occasions, we saw a large alligator, both of which seemed to be about eight feet long and very wide-bodied (we looked down on one from a raised walk-way, a particularly close view).



Tricolored Heron Photo by Judy Cassady

It was wonderful to see so many different birds, especially those for the first time, though I really treasure the opportunity for a truly good look, in the bright sun. I don't keep a life list, but instead savor memories of special views (and, if I forget, the next look will be fresh and new).

Sax-Zim Bog Trip

By Carne Andrews

On Wednesday, February 15 at 9 AM, ten adventuresome Bird Club members departed for a two day field trip in search of winter birds at the Sax-Zim Bog Birding Area, about 35 miles north of Duluth, MN. Zach Wilson was at the wheel of the NLDC van. The temperature was in the 20's with overcast skies and mild westerly winds. Following a stop at the DOT visitor's information

center in Hurley, we headed west to our first scheduled stops in Ashland.

Initial sightings in Ashland were minimal at the airport, and due to the frozen Chequamegon Bay, at the ore dock, and marina. However, in Prentice Park and at the Long Bridge on Hwy 2, we found open water and observed a small flock of Mallards, four Black Ducks, a Mute Swan, the first American Robin of 2012, and a flock of Common Goldeneyes! Common Redpolls, Black-capped Chickadees, Rock Doves, American Crows, Common Ravens, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and a Herring Gull were also seen.

With excellent driving conditions, we decided to head north on Hwy. 13 in search of open water along the south shore of Lake Superior to Duluth.

BIRD CLUB TRIP – WYALUSING STATE PARK

There is still space available on the Bird Club's overnight trip to Wyalusing State Park, May 21-23, 2012. There will be a stop at Necedah NWR to see Whooping Cranes along the way. For more information contact Jim Krakowski; 239-776-5279 or jameskrakowski@msn.com

Following a quick stop at the popular Café Coco Artisan Bakery in Washburn for a hot drink and sandwich, we proceeded north on CTH C to Cornucopia, then west on Hwy 13 through Herbster and Port Wing back to Hwy 2. Views from scenic vistas along the highway revealed expanses of ice all along the Lake Superior shoreline. No waterfowl or other birds of interest were seen.

Stops at Wisconsin Point and the adjacent landfill revealed four American Eagles, a Hairy Woodpecker, a raft of hundreds of European Starlings perched in a stand of aspen trees comically adorned with plastic bags that had escaped the landfill. Some unidentified gulls disappeared over a mountain of refuse. With

some daylight left, we ventured into Duluth to check out the Canal Park shoreline and the location we were to meet our guide to Sax-Zim Bog the following morning. Birders from the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union (website moumn.org is worth a look) in the area for the Sax-Zim Bog Festival excitedly reported sightings of three rare gulls. We quickly scoped the open water but saw no unusual gulls. Before returning to Superior to check into the Baywalk Inn for the night, we enjoyed dinner and beverages at the popular Fitger's Brewhouse and Pub.



Birding at Sax-Zim Bog Photo by Guy David

Thursday morning we were up early for breakfast at 5 AM, checkout, and headed back to Canal Park at 6AM to meet Erik Bruhnke, our guide for the day. We traveled north on Hwy 53 about 35 miles. While en route and throughout the day, Erik provided explained why this nationally know IBA is home to a unique variety of boreal bird species the Bog, helpful bird ID tips, and. After a brief stop at the Super America Gas Station, we proceeded west into the center of the Sax-Zim Bog.

[Note: The Sax-Zim Bog, so named after parts of two townships within its borders, is widely accessible through a network of county and township roads. A printable map is available at <http://sax-zimbog.com/about-sax-zim/sax-zim->

[bog-map/](#) The day's specific route details are available on request.]

We spent the day riding through a variety of habitats--open frozen marshland, farmland, and northern boreal forest, learning from Erik how to tell a flying flock of Common Redpolls from White-winged Crossbills; general characteristics of Arctic birds with their shorter extremities and shorter bills; and how Gray Jays are being affected by climate change, which is causing their year-round caches to become rancid.

Erik led off-road hikes into two areas where stands of black spruce and tamarack had recently been logged and Great Gray Owl and Black-backed Woodpeckers are regularly seen, though not this day. Outer bark stripped from tamarack trees gave evidence of these large, bark-foraging woodpeckers.



Gray Jay Photo by Guy David

A highlight of the day was a photo-op at the feeder station on Admiral Road where many species were observed: Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, Hairy Woodpecker, 3 Gray Jays, flocks of White-winged Crossbills, Black-capped Chickadees, and a life bird for some of us, the Boreal Chickadee. Other sightings during the day in the Bog included Rough-legged Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Common Redpoll, American Crow, Common Raven, Northern Shrike, European Starling, House Sparrow, Rock Pigeon, Blue Jay, and Brown Creeper.

Following is a list of the species added to the bird club life list so far in 2012.

Location	Date	Species
Duluth-Canal Park	2/16/2012	Thayer's Gull
Duluth-Canal Park	2/16/2012	Great Black-backed Gull

Mid-afternoon we headed back to Duluth to find the gulls that had eluded us the day before. As we headed back to Hwy 53, we saw and scoped a Rough-legged Hawk perched and subsequently in flight. Back in Canal Park, we got extended looks and photos of two new birds to add to the DCBC lifelist--the Thayer's Gull and Great Black-backed Gull [see story below], and observe a flock of Mallards, a Bufflehead, and a few Rock Pigeons. Erik explained how to distinguish these rarer gulls from Herring Gulls and the Ring-billed Gulls commonly seen here in warmer months.

About 4 PM we gathered for a group picture and each of us received a pictorial greeting card from Erik as we thanked him for a memorable day. Thanks are due also to the NLDC for making the van and Zach available for the trip, and to BC participants Zach Wilson, John Randolph, Ed Marshall, Vanessa Lehman, Bob and Deb Harris, Jean Hanson, Katie Foley, and Guy David.

As I have mentioned many times before, the club's best chances to find new life-list species lie in birding outside our 'home range'. This was the case with these two gull species. It took two stops at a known hotspot before we were able to connect.

Both of these species of gulls are most likely to be found in Wisconsin on the Great Lakes. In the winter they may be easier to find in harbor areas where open water is found.

I searched for information of Thayer's Gull at the Cornell Lab Web site at: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Thayers_Gull/id/ac

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

Life List

Wow! That's about all that I can say regarding our 2012 progress on the club's life list. Ending 2011 with 240 species on the list, I thought it would be awhile before we added any new species in 2012. Yet this had already occurred on the club's first outing of the year, the trip to the Duluth and Sax-Zim Bog areas!

As reported elsewhere in this newsletter, club members enjoyed an outstanding overnight field trip in February. In addition to tallying some hard-to-get species for the club's 2012 annual list, some of us, including me, added species to our personal life lists. Observing Boreal Chickadees was an addition to my life list. The species had been observed and tallied by the club on June 18, 2009 during an outing to the Conover area that I had missed.



Thayer's Gull Photo by Guy David

The following quote speaks to how fortunate club members were to be in a time and place where this species could be observed.

"The Thayer's Gull breeds in the high Arctic of Canada and winters along the northern Pacific Coast. It has become a more common winter visitor to the Great

Lakes and the East Coast, but it is unknown whether increasing reports are due to increasingly eastward movement of the species or to more birders being aware of this rare gull.”

I also researched the Great Black-backed Gull at the Cornell Lab at:

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great_Black-backed_Gull/id/ac



Great Black-Backed Gull

Photo by Guy David

Here is a quote from that Web site regarding the status of this species.

“The largest gull in the world, the Great Black-backed Gull is primarily a coastal species. A bird of the North Atlantic, it has been expanding its breeding and wintering ranges farther south along the East Coast and into the Great Lakes.”

Having a great opportunity to observe these species was a treat for all who were on this outing. While seeing two new species was outstanding, participants went home longing for even more. People we met along the way mentioned that we ‘just missed’ a couple of other species that had left just before we got to Canal Park!

Our group had hoped to tally one or two new species in Sax-Zim Bog too, but it didn’t happen this time. So it goes...we gotta go back again, soon!

Annual List

As with our Life List, the club also has a great start on our 2012 Annual List. We have only had one outing as of this writing, but what an outing it was! We netted 27 species in the winter time!

Many of the species that were recorded are ones that we would expect to observe during our outings, but a few were unique and might have otherwise been missed this year.

- Common Goldeneye was first tallied by the club in 2009 and observed only once in 2011.
- Rough-legged Hawk was last tallied during the club’s 2008 Christmas Bird Count. After not recording this species the past 3 years, several were observed in Sax-Zim Bog.
- Gray Jay has been recorded twice each during 2011, 2010 and 2009. It was missed in 2008 and found only once in 2007.
- Boreal Chickadee, as mentioned herein, has been only recorded once before by the club.
- White-winged Crossbill was missed in 2011, recorded only once in 2010 and 2009, and 2 times in 2008 which was the first year that this species occurred on the club life list! All of the other club records for this species were recorded during Christmas Bird Counts.

Already having tallied 2 new life species and having recorded several species that have been uncommon for the club life list, I am really confident that the club will exceed the 180 species that we recorded for 2011. Maybe we’ll even surpass our 2010 record of 193 species.

This really fires me up as I am looking forward to our outings. More out of area field trips are already in the works and are sure to generate excitement. There are several members signed up for the Buena Vista Grasslands and Mead

Wildlife Area trip in April, and even more signed up for the trip to Wyalusing State Park in late May. These are going to be soooo gooooooood!



Purple Gallinule

Photo by Judy Cassady

Birding in Florida

By Judy Cassady

Jon and I arrived at Rex and Carol Percelle's home in Sebastian Dec. 18. Having missed both Christmas Bird Counts organized by the NLDC Bird Club, we were hoping to participate in the CBC in the Sebastian area. I contacted the Pelican Island Audubon Society, which is quite a bit larger than our NLDC Bird Club and was told that their plans had not been finalized. Since I had not heard from them by Dec. 25, Jon and I walked the Percelle's neighborhood and did our own CBC. With our limited knowledge of Florida birds, we came up with 10 species and about 122 birds including 2 Crested Caracara who flew right over our heads, and 2 Eurasian Collared Doves hanging out with the Mourning Doves on the wire behind the Percelle's house. The flock of about 14 White Ibis that are *always* at the small lake in that neighborhood were absent at our 7 am count. We found them later in the St. Sebastian Catholic Church yard. (Of course, it was the same flock! Everybody goes to church on Christmas!) Stopping at Riverside Park on the way back we

picked up 6 more species, 45 more birds counting the White Ibis flock and a Black Vulture perched on a wall near Hwy. 1.

The official South Brevard County CBC occurred Jan. 2, and included Sebastian, Fellsmere, and Indian River Estates to the Ocean shore. The 48 participants were divided into 12 teams. The teams together identified 154 bird species. Among the notable species were the Red-headed Woodpecker, American Avocet, Northern Flicker, and Prothonotary Warbler. Those of us who hadn't already received count sheets and instructions met the coordinator at Riverside Park at 5:30 am. It was still dark! But coffee and bagels were available. Jon and I were teamed with Roland John, our leader, who is an excellent birder from Florida's Space Coast. Our area included Stick Marsh, one of Jon's favorite fishing places. I'd never been there since I don't fish, but Jon said there are always a lot of birds there. Among the 43 species our team recorded, most notable to me were first time sightings of Loggerhead Shrikes, Roseate Spoonbills, Limpkin, Common Moorhen and Fish Crows.



Jon Cassady with Florida Scrub Jay

Photo by Judy Cassady

The Pelican Island Audubon Society has 2 meetings a month - the first Monday of the month at North County Library near Sebastian, and the third Monday at Vero Beach Community Center which is about 10 miles south of Sebastian. The PIAS website is www.pelicanislandaudubon.org.

The newsletter, The Peligram is very interesting and features a "Bird of the Month", and a "Plant of the Month". Included this month is a well written article on the field trip to Treasure Hammock Ranch. We participated in that outing and recorded 20 species including a Red-bellied Woodpecker helping himself to the fruit in an orange tree beside the barn, or possibly insects that had invaded the fruit.

Jon and I moved into the condo at Reflections on the River on Jan. 15, the first day of our lease. Our living room and bedroom windows overlook Mirror Lake. Fishing and swimming in the lake is prohibited. The birds enjoy it and we enjoy seeing a variety of Florida birds every day. Anhingas, Double Crested Cormorants, Wood Storks, Great Blue Herons, Little Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets, Mottled Ducks, Kingfishers, White Ibises and occasionally Roseate Spoonbills.

The interaction among the species is interesting, too. The Wood Storks, Herons, and Egrets will walk along the shore near the side of the lake where the Anhingas and Cormorants are diving or where the Mottled Ducks are dabbling. It appears that the divers and dabblers are stirring up the fish and other



Snowy Egret Photo by Judy Cassady

food sources to make feeding easier for the shore birds. A few days ago just before a rain shower, about 35 small egrets landed on the northwest shore of the lake with their backs to the lake. They were behind one of the villas that may have acted as a wind break, but they actually flew off before the rain came. Yesterday we saw a flock of about 50 gulls flying in circles and diving to the lake for only a few minutes. We identified Ring-billed Gulls and Laughing Gulls for sure.

Beyond the clubhouse on the other side of Mirror Lake, we can see the lagoon, commonly known as Indian River, the Intercoastal Waterway, the Spoil Islands, Pelican Island, and the Barrier Islands. Royal Terns are regulars at the end of the long dock at Reflections on the River. Brown Pelicans, White Pelicans, Osprey, and Black Vultures are regularly seen. When we go to the beach on the Atlantic, my favorite birds to watch are the Ruddy Turnstones, and the Sanderlings.

Jim and Cynthia Krakowski invited us to visit them at their home in Bonita Springs on Florida's west coast. The afternoon of our arrival we stopped at their favorite restaurant for take-out, then drove to Naples pier for a sunset picnic. A Snowy Egret was resting on the roof of the little building at the end of the pier. On another area of the roof two Boat-tailed Grackles were strutting with wings out in an apparent territorial standoff.

Jim's itinerary for us was incredible. For five days, the Krakowskis prepared a healthy breakfast for us, packed a picnic lunch, then we were off, birding in several habitats until late afternoon when we would return to their Cedar Creek home for a home cooked dinner. Jim and Cynthia belong to the Caloosa Bird Club of Fort Myers, and we were invited to join them for a bird hike at Tigertail Beach. The Reddish Egret, Short-billed Dowitcher, Yellow Crowned Night Heron, Piping Plovers, Western Sandpiper, Prairie Warbler, and Laughing Gull, birds I'd never seen before, were the highlights of this field trip for me. We also saw a dance-like display by two Great Blue Herons. We then drove to Marco Island where we checked the vacant lots for Burrowing Owls, another new bird for Jon and

me.



Red Shouldered Hawk

Photo by Judy Cassidy

The Leighigh Acres area was the first destination of the next day where among the 37 species that we saw was a Snail Kite. Enroute to our next stop, Lake Tafford, we noted a flock of Wood Storks busily feeding in a small pond. The Wood Stork's method of foraging for food is to walk along in shallow water and move its head back and forth with bill open in the water. The Limpkin was the new bird for me at Lake Tafford. A surprising sighting was a Little Blue Heron walking very nearly on the tail of an alligator. A friend of the Krakowskis had invited us to his yard to see the birds that frequented his bird feeders on the way back to Bonita Springs. We watched several pairs of Painted Buntings as well as a White Winged Dove. We also made a stop at the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, one of the National Wildlife Refuges that Jim had managed before he retired. A Brown-headed Nuthatch was a good sighting in the Refuge. We were introduced to members of a film crew there. The purpose of the film is to promote hiking, canoeing, and biking in natural Florida. Cynthia isn't sure if the film will be aired

on PBS nationally or only in Florida.

At Corkscrew Audubon Sanctuary boardwalk trails took us through several diverse habitats. We had a very good view of both a Barred Owl and a Red-Shouldered Hawk which is the most common hawk in Florida. At Everglades National Park,, Shark Valley, Jon and Jim rode bikes around the 15 mile paved track while Cynthia and I rode the tram on the same paved trail. We saw several alligators sunning themselves beside the canal. Of the 25 bird species I had recorded the White-eyed Vireo is the one I really had to work at to spot it.

The morning of our departure while Jon and Jim kayaked in a nearby river, Cynthia and I walked around their neighborhood which does in fact border Cedar Creek. We found 19 species including a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, a Great Crested Flycatcher, and a Common Gallinule.

We really appreciated Jim and Cynthia's personal bird tour of Florida's southwest coast. Birding in Florida is awesome!

Annual Birding Festival

This Year's Festival is shaping up to be one terrific weekend!

Friday, May 18: Evening Reception with Guest Speaker Mariette Nowak

Saturday, May 19: A full day of workshops and lectures. Keynote by Bill Volkert.

Register on NLDC website
www.discoverycenter.net

Club Participation Summary, 2012 GBBC

By Guy David

This is the first year that the Discovery Center Bird Club collected the Great Backyard Bird Count data from our participants. I volunteered to receive and compile our data in order to see what birds are being observed at local feeders. Following is a summary of the results that I have compiled based on the data that was shared with me.

Number of reporters: 10 (Guy David, Ann and Duane Swift, Pat Schwai, Sharon Lukas, Bob and Judy Ruch, Carne Andrews, Ed Marshall, Tom Kacena, John Randolph and David Foster)

Number of checklists submitted over 4 days: 25 [Guy David (3), Ann and Duane Swift (2), Pat Schwai (3), Sharon Lukas (3), Bob and Judy Ruch (1), Carne Andrews (1), Ed Marshall (4), Tom Kacena (4), John Randolph (1) and David Foster (3)]

Number of species reported: 20

Number of individual birds reported: 790

Species with highest number of individual birds reported: 390 Common Redpolls which were included on 21 of the 25 checklists (48.8% of total number of individual birds reported).

Species with the second highest number of birds reported: 116 Black-capped Chickadees which were included on 23 of the 25 checklists.

Species reported on only 1 to 3 checklists (thus proving that every checklist is important!)

- Trumpeter Swan = 2 checklists (Congratulations Ann and Duane Swift, and Carne Andrews)
- Ruffed Grouse = 1 checklist (Congratulations Sharon Lukas)

- Bald Eagle = 2 checklists (Congratulations Ann and Duane Swift, and Carne Andrews)
- Mourning Dove = 1 checklist (Congratulations Pat Schwai)
- Common Raven = 3 checklists (Congratulations Guy David, Bob and Judy Ruch, and David Foster)
- American Tree Sparrow = 2 checklists (congratulations Tom Kacena who reported them two days)
- Pine Grosbeak = 3 checklists (congratulations Sharon Lukas who reported them three days)
- Hoary Redpoll = 2 checklists (congratulations Pat Schwai and Guy David for nailing this rarity). Both birds were photographed and verified by an eBird authority.
- Pine Siskin = 3 checklists (Congratulations Carne Andrews who reported them 1 day and Tom Kacena who reported them 2 days)
- Participant with the highest number of individual birds on 1 checklist = Pat Schwai with 106 individual birds on February 17 (82 were Common Redpolls) which was 13.8% of the 769 birds reported for the 4 days!)

Participants reporting the highest number of individual birds over the four count days = Pat Schwai (166), Guy David (125), and David Foster (85)

I hope that all participants enjoyed participating in the GBBC this year and I thank all of them for submitting their data for our local bird club records. It will be interesting to see if we could increase our member participation in future years and it also will be interesting to see how the number birds of each species varies from year to year. Clearly, 2012 is a big year for Common Redpolls.

Following is a table that shows a summary of the data that was sent to me this year.

**Discovery Center Bird Club
2012 Great Backyard Bird Count Summary**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Total Birds	Total Checklists
Trumpeter Swan	<i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	14	2
Ruffed Grouse	<i>Bonasa umbellus</i>	1	1
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	3	2
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>	2	1
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>	19	11
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>	18	10
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	5	4
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	14	8
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	24	8
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	4	3
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>	116	23
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>	37	18
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>	20	13
American Tree Sparrow	<i>Spizella arborea</i>	3	2
Pine Grosbeak	<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>	14	3
Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	390	21
Hoary Redpoll *	<i>Carduelis hornemanni</i>	2	2
Pine Siskin	<i>Carduelis pinus</i>	4	3
American Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis tristis</i>	64	13
Evening Grosbeak	<i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i>	36	2
	Species Count	20	
	Total Birds	790	