

Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club



February, 2009

Vol.6, No. 1

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President's Report

By David Foster

Brrrrrr! It's been cold and snowy in the northwoods since November, giving us a great opportunity to give the birds good meals if not warm places. The Fosters' feeders have been busy, with flocks of redpolls, pine siskins, and evening grosbeaks every day, along with goldfinches and other winter residents. Boy, can those grosbeaks clean out a feeder fast! The seeds fly everywhere as they hog the feeder platforms, while the redpolls, siskins and goldfinches carpet the snow

underneath to catch the ample leavings. I think we're keeping the squirrel population healthy as well! Many sightings of crossbills have also been reported, along with an exciting view of a varied thrush, a rare transient from the American and Canadian west. Read Guy David's report on the Christmas bird census for details on winter birds counted in December.

As an antidote to the cold, our January social provided warmth, good food, fellowship, and an excellent program consisting of Guy's annual club photo retrospective, followed by a presentation and DVD from Brian Hoover of the LDF organization, describing the bird club's role in the tribal programs affecting Powell Marsh. At our February meeting, Bruce Greenhill, director of the North Lakeland Discovery Center, outlined planning, still in an

early stage, for a new lodge and accompanying redesign of the Center grounds and facilities. The bird club's birding trail signs, currently in preparation, will become a significant feature Of the Center's trails as the development plan takes shape in the future. This birding trail and its signs will extend the Discovery Center's nature trail network, demonstrating the important role played by the bird club in supporting the NLDC's offerings.

Planning for Birdfest 09, scheduled for May 15-16, 2009, is moving ahead well. The keynote speaker will be Andy Paulios of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative. Friday evening's events will include a reception and evening program. Saturday's schedule will feature early warbler walks, morning field trips, two periods of afternoon presentations, and a final time together. The success of our birdfest, now in its fifth year, testifies to our membership's dedication and hard work!



Photo by David Foster
Eat fast, guys! Somebody else might get some!

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

Unlike some publications that print erroneous information on their front page and then print a correction in small print in a tiny column buried deep in a later edition of the publication, I will admit my errors up front.

In my November 2008 Life List Quarterly column I reported that the club's life list species number 204 was a Willow Flycatcher. Actually, the Willow Flycatcher was recorded during Birdfest 2008. The species that was observed at the Presque Isle Ponds was the Olive-sided Flycatcher. I want to thank Jim Krakowski for notifying me regarding the error in my reporting. Jim also deserves credit for identifying the bird that was observed but unfamiliar to the rest of the group.

During my November column I mentioned that the club was having a good listing year in part because we had visited a variety of habitats during our outings. In this issue, the emphasis changed to the changing seasons in Wisconsin which is another reason for diversity in observing bird species in our area. Winter 2008 – 2009 has resulted in the addition of the White-winged Crossbill, Red Crossbill, and Varied Thrush. The crossbill species were added by various groups during our two Christmas Bird Counts which increased the club's life list total to 206 species as of the end of 2008.

Species number 207 was added on January 30, 2009 when a group of club members traveled to Rhinelander to observe a Varied Thrush that was staying in a rural residential neighborhood. Incredibly, the club added 9 new species to our life list in 2008 and we already added one for 2009!

The onset of winter also caused the club to appreciably add species to our annual list as well. In the November newsletter I reported that our annual list stood at 144 species which included species observed through the end of September 2008. At that time I was hoping that the Christmas Bird Counts would swell our annual list with winter birds. I am not disappointed because I can excitedly

announce that we added 10 species since my November report. The year ended with 154 species of birds on our annual list, which exceeded all of our other years except for 2006 when we recorded 158 species!

Following are the new species added to our 2008 annual list since my last report.

Location	Date	Species
Manitowish Waters CBC	12/14/2008	Northern Shrike, American Tree Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Common Redpoll
Minocqua CBC	12/20/2008	Rough-legged Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, House Finch, Red Crossbill, House Sparrow

Therefore, even though the club doesn't typically have many outings between October and April, winter is another advantageous variable that we enjoy in northern Wisconsin when we get to observe a good number of bird species that folks living south of us never have a reasonable opportunity to enjoy!

I can happily note that the club already had one outing in 2009 and it resulted in a new species for our life list. So, why wait for the Crane Count to have our next outing? Why wait for the 2009 Christmas Bird Counts to add winter species to our 2009 annual list?

It seems likely that we won't have the opportunity to see crossbills next winter like we do this winter. Since we are seeing so many Redpolls this winter, now would be our prime opportunity to look for Hoary Redpolls among all of the Common Redpolls. We know that winter finch species are highly variable from year to year and it may be awhile before we have such a good opportunity again.

A Thrush in Time

By David Foster

Sometimes luck is what's needed! When Vanessa Haese-Lehman notified Guy David that a varied thrush, a rare western visitor, was coming to Brian Karnosky's feeder near Rhinelander, Guy organized an expedition of hopeful birders to find the visitor and add her to the club's life list—and in most cases to their own as well.



Photo by Guy David
Varied Thrush

As we waited at Brian's windows for Ms. Thrush to show up, it seemed she might have spurned us—when suddenly, there she was, perched in a nearby maple taking her time to decide when to come to the feeder to eat. Many photos were taken and life lists increased by one beautifully colored thrush that morning. As Brian said later, "the diva" wasn't late the next morning, but "came early and was eating within 5 minutes after I had placed her buffet on the ground. Loves the Craisins, sunflower hearts, and chopped nuts." The club is very grateful for Brian's hospitality in giving us this unexpected pleasure.

2008 Minocqua Christmas Bird Count Report

By Guy David

Minocqua CBC

The 2008 Minocqua Christmas Bird Count was the eleventh time this count was conducted. The first count year for the Minocqua CBC was 1962-3 when 3 field observers in 1 party spent 8 party hours

looking for birds on January 1, 1963.

This information, which I gleaned from Wisconsin Society for Ornithology Archives, led to my realization that I was still in high school when this activity first began in the Minocqua area. The count was resurrected in 1982 and again in 1988. Again it faltered until another group took up the task and conducted counts in 1997 and 1998.

Beginning in 2006, the Discovery Center Bird Club resumed the historic Minocqua CBC and now we have completed this project for 3 years in a row. Congratulations, and thank you to all who have made the successful Minocqua CBC possible.

According to records that I have compiled there have been a total of 48 different species of birds observed during 11 counts. Of these species, 27 were recorded during the 2008 CBC. Following is the 2008 Minocqua CBC List and Tally.

2008 Species List	Tally
Mallard	1
Ruffed Grouse	2
Wild Turkey	20
Bald Eagle	7
Rough-legged Hawk	1
Mourning Dove	12
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1
Downy Woodpecker	17
Hairy Woodpecker	16
Pileated Woodpecker	15
Blue Jay	61
American Crow	68
Common Raven	31
Black-capped Chickadee	376
Red-breasted Nuthatch	44
White-breasted Nuthatch	49
Brown Creeper	4
American Robin	1
Cedar Waxwing	5
Snow Bunting	20(cw)
Red-winged Blackbird	1
House Finch	5
Red Crossbill	16
White-winged Crossbill	35
Common Redpoll	230
Pine Siskin	87
American Goldfinch	306
House Sparrow	7
Total Birds	1418
Total Species	27

Prior to 2008, the total species observed during the 10 other counts varied from 9 species in 1965 to 24 species in 2007. Therefore, in terms of total species observed during one count day, the 27 species recorded in 2008 broke all previous records for this count. Likewise, 2008 yielded more individual birds observed as we recorded 1,418 birds. Previous counts resulted in a low of 195 birds in 1965 to the previous high of 768 birds in 2007. Therefore, 2008 has been a very good year indeed!

Incredibly, there were 5 new species added to the historic Minocqua CBC list in 2008 including Wild Turkey, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, House Finch and Red Crossbill. The only thing incredible about adding the Wild Turkey this year was that they were missed in 2006 and 2007, even though we knew that they inhabit the area now.

The American Robin, while this was the first year for Minocqua CBC records, we also know that there are infrequent observations of this species in the area throughout recent winters but they were missed on the count days.

The Cedar Waxwing might be the biggest surprise this year. The winter months in northern Wisconsin are more likely to include Bohemian Waxwings, but this year 5 Cedar Waxwings were recorded. While I commonly observe Cedar Waxwings during the winter in Stevens Point, I have not ever seen them up north until this year.

It may be that House Finches have been observed during other counts but assumed to be Purple Finch. This year one knowledgeable observer carefully studied and recorded 5 House Finches. It certainly pays to pay attention to every bird seen because it would be much too easy to dismiss an observed bird as a common species.

As for the crossbills, every year we hope to see these species but their occurrence on the Minocqua CBC has been light indeed. This year, 2 groups reported a total of 16 Red Crossbills and 3 groups reported a total of 35 White-winged Crossbills. The only time crossbills have been reported previously was when 3 White-winged Crossbills were recorded in 1964. This year, therefore, was special in another way. The 2008 count was the first in which both

crossbill species have been recorded! Another milestone! Apparently our White Pine, Spruce, and Fir trees produced a good cone crop this year and our count participants were watchful for crossbills.



Photo by Bill Heins

Historically, there are certain species of birds that are found in appreciable numbers every year during the Christmas Bird Count. I bet most readers could name the top 10 without thinking about it too much! As you review the following data, you are permitted to be pretty smug about knowing these things!

No. of Yrs.	Species
11	Blue Jay
11	Black-capped Chickadee
11	White-breasted Nuthatch
10	Hairy Woodpecker
10	Common Raven
10	Red-breasted Nuthatch
9	Bald Eagle
9	Downy Woodpecker
8	Ruffed Grouse
8	American Crow

Well? Any surprises in this list? I would think not because some of them remain commonly present winter residents and some of them are just plain noticeable and easy to observe. The only surprise may be that some of these were missed during one or more counts, because we believe that they are permanent resident species. The most likely explanation is that some years there was a greater survey effort put forth than some other years!

There are other winter residents that we might expect to observe during any given count, but there

are fewer of them around and in some cases take more of an effort to observe. The Brown Creeper is a great example of one such species! Another species, the American Crow, is easily observed by either sight or sound, and they have been observed the last 7 counts in a row, but they were missed during 3 out of the 4 earliest counts. Again, this probably was attributable to those counts only having one field party covering a limited amount of the possible count area. The Barred Owl (2 counts) and Great-horned Owls (3 counts) also are thought to be permanently present. This year, despite 2 different observers spending 4 hours 'owling', they were missed again this year.

It is interesting the 14 of the 48 species found during all Minocqua CBC events have been found only once each! These species include the Canada Goose (2007), Wood Duck (1997), Hooded Merganser (1962), Wild Turkey (2008), Red-headed Woodpecker (1988), Boreal Chickadee (1997), Gold-crowned Kinglet (1998), American Robin (2008), Bohemian Waxwing (2007), Cedar Waxwing (2008), American Tree Sparrow (1998), Red Crossbill (2008), Common Grackle (1964), and House Finch (2008).

I continue to believe that the Minocqua CBC has a great future. There are bird rich habitats in the area and every year brings changes to our avian populations. I sincerely hope that all of our participants this year will be quick to sign up again for next year's count and that a few more will join in on the fun and excitement!

The Great Annual January Social!!

By David Foster

On a cold and snowy night in mid-January, the bird club enjoyed warmth, fellowship, and scenes from the year's activities at the annual January social held at Smokey's Restaurant in Manitowish Waters. The first hour raised our spirits with well-mixed spirits (have I repeated myself again?), followed by an excellent meal, and finally by the evening's featured program. Guy David's by-now annual club photo retrospective came first, followed by a presentation and DVD from Brian Hoover of the LDF organization, describing the bird club's role in

the tribal programs affecting Powell Marsh. Everyone went home well-fed, high-spirited, and grateful to Guy and Brian for a great program. See a gallery of photos below and on the next page, showing lots of people appearing to have lots of fun!



Whooh, are we full!—at least the program is good!



He's honored because he just won the guy-with-the-least-hair award!



They look suspiciously happy for a bunch of retired teachers!

Winter Bird Banding

By Judy Cassady

Jon and I attended the Winter Bird Banding class at the NLDC Saturday, Jan. 31. Naturalist Zach Wilson reminded us of the importance of banding as a research tool. He had set several traps in the area of the bird feeders at the Discovery Center.

The first bird caught was a black capped chickadee which had been banded May 2006. Zach told us that chickadees can live up to 12 years. He also told us that the male and female chickadees have the same coloring and size, so I didn't record the sex of this bird.



Zach demonstrated measurement of the wings, then recorded the date and number on the band. As a means of identification, the size of the bill was noted. Zach also pointed out the length of the tarsus and the position of the toes that enable the birds to cling to the trees.



The following are the birds that were caught, banded, and released: female Downy Woodpecker,

male Downy Woodpecker, female Red-breasted Nuthatch, male Red-breasted Nuthatch, female Hairy Woodpecker, male Hairy Woodpecker, and female White-breasted Nuthatch.

Just when you thought you'd heard everything--

Birder Attacked on Christmas Bird Count!!

On December 30th, I was helping with the Oconomowoc CBC. About 10:30 in the morning, I got out of my car to bird a residential area on Mill Road just east of State 67 and just south of the Dodge/Waukesha county line. I had birded this area a number of times in the past. It was an area of mature deciduous and coniferous trees and several bird feeders. I have had luck in the past in finding birds here - and had never felt threatened. I was standing in the middle of the road, facing south, and pishing. Suddenly I was struck on the top of my head. It felt as if someone had rapped me as hard as possible with their knuckles. My "fight or flight" paraphernalia went instantly into high gear. I spun around to confront my attacker. But there was no one to be seen. I stood there alone in the middle of the road!

It was then I noticed the Barred Owl. It was sitting on the branch of a tree hardly ten feet away. It looked at me with large dark eyes. But this look of innocence fooled me not a moment. I knew there sat my attacker. Fortunately, at the time of the assault, I was wearing a wool cap. What few strands of hair that still protrudes from my scalp came through unscathed. I was not bleeding and didn't even cry. But I did become wary. A few pish stops down the road, I attracted a Cooper's Hawk that landed in a tree very near me. I did not turn my back to this red-eyed beast from the forest deep - and I kept my wool cap on my head.

--from The Badger Birder, February 2009, page 4.

DON'T FORGET—
THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT
12-15 FEBRUARY! 15 minutes/ day
See www.birdsource.org/gbbc/

