

## **BIRD SONGS**

Newsletter of the  
Discovery Center Bird Club

---

February, 2013 Vol. 9, No. 3

David Foster, Editor

[davdfost@aol.com](mailto:davdfost@aol.com)

### **Officers**

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

## **President's Message**

*By John Randolph*

As this column is being written, there is a Bird Club outing to northern Iron County planned for Monday morning, February 25, led by naturalist Zach Wilson. I am confident that the trip will be very enjoyable, and there is hope that we'll see Red Crossbills (which would be a new life bird for the club). On a similar trip years ago, Club members were good-naturedly hassling Zach for failing to produce a Gray Jay, a prime goal for the day (as if it were his obligation to achieve success!). Near the end of the outing, though, we did have an excellent look at a handsome Gray Jay. Of course there are no guarantees, and we will certainly appreciate whatever birds we do see.

At the Birding Festival at the Discovery Center several years ago, Stan Tekiela was the keynote speaker. I remember being a bit disappointed in the weeks leading up to the Festival in the topic he had chosen, something like "Common Birds". As it turned out, his presentation was notably informative and fun. He even managed to



elicit grudging respect for Brown-headed Cowbirds, and discussed some research showing that when the Cowbird egg was removed from a particular songbird nest, the persistent creature came back to leave a new egg (one such bird, 25 times!). Now, at this time of year, there are a limited number of species coming to our feeders, and I remind myself to look at them as carefully as possible, knowing that I'll likely never remember every distinctive feature.

Several years ago, I copied the design of a friend, who had tied together two vinyl-covered wire cages for square cakes of suet, one on top of the other, so that the device was long enough to give Pileated Woodpeckers good leverage for their tail. Recently, he mentioned to me that he had seen that day a Hairy Woodpecker on one side of the suet and a Red-bellied Woodpecker on the other. It seemed like an interesting coincidence that I had seen the same combination that same day (he lives about 25 miles to the west of our place).

This winter and spring I'm planning to work on my bird identification skills--and the best strategy I've experienced thus far is using the [www.birderidentification.org](http://www.birderidentification.org) website. There are two separate tests, visual and auditory. The visual tests (both practice and "real" versions)

often feature birds partially hidden in vegetation, or in shadow, which makes it important to zero in on every available cue (head and bill shape, etc.).



Pileated Woodpecker on double suet feeder  
*Photo by John Randolph*

On another subject, David Foster has been editor of the Club's newsletter, *Bird Songs*, for at least five years, and will be turning this duty over to someone else this summer. I really appreciate the work Dave has done – there is a lovely format already set up, published online on the Bird Club's portion of the Discovery Center's website. The Club president does a column every issue, and members such as Guy David have regularly provided engaging content. We need a member to take Dave's place!

The 2013 Birding Festival at the Discovery Center is scheduled for May 10 and 11, with registration opening on March 1. Keynote speaker John Bates will also lead a warbling walk and later birding outing, and Club member Jim Krakowski will do the Friday evening presentation on the Passenger Pigeon. I have found John to be invariably inspiring and informative (always something new), and Jim is a highly skilled, experienced birder who conveys an appealing combination of expertise and enthusiasm. I hope you can take part.

### CRANE COUNT 2013

Save the date for the 2013 count on **Saturday, April 13 from 5:30 am to 7:30 am CDT**. Club members will be invited to participate by NLDC email.

## Life List Quarterly

*By Guy David*

### Life List

The bird club has concluded our 2012 birding outings with adding 14 new species, which means that the club's life list now includes 253 species of birds!

I noted in the November 2012 Life List Quarterly that all 13 of the new species added to the club life list were observed outside of the club's normal 'home range'. Therefore it is even more exciting that a new species was documented in the club's 'home range' since then during both the Minocqua Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 15, 2012 and the Manitowish Waters CBC on December 22, 2012.

New Life List species number 14 for 2012 is the Hoary Redpoll! Guy David and Ed Marshall teamed up to do the Northwest sector for the Minocqua CBC. They encountered a flock of about 30 Common Redpolls and found a Hoary Redpoll among them. On the same day Donna Roche's crew that also included Kay Hoff and Jean Hanson recorded multiple Hoary Redpolls at a bird feeder in the SE quadrant. A week later, during the Manitowish Waters CBC, Guy David spotted a Hoary Redpoll among a large flock of Common Redpolls in open country. Unfortunately the flock flushed before his partners, Ed Marshall and Peter Rasmussen, were able to key in on the bird.

Since the Hoary Redpoll is regarded as an uncommon and difficult to identify species, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (WSO) has the species listed as "Review Species Status". This means that observers are required to submit documentation to be reviewed by a committee before the WSO will accept the report. (See photo below).

Since our observations were made during a Christmas Bird Count, the National Audubon Society also requires submission of

documentation of “Review Species Status” birds before including the observations in CBC records. Therefore both Guy and Donna completed a CBC Rare Bird Documentation Form for each of our observations. Assuming our reports are accepted, that would mean that the club has successfully recorded the Hoary Redpoll in 2012 for both Oneida County (Minocqua CBC) and Vilas County (Manitowish Waters CBC). This would bring the club’s life total for Vilas County to 177 species and Oneida County to 148 species!



Hoary Redpoll

*Photo by Guy David*

### Annual List

The club’s annual list for 2012 ended at 191 species. Since my last report the club has been able to add 2 species to the club’s annual list due to successful Christmas Bird Counts. As reported above, Hoary Redpolls were added during both the Minocqua and Manitowish Waters Christmas Bird Counts by three different groups. The Pine Grosbeak also was added during the Christmas Bird Counts by several crews.

That concludes my bird observation record keeping for the club for 2012 and it is time to set up to begin recording our 2013 observations. I wonder what excitement the New Year will bring. Before I wrap up 2012 I would like to report on the club’s effort that resulted in observing 191 species in one year.

For 2012 I recorded bird observation records for a total of 39 club outings and we averaged 10.59 observers per outing. There were outings

conducted during every month of the year except for January, March, and November. Outings included Bird Fest 2012, overnight trips, day trips, and our regular Thursday outings.

Bird Fest, which was held on May 18 and 19, 2012, included 68 participants who collectively recorded 68 species of birds. Both numbers were well below previous Bird Fest results.

Overnight trips included the Duluth, MN area in February when 11 club members visited the Sax-Zim Bog in search of boreal species, Canal Park in Duluth in search of new species of gulls, and a few other hotspots along the way. That trip had low bird species production due to winter conditions but the group netted 27 species including 2 new life list species for the club, the Thayer’s Gull and Greater Black-backed Gull. The club owes a collective thank you to Carne Andrews for organizing that trip.

In April Guy David guided 7 club members to the Buena Vista Marsh and Mead Wildlife Area. This trip netted 72 species of birds. The main purpose of the trip was to utilize viewing blinds to observe Greater Prairie Chickens on their booming grounds. Not only did the group have a great time watching 13 Greater Prairie Chickens do their early morning thing, the group also enjoyed adding another life list species when a Short-eared Owl put on a great dawn aerial hunting display.

In what was arguably the most productive overnight trip of the year, Jim Krakowski lead 14 members to birding in the Prairie du Chien, WI region. Hotspots that the group visited included Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, Wyalusing State Park, La Reviere City Park, and Hogsback Prairie State Natural Area. Visiting these hot spots during the height of bird breeding season resulted in recording 94 species of birds. This trip also was a new Life List Species bonanza because the group recorded 9 new species including Eurasian-collared Dove, Acadian Flycatcher, Bell’s Vireo, Carolina Wren, Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, and Kentucky Warbler.



The fourth overnight trip of the year was organized by Guy David so that 14 club members attended the 2012 Grosbeaks Galore! A Birds On Your Landscape Workshop in Port Washington, WI. On the way down the group spent a half day at Horicon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge where another Life List species was recorded when we found 3 Snow Geese on one of the refuge impoundments. While finding 48 species of birds in 4 hours of birding at Horicon was pretty good the results still were disappointing. Due to drought conditions Horicon was devoid of water and mud flats so several species of birds that normally would be expected were absent. On the next day 14 more species were added to the trip list while attending a workshop field trip at Forest Beach Migratory Preserve. Even though 62 species isn't bad for a trip in October, it still fell well below expectations. Birding was limited due to rain and visibility during the workshop field trip and then, due to torrential rains, all birding planned for the next morning on our way home was completely washed out.

Day trips organized for bird club members included trips to the Ashland area (May and October); the Penokees and Saxon Harbor in August; and Ashland, Wisconsin Point and Hawk Ridge in September. The club also took a day to visit Birds in Art at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in October but that trip did not include any birding due to weather conditions.

In addition to all of these outings with a longer time period, club members also got to participate in and enjoy 22 Thursday morning outings organized by Donna Roche. Then the club's birding year was capped off by 2 Christmas Bird Counts organized by Guy David (Minocqua CBC) and John Bates (Manitowish Waters CBC).

All in all, 2012 was another great birding year for the Discovery Center Bird Club. Today, as I was finishing this article, I received notice from Carne Andrews that our first outing of the 2013 season is on the calendar with plans to travel the Island Lake area north of Mercer. I can't wait! Zach Wilson will be guiding us and we hope to net many of our possible winter species. Maybe

we'll "get" some species that we missed in 2012...like the Evening Grosbeak! Maybe we'll "get" a new species for our Life List...like the Red Crossbill!

Good enough reason for me to get out there early and often. Maybe 2013 will be the year when the club finally records our first 100 species day and/or our first 200 species year!!!



Ruffed Grouse in aggressive stance

*Photo by David Foster*

### **Attack Grouse On The Loose!**

At dusk late last fall, I stood on a ladder mounting the suet feeder on the dead birch tree just beyond our deck. Below me I heard a scrabbling in the leaves and looked down to see a grouse walking towards me. He looked up, then flew up onto the deck rail just behind me; as I looked over my shoulder, we stood eyeball to eyeball for thirty seconds. Suddenly he launched himself at my head, bounced off my neck, hit the suet feeder behind me, and dropped back into the leaves. He then walked out of sight.

I scrambled down and went inside to grab my camera. Coming out our side door, I started down the steps toward the garage. A whirring shape suddenly fanned past my head and dropped on the walkway below where it confronted me, calling sharply. My opponent again. It jumped into the air repeatedly in full aggression mode, its neck plumage spread wide as I photographed it. Finally it disappeared in the darkness.

I have found several references to grouse aggression, all pegged to behavior during mating season. Why was this guy so enraged late in the fall? A jilted lover? Still trying to defend territory? I don't know. But he wasn't done with me. He continued to appear in our driveway, jumping as I walked toward him, then vanishing into the woods. Our neighbor later reported being assaulted by a grouse during the same time period, so either this guy got around, or had a twin with the same anger-management issues.



Jean Harris admires a Green-Winged Teal carving by Bob Harris.  
*Photo by David Foster*



Kestrel Carving—Bob Harris  
*Photo by David Foster*

## **Bob Harris—Woodcarver Extraordinaire**

At the Bird Club monthly meeting on December 3, 2012, President Randolph welcomed club member and woodcarver Bob Harris for his presentation “Carve to Paint.” Bob spoke about the stages of learning woodcarving, then described how he selected and carved the wood, treated it with flame to get a patina, and painted the carvings with acrylic and airbrushed it to blend the colors. Bob brought several boxes full of carvings which he passed around to the delight of the audience. These included several decoy-sized carvings including a Canvasback and a Green-Winged Teal, as well as branch-mounted carvings including a Kestrel and a Cerulean Warbler. His skill as an artist/craftsman and his passion for birds were evident throughout.

## **Winter Finch Update**

*By Ryan Brady*

[The following article is excerpted by permission from the websites noted at the end]

Common Redpolls are now widespread across the northwoods, pretty much on schedule with most years. In the south they have been reported in only small numbers but appear to be very widespread.

Redpolls specialize in seeds/cones of birches, alders, willows, and tamaracks, where available. They also enjoy picking seeds of goldenrod, tansy, and other vegetation in weedy fields. Many birders know them as backyard feeder visitors where they prefer nyger (thistle) and black oil sunflower seeds. They usually start hitting feeders hard in late December and January and continue through their departure in early April. Look for Hoary Redpolls amidst these flocks and snap documentation photos if you can - this is a challenging identification issue.

Pine Grosbeaks are typically a slightly later-arriving species, but signs so far point to a least a good if not great year, perhaps as good or better than the excellent 2010-2011 winter season. Birders are finding them in decent numbers in their typical range up north, with the largest reported flock featuring 16 birds (eBird data here). They don't seem to wander southward as much as other irruptives but early reports out of Clark County and

Wausau bode well for at least central Wisconsin birders adding this species to their winter lists.



Male Pine Grosbeak

*Photo by David Foster*

Much like Bohemian Waxwings, the Pine Grosbeak is largely a fruit eater focusing on crabapples, mountain ash, buckthorn, etc. However, it is also a frequent visitor to feeders hosting black oil sunflower seeds, especially when fruit sources are lacking. Away from feeders, Pine Grosbeaks also show affinity for seeds from box elders and ashes. Look for this species' long profile and undulating overhead flight, often while giving its plaintive yet very "finchy" whistle.

The original article is at <http://ebird.org/content/wi/news/wisconsin2019s-winter-finch-update-1-1> and an update is at <http://ebird.org/content/wi/news/wisconsin2019s-winter-finch-update-2>