

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Report

By Judy Cassady

Happy New Year to North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Club members! I hope you have enjoyed the holidays and are looking forward to an interesting, educational, and fun 2010 with our exciting organization.

January is already busy with the Jan. 19 Birding Festival Planning Meeting, Jan. 20 Winter Social, and Jan. 25 Bird Club Board Meeting. Our regular 7 pm Feb. and Mar. meetings at the Bobcat Cabin fall on the 1st. Program subjects have yet to be disclosed. We can look forward to sharing bird sightings from our backyard feeders and whatever other surprises we encounter in watching feathered friends. Bird identification skills will be a part of all of our meetings as suggested at our November "Skull Session" program.

In April we will resume our Thursday Morning Birding Walks. In addition to seeing our migratory birds, our "snow bird" members will probably be returning. We hope to hear some interesting tales of bird sightings in other regions. May will see us busy with preparations for another great Birding Festival.

Be prepared to participate in surveys, projects, and interesting events. Our Bird Club has a web page in the Discovery Center web site. So check that out, keep your Bird Club newsletters handy, and attend as many meetings as you can. I don't want you to miss a thing! A word about Bird Club membership: The prerequisite for being a Bird Club member is that you are a member of the

Discovery Center. If you are unsure of your status as a Discovery Center member, you may call the office at 715 543-2085. If you have any suggestions or questions about the Bird Club, you may call me at 715 356-6230 or email me at jacquilt@verizon.net.

Happy birding!
Judy

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

It has been a very good year (and each year seems to get better)! As bird club members become more proficient birders our bird observation records become ever more impressive.

Learning to become better at being in the right place at the right time, i.e. when and where the birds are, we are becoming more successful at finding birds. Learning to become better at identifying birds that we encounter, i.e. being able to recognize species by sight and sound and applying other relevant clues, we are becoming more successful at identifying the birds that we do encounter.

Spending time in the field in the pursuit of birds also tends to increase our chances for encountering

various species of birds. Increasing our use of better equipment such as high quality binoculars and spotting scopes helps. Finally, sometimes it is just great to have an expert guiding us during our outings who know things that we are yet to learn.

Life List

At the end of 2007 we had 197 species recorded on the club's life list. At the conclusion of 2008 the bird club's life list stood at 206 species. Believing that the club had already recorded most of the commonly occurring species for our area, I thought that adding 9 new species in 2008 was quite commendable. I also thought that we were likely to add even fewer new species in 2009. I was WRONG!

At the conclusion of our 2009 birding year we had recorded 218 species to our life list! Yes, 12 new species were added. Following is a list of the species added to the bird club life list in 2009.

Location	Date	Species
Rhineland Home	1/3/2009	Varied Thrush: Guided by Vanessa Haese-Lehman who helped connect club members to a friend's bird feeders.
Crane Count, Powell Marsh	4/18/2009	Sharp-tailed Grouse: Lucky find by Guy David and Ed Marshall during the Crane Count.
Presque Isle Ponds	5/16/2009	Common Goldeneye: Observed by a Birdfest group guided by Guy David.
Presque Isle Ponds	5/16/2009	Long-billed Dowitcher: Observed by a Birdfest group and positively identified with the assistance of Darwin Wile.
Little Turtle Flowage	5/16/2009	Franklin's Gull: Observed by a Birdfest group and positively identified by Andy Paulios of the Wisconsin Bird

		Conservation Initiative.
Discovery Center	5/16/2009	Orange-crowned Warbler: Observed and reported by a morning warbler walk group, leader unknown.
Ashland	5/21/2009	Chimney Swift: Observed in town during a rest stop.
Ashland	5/21/2009	House Wren: Observed in town during a rest stop.
Powell Marsh	5/29/2009	Virginia Rail: Observed by an Elderhostel group and invited bird club members, lead by Troy Walters
Conover Area	6/18/2009	Boreal Chickadee: Observed during a field trip lead by Troy Walters.
Conover Area	6/18/2009	Vesper Sparrow: Observed during a field trip lead by Troy Walters.
Ashland	10/8/2009	Cackling Goose: Observed during a field trip because Jim Krakowski learned about their presence and arranged for a local guide to assist.

Annual List

The bird club's annual list for 2009 also is quite impressive since we were successful at observing, identifying, and recording 169 species! Given that the club's forays are mostly around the Lakeland area with occasional sorties further abroad, this is a significant result for our club outings.

It becomes easier to appreciate the achievement after comparing 2009 statistics to previous years. Consider the following:

Year	Number of Species	Number of Outings	Average Number Participants
2004	111	13	10.00
2005	150	29	11.86

2006	158	40	9.08
2007	150	40	8.35
2008	154	25	11.88
2009	169	38	9.87

It is hard to believe that I have been keeping these records for 6 years already! By a significant margin, the club's success with building our birding record in 2009 has resulted in the highest annual species count so far. While this is a great accomplishment, I know that we'll be even more successful in future years as we make gains in organization and proficiency. With good planning for club outings and field trips and improved proficiency as birders, I can see no reason why the club couldn't have a 200 species year in the near future. We know the birds are there!

Since I also record our outings and observations on eBird, our data represents a significant contribution to that citizen science database, which is a fact that the club should be proud of, given our affiliation with the North Lakeland Discovery Center and its mission.

Thank you to our members who take the initiative to plan and organize club outings each year. Without you the club members wouldn't be getting out, enjoying ourselves, and learning about birds and birding. Thank you also to all participants in our weekly outings, regular field trips, Birdfest, and Christmas Bird Counts. It is the cumulative effort of all who are involved that makes every club year better than the last.

Now, let's get out there and start building on our successes for 2010.

Our Birding Story—and Mine

By David Foster

What's your story as a birder? For most of us there's a story—maybe several of them--that explain how we came to be birders. And there's also a larger story as to how birding gained the dominant role in now has in the United States. All these stories feature how we see birds and know them. I've been reading several books that tell the American birding story: Scott Weidensaul's *Of A Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*, which begins in the 1700's; Mark Barrow, Jr.'s *A Passion For Birds*, which focuses on the last hundred and fifty years of American birding; and Roger Tory

Peterson's *All Things Reconsidered*, focusing on his many years of birding. I found it interesting to compare my individual story with these larger narratives, just to see how they fit. What I found is that seeing is a key in the history of American ornithology, and, I have realized, to my story as well.

When the first Europeans saw North American birds, there was no universal scientific classification system to use. They had to invent names for birds just to give them some kind of identity. They could only categorize them in terms of the Old World birds they were already familiar with—like the robin. For example, John White, an English explorer of the Carolinas in the seventeenth century, sent his watercolors back to England to amaze people with the abundance of strange birds he had seen. Later, in the nineteenth century after the scientific system of species naming had emerged, the painter John James Audubon identified and in some cases named over 400 birds of eastern and central North America, making lifelike depictions of these birds famous around Europe. Because Audubon could name American birds within the Latin-based system, he could identify them systematically for his readers. They could then pass along the knowledge they gained by relying on a shared system of identification.

Seeing birds is the key to identifying them. Does this sound simplistic? Consider that during most of the history of birding worldwide, optical instruments were not reliable for identification. Birds were shot to get them in hand-- the dominant method of reliable bird identification for hundreds of years. Only in the twentieth century when scopes and binoculars began to improve so observers could see detail clearly, did the tradition of killing birds for identification diminish. Shooting gave way for the most part to seeing and photographing as optical instruments and cameras improved. During this period, with the help of cameras and scopes, conservationists like John Burroughs, John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt brought the awareness of American wildlife into the American mainstream. Roger Tory Peterson tells how his field guides show the impact of optical empowerment. The paintings he made for early editions of the 1930s showed only the most visible features, because he knew his readers could not see much detail with the binoculars then available. In later editions of the 1970s and '80s, Peterson drew birds with much more color and detail because he knew his readers would be able to see them.

My life as a birder also began with seeing. As a kid I had always been nearsighted, a fact which had not registered with either my parents or my teachers, even though I could not read school blackboards or much else unless I held it close. So far as I knew, seeing the world as a colorful blur was just a version of normal. Then, when I was getting a physical for my first Boy Scout camp, I was told to read the eye chart. This simple act was a revelation to me and my parents. Within a week I walked out of the optometrist's shop with . . . my first pair of glasses! And oh the things I saw! The sky had clouds. Trees had leaves. Streets had signs, and people had faces recognizable at a distance. And most of all, I could see the birds I had just heard up till then. I suddenly began knowing the world in a new way.

I could see what I had only heard from a blurred distance before. I wanted to be able to name the birds I saw, recognize them, and connect the sights and sounds of their presence in the Virginia mountains where I lived. I got a pair of binoculars and began walking the woods with an old Golden Books guide, full of colorful pictures better to look at than to use in the field—a distinction I didn't recognize at the time. I remember the first time I watched a very small bird, gray above and white below, flit around our backyard singing a wheezy song. I flipped through the book and—bingo—there it was: a blue-gray gnatcatcher. I could see it, hear it, and identify it; what more could anyone want? I could track pileated woodpeckers to their nests high up in old trees. I could even see ever-present buzzards high in the air; eventually I learned to tell the turkey vultures from the black vultures by the amount of white in the wings—a detail I finally could see.

For decades afterwards my glasses-corrected eyesight plus a pair of 8x40 binoculars let me be part of the world of birds. Recently as age comes on, I have switched to 10x40s (which reduces the field but magnifies the image) and discovered what good scopes can do to help me see birds at distances Audubon could only have dreamed of.

Christmas Trip Compensations

By John Randolph

Although Karin and I were disappointed that our daughters and their families decided not to come to Minocqua for Christmas, we agreed to gather in

Memphis. We enjoyed seeing several Tufted Titmice, about nine Hooded Mergansers in their pond, and had an excellent view of a large group of ducks in a nearby nature preserve. We particularly appreciated having a very good and extended binocular view of Canvasbacks and Northern Shovelers – the male Shovelers are so striking (the trees and bushes on the shoreline served as somewhat of a blind). We stopped in Urbana, IL on the way back to visit Karin's 97 year old aunt, and I spent some time on computers in the retirement complex library looking at a small portion of the huge array of pictures and videos on the Internet Bird Collection: www.ibt.lynxeds.com. I'm not a member, but access to the pictures and videos is free. A great many of the birds are natives of other parts of the world, but the birds we see are there.

2009 CBC Report

By Guy David

One thing that is so interesting about the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is to note the things that are fairly consistent from year to year as well as what has been unique each year. The 2009 Manitowish Waters and Minocqua CBC events lived up to expectations.

Following is a summary table depicting the outcome of both counts.

Species	Minocqua	Manitowish Waters
Trumpeter Swan	0	8
Ruffed Grouse	0	1
Wild Turkey	36	13
Bald Eagle	7	3
Rock Pigeon	10	0
Mourning Dove	30	39
Great Horned Owl	1	0
Barred Owl	1	0
Red-bellied Woodpecker	4	0
Downy Woodpecker	21	40
Hairy Woodpecker	11	33
Pileated Woodpecker	17	4
Northern Shrike	0	1
Gray Jay	0	4
Blue Jay	57	98
American Crow	74	74
Common Raven	8	19
Black-capped	173	334

Chickadee		
Red-breasted Nuthatch	17	45
White-breasted Nuthatch	41	44
Brown Creeper	3	2
American Robin	0	1
Bohemian Waxwing	134	12
American Tree Sparrow	0	1
White-throated Sparrow	0	1
Dark-eyed Junco	0	4
Snow Bunting	7	0
White-winged Crossbill	0	10
Common Redpoll	0	50
Pine Siskin	62	17
American Goldfinch	71	117
Evening Grosbeak	0	3
House Sparrow	21	0
Total Species	22	27
Total Birds	806	978

Note that the species that yielded the highest number of individual birds is the Black-capped Chickadee. A check of my records reveals this observation to be true for every year for both counts.

Another observation that the data reveals is that there are certain species that can be relied upon to be present and counted every year. Among these species are the Bald Eagle, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch and White-breasted Nuthatch. It may be that these birds show for the CBC every year because they are large and visible or they are species that are coaxed to visit bird feeders where they can easily be observed and recorded. These are truly the winter hardy resident birds that are consistently in the area around the end of December when the CBC occurs every year.

Many of the remaining species on the list may be regularly in the area during CBC time but are harder to find. Examples of these intermittent 'no-shows' would be the Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, and Brown Creeper.

There are some species that are uncommon in the area during the winter but may be present in small numbers when conditions allow. Birds to be included in this group are the Rough-legged Hawk,

Red-bellied Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, and Snow Bunting.

Species that may show up more regularly on one count but not the other probably relate to some unique habitat feature that is more common in one count area than the other. For example, the Manitowish Waters count in recent years has featured Trumpeter Swans that are found in open water areas of the Manitowish River. On the other hand, the Minocqua count which includes a larger urban setting is more likely to yield Rock Pigeon and House Sparrow. Larger numbers of Bohemian Waxwing may more easily be found in the Minocqua area due to the relative abundance of fruit bearing trees such as the flowering crab.

Writing this article also requires acknowledging the importance of irruptive species. These are the species that are likely to result in huge numbers one year and few or none during another year. Last year both the Manitowish Waters and Minocqua CBC yielded a much higher total number of birds. This year the Manitowish Waters CBC yielded 978 birds compared to 1302 last year. This year the Minocqua CBC tallied 806 birds compared to 1219 last year.

The Common Redpoll provides the greatest tally difference between 2008 and 2009. In 2008 there was a combined a total of 522 Common Redpolls reported for the Minocqua and Manitowish Waters CBC. In 2009 there were 50 Common Redpolls reported for the Manitowish Waters CBC and none for the Minocqua CBC. The American Goldfinch count also was down this year with a combined total of 627 reported in 2008 and 188 for 2009.

Variability in numbers of birds goes to the plus side too and the big news species for the 2009 CBC is the Bohemian Waxwing that was present in large numbers and found by field counters on the count day. The Minocqua count has been devoid of Bohemian Waxwings during 10 out of 12 CBC years. The first time they were reported on the Minocqua count was 2007 when 20 birds were counted. Out of 17 CBC years that I have records for, the Bohemian Waxwing was reported 3 times (2002, 2005 and 2009). The 2009 CBC was a first time that this species was reported for both counts for a total number of 148 birds!

Thanks again to everybody who helped with the Christmas Bird Counts again this winter. I think

that the data shows that your efforts are productive and worthwhile, and we have a great time doing it!

The next *Birdsongs: Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club*, will be published in April, 2010.

Contributors should send articles and photos to davdfost@aol.com by April 10, 2010.