

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club

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Officers

Judy Cassady, President
John Randolph, Secretary
Jon Cassady, Treasurer
Jim Krakowski, Program Chair
Linda Dunn, Membership



President's Message

By Judy Cassady

Hello, Bird Club Members!

What a beautiful time of year we have been enjoying! After Jon and I journeyed to upstate NY in July to celebrate our grandson's 4th birthday, I have resumed my habit of briskly walking on the Bearskin Trail on the mornings that I'm not participating in Thursday a.m. bird hikes. The songbirds are quieter now, but I did enjoy the chatty one sided conversation of the Red-eyed Vireo and the magical music of the Hermit Thrush this morning. An older jogger passed me, that is, a jogger with no ipod earphones. Instead of the usual "good morning" greeting, I said, before she was too far ahead, "Listen for the Hermit Thrush! It sounds like a flute!" She turned around, still jogging in place. "What?" she inquired. I repeated my suggestion. She turned and jogged on. Soon she turned around in my direction, still jogging in place and gave me a high "thumbs up".

Hooray! Another convert to the appreciation of bird song!

This time of year, though, our best bets for identifying birds are habitat, color pattern, behavior, along with size and shape. Thank you Guy, Ann, Cynthia, and Donna for teaching us these birding basics with your programs based on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Our Bird Club was established June 4, 2005 according to the information on our web site. The B.C. Board has voted to move our Bird Club annual meeting and celebrate our Bird Club's 5th birthday on the first Monday in August. This change will give the treasurer additional time to prepare next year's budget after receiving the financial report from the Birding Festival. Some people view annual meetings as boring and neglect to attend. No Bird Club meeting, including the Annual one, is boring. We will have refreshments, election of officers, and maybe a surprise or two. I'm bringing a

big cake, and expecting a big crowd. We'll see you on Monday, August 2 at 7 p.m. in the Discovery Center Lodge.

PS--Jon and I listened to a CD book on our way to Ohio a couple of weeks ago: The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession by Mark Obmascik. If you haven't read the book I would highly recommend it as very entertaining.

Keep on birding! Judy

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

Wow! Since I reported in April, the club has gone 'over the top' with finding new species to add to our Annual List and our Life List. Check out this list of recent Life List additions!

Species	Date	Location	Outing Leader
Greater Prairie-Chicken	4/21/2010	Buena Vista Grasslands	Guy David
Western Meadowlark	4/21/2010	Buena Vista Grasslands	Guy David
Ruddy Duck	4/22/2010	Mead Wildlife Area	Guy David
Yellow-headed Blackbird	4/22/2010	Mead Wildlife Area	Guy David
Golden-winged Warbler	5/27/2010	Wilson Flowage Region	Jim Krakowski
Least Bittern	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Glossy Ibis ^	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
White-faced Ibis **	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Common Moorhen	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Black-necked Stilt **	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Ruddy Turnstone	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski

Forster's Tern	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Common Nighthawk	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Henslow's Sparrow	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Dickcissel	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski
Orchard Oriole	6/5/2010	Horicon NWR	Jim Krakowski

In my April 2010 column I expressed optimism that the club would be finding new life species for us because of some planned field trips that would take us to new territories, but our success far exceeded my expectations. Adding 17 new species to our list during one period of quarterly reporting is simply amazing! The club eBird Life List now features 233 species!

In April I reported that our eBird Life List includes 7 species that are listed by the WSO for Wisconsin as being Accidental (less than 1 record every 5 years), Casual (1 record every 1-5 years), and Rare (less than 9 records every year). As of this writing, our list now includes 10 of these species. The Glossy Ibis is listed as "Accidental." The White-faced Ibis and Black-necked Stilt are listed as "Casual". Talk about the right place at the right time, the club added three uncommon species in one day!

During our April 21-22 field trip the group was successful at observing Greater Prairie-Chickens and Western Meadowlarks in the Buena Vista Grasslands, and Ruddy Ducks and Yellow-headed Blackbirds in the Mead Wildlife Area. Please see the separate article in this newsletter regarding this field trip.

The Golden-winged Warbler was tallied during a field trip that Jim and Cynthia

Krakowski scouted ahead of time. After stopping at several likely locations, a representative of the species finally was located by the group by a stream crossing on Gates Lake Road.

The Horicon National Wildlife Refuge visit merits its own article which also is found elsewhere in this issue. The very unique ecosystem that comprises Horicon yielded a dozen new 'lifers' for the club which clearly supports the argument that finding a diverse variety of bird species requires visiting diverse habitats during specific times. This trip was a clear 'home run'!

As for the club's Annual List, 2010 has already been extraordinarily successful. As of mid-June our Annual List includes 170 species. This means that the club already has tallied more species in the first half of 2010 than were recorded during any previous year! Knowing that we already have an outing planned in September to visit the Mississippi River bottoms, that the fall shorebird migration is yet to come and maybe we'll get lucky this year, and that we may visit Hawk Ridge again, it appears that the Annual List has plenty of room to grow yet!

Let's go birding!!!

Banding Kestrels

By David Foster

As the Bird Club hiked around the open water of the Little Turtle Flowage on June 24, 2010, a pickup truck came bouncing up the road with smiling Bruce Bacon of the DNR and helpers inside. "Hey," he said, "I knew you were coming and wondered if you wanted to help me band some kestrel chicks!" Answer: Yes we did! So off we went down the road, arriving shortly at the nesting box in which a kestrel pair was raising their chicks.

Bruce and his helpers hauled out a ladder and climbed up to the box, opened it and

started gently collecting the chicks for banding. One, apparently an impatient sort, dove out onto the ground before the crew could get their hands on him. There were 3 males and 2 females, all five well nourished and healthy and showing much adult coloring.



Kestrel Chicks on Little Turtle Flowage
Photo by Guy David

Carefully Bruce and his crew measured and banded the chicks while the adult birds circled warily but kept their distance.

Bruce, a wildlife biologist for the Little Turtle Flowage, has been a good friend to the bird club since its inception. He's done bird banding at our annual Birdfest, given presentations about his osprey program, worked with Zach Wilson on owl banding programs at the Discovery Center, and taken the club on a memorable trip to the Superior area searching for great gray owls. Thanks again, Bruce, for all that you do for our club.

The Club's "Big Day" at Horicon Marsh

By Jim Krakowski

Twelve members of the NLDC's Bird Club visited Horicon Marsh on 6/5/10. The trip was organized by club members Jim and Cynthia Krakowski. Members were fortunate that Jeff and Suzanne Bahls led the trip for most of the day. Jeff is president of the Horicon Marsh Bird Club and proved to be a most informative host and guide. Horicon Marsh is the largest cattail marsh in the US. The upper two thirds of the marsh is Federal property managed by Horicon National Wildlife Refuge. The southern 1/3 is managed by the WI DNR.

Members were fortunate to observe 103 species, including 11 new Club life list species (**in bold below**). It was an intensive, 11 hr/day of birding which many members may not have experienced before, but we were rewarded for our efforts!



Bird Club Members visit Horicon Marsh
Photo by Guy David

The trip actually began Friday evening. Most of our group met at Helen's Kitchen in Waupun. Following dinner, our group "birded" Waupun County Park, hoping to

observe nocturnal species and walk off our gastronomic exploitations. We succeeded in spotting 24 species. Highlights included a **Common Nighthawk**, a Great Horned Owl (flew low over our group) and several other species not observed in the marsh the next day.

Saturday morning was sunny and full of anticipation, as the group gathered at 6 am to carpool around the marsh. Jeff and Suzanne met us in the hotel parking lot. Our first stop was Hwy 49 as it bisects the northern portion of the Marsh. Our group was immediately "wowed" by the expanse of the marsh and abundance of bird life. A Sora and Black-crowned Night-Heron greeted us; walking in plain view at the edge of the marsh, not 75 yards from the group!

There was a good assortment of ducks, coots, and White Pelicans to scope out. **Forster's Terns** flew low over the water. The American Coots had downy chicks in tow. We had close observations of Gadwall, Blue-winged Teal and American Wigeon and a group discussion on how to distinguish the male ducks by the color pattern of their 'butts'. A Virginia Rail walked out on a distant mudflat and our scopes brought the bird into view. Our scopes also helped us observe Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Ruddy Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Redheads and a Ruddy Turnstone; all were in beautiful breeding plumage. Canada Geese, Sandhill Cranes, Pied-billed Grebes, the Yellow-headed Blackbirds' quirky song and ducks and coots all provided a background chorus.

After several stops along the grasslands on the eastside of the marsh, we traversed the Dike Road that separates the northern Federal marsh from the southern State marsh. Jeff spotted a singing **Henslow's**

Sparrow in the grassland; we had stunning views of this rare bird. The Dike

Rd provided views of **Black-necked Stilts**, a **Common Moorhen**, 2 **White-faced Ibis**, and a **Glossy Ibis**. The stilt and ibis are southern birds that rarely occur in WI. We saw a beautiful Black-bellied Plover in breeding plumage. Black and Forster's Terns winged their way low over the marsh. American Bittern, Marsh and Sedge Wrens called from the cattails. Jeff discussed some of the marsh management issues.



Black-Crowned Night Heron at Horicon Marsh

Photo by Guy David

The next stop was Ledge Park, a few miles east of the marsh to view forest birds. This Co Park offers a limestone ridge trail that enables one to view the treetops below and the scenic countryside. It is noted as a great birding area during migration. Here we spotted **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** and had a great view of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Next was our lunch stop at the WI DNR's International Education Center (SE side of the marsh). Jeff Bahls set up a video presentation for us, "The History of Horicon Marsh" and answered questions afterward. Housed in a relatively new building, the Center provides a panoramic view of wetland habitat. Volunteers staff

the Center on weekends and there is a nice gift shop.

After lunch the group surveyed the old DNR office site overlooking the marsh and picked up Purple Martins, more ducks, and an Eastern Phoebe. On a tip from DNR Naturalist Bill Volkert, we observed a **Dickcissel** singing from a roadside telephone line east of the marsh. On Ledge Road leading into the marsh two members observed a **Least Bittern** flying at a distance. On the Marsh Road, a Common Tern (rare for Horicon) sat on a log alongside a few Forster's Terns for easy comparison. The day ended with rain as we traveled the auto tour route on the northwest side of the marsh. Fortunately, another Least Bittern was observed in flight by another carload of members. Hungry after a busy day outdoors, our group enjoyed dinner at Waupun's Sandy's Goose Shot and reviewed the bird tally for the day.

The next morning, our bird thirsty group again gathered at 6am, to bird a few hours prior to heading north. Although the weather was not as pleasant, we were able to reinforce some of the bird ids from the prior day. Off Hwy 49, we saw Green-winged Teal to verify Guy David's Saturday sighting. At the Hwy 49 NE overlook, Guy David heard a strange call from nearby trees. Guy quickly found the bird and called "**Orchard Oriole**" a life bird for him and the club! In a tree branch hanging over Marsh Road, Guy spotted a nest and nestling of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. On this road we also had great views of singing Willow Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pee-wee, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, and Indigo Bunting. The complete bird list can be obtained from Guy David. Horicon Marsh is a wetland of national importance. Club members were fortunate to get an informative and firsthand look at its history, habitat and birds.

A Loon Get-Together

By George Zickert

On July 17, coincidentally the same date as the Annual Loon Survey, we were on our Pontoon Boat in the AM on Gunlock Lake and saw a gathering of seven loons interacting with one another and three flying overhead. We watched them for a while and it was very interesting. There is a discussion of this type of a gathering in Tom Klein's *Loon Magic*, pages 93-94. I found nothing in either of my two Sibley guides. These gatherings, called "social flocking," consist of loons that have not mated and raised young, and are a common occurrence after the breeding season and chicks are hatched.

Tympanuchus cupido

By Guy David

"oo-loo-woo"... "oo-loo-woo"!

Listen! Quiet! Hear that? They're here!

"oo-loo-woo"... "oo-loo-woo"! "oo-loo-woo"... "oo-loo-woo"!

Yes! So that is what booming sounds like! I'll record the time.

What is the time? 5:08 a.m. and the action has already begun, even though we've only been in this blind for about 10 minutes! Their sound DOES resemble air blown across the top of a bottle! Should I open the porthole and take a peek? No, our guide told us to not open them until the booming is well underway. We want to see them and not scare them away. Besides that, it's too dark to see yet!

Wow, this trip already is worth it and we haven't even seen the Greater-prairie Chickens yet. We traveled to the area yesterday, left our motel at 4:00 a.m., met our guide at 4:30 a.m. and were in our blind before 5:00 a.m. It is cool and dark, the

quarters are cramped, and the excitement is building!

It's 5:15 a.m. and the sounds outside the blind seem to be constant, I think I'll take a peek. Oh, yeah, I can see them but it still is pretty dark.

Thus began the adventures of club members Guy David, Carne Andrews, and Katie Foley and our guests Charlotte and Nick when we gathered on April 21, 2010 to view the Greater-prairie Chickens on their booming grounds in the Buena Vista Grasslands.

After reserving the blinds through the U.W Stevens Point College of Natural Resources we were provided with literature about the birds and information regarding booming ground census methods. First, we needed to learn to distinguish cocks from hens. We learned that cocks have long (2-3 inch) neck feathers (pinnae) and orange eyebrows are quite obvious, even when cocks are not booming. The pinnae of hens are shorter (1-inch), they lack the orange eyebrow and they do not boom.



Club Members in the Blind

Photo by Guy David

We were provided with census forms and were asked to participate in census procedures as citizen scientists by recording the following information:

1. Number of cocks and females at first light.

2. Number of cocks and females every 30 minutes.
3. Final count of cocks before leaving the blind and when they flush as we leave the blind.
4. Note any disturbances or interactions with other animals, other chickens, or humans.
5. Sketch and number cock territories to help keep track of chickens.
6. Include general information such as date, weather, and any other helpful observations.

As we observed the booming grounds over the next 2 hours we were able to count 11 actively booming cocks and 3 females. One female appeared only briefly and then left. The other 2 females wandered throughout the booming males territories creating excitement, fights and frenzy among the males.

since the cocks had all become quiet and were no longer displaying. When we exited the blind we counted the number of birds that we had flushed and were surprised that there were 13 of them. We had not seen all of the birds that were present from our blind.



Prairie Chicken hen

Photo by Guy David



Prairie Chicken cock

Photo by Guy David

The second female left the lek around 6:50 a.m. leaving one for the 11 males to court. Around 7:05 a.m. it appeared that the remaining female allowed a male to mount her three times. After that was over, the female ruffled her feathers and then flew off.

After taking some group photos to document the occasion, completing the record keeping, and securing the blind for the day, the group proceeded to bird the Buena Vista Grasslands for a few more hours. For the entire day we recorded 45 species of birds including 2 new species for the club life list, the Greater-prairie Chicken and Western Meadowlark.

If you are interested in learning more about the habitat, history and management of the Greater-prairie Chicken or signing up to view them on their booming grounds next spring, check this Web site:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/wildlife/pchicken/index.aspx>

Having been instructed by our guide to remain in the blind until all females have left, we decided to exit around 7:15 a.m.

