

# BIRD SONGS

## Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club

June, 2009

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**Betty Murphy**  
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**Jon Cassady**  
Director and  
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Chair

## President's Report

*By David Foster*

This will be my last President's report, which I was going to start by saying that summer's here and the birding is fine. Well, the birding is fine but summer is slow in coming. On June 1 at 6 AM, the first Shoreline Survey participants marched bravely into--cold and wind. Brrrrr!

On June 1 our new Board of Directors took office, with Judy Cassady becoming president, John Randolph secretary, Betty Murphy treasurer, Jon Cassady program director, and Ann Swift Membership chair. The new board will take over leadership of a truly hyperactive bird club! At our June 1 meeting I reviewed as many of our activities as I could think of, but we do so much it wasn't easy! Suffice to say we are very busy this summer, with bird outings each Thursday and several special projects that will keep us going throughout the summer.

Work for the Shoreline Survey, on a DNR contract administered by the Discovery Center and managed by Zach Wilson, will keep many of us busy throughout June. Later in the summer the Birding Trail sign project, under Sarah Johnson's leadership, could be at a point



where signs are ready to mount and place in the ground. This trail with its signs will become a significant feature of the Discovery Center's trail system, extending the nature trail network, and demonstrating the important role played by the bird club in supporting the NLDC's offerings.

Thanks for the privilege of serving the Bird Club. It has been a good year for the club, with another great year already begun!



*Bird Club Directors—2009-2010*

*Left front: Jon Cassady, Judy Cassady  
Left rear: John Randolph, Ann Swift,  
Betty Murphy*

*Photo by Guy David.*

## Life List Quarterly

*By Guy David*

As reported in the February 2009 newsletter, species number 207, the Varied Thrush, was added on January 30, 2009 when a group of club members traveled to observe a bird that had been reported to be regularly visiting a yard with bird feeders.

The club has recorded species during 8 outings so far in 2009. The ninth outing that is scheduled is our annual visit to the Fifield Nature Center on May 28, 2009. During the 8 outings the club has had great success with welcoming the migrating birds back to the northland.

As of May 21, 2009 the club's annual list already included 128 species. Considering that our annual total species count for 2008 was 154, I have to believe that this is going to be a banner year for our annual list! I hope that our field trip organizers continue to do such a great job of scheduling our outings in prime habitat during prime birding times.



*Cold and windblown Birdfest 2009 attendees view a Long-billed Dowitcher at the Presque Isle Ponds.*

*Photo by Guy David.*

Not only has the club been having a great year already for our annual list, we also are having a great year for adding new species to our club life list.

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

Lac du Flambeau	Powell Marsh	April 18, 2009	Sharp-tailed Grouse
Presque Isle	Presque Isle Ponds	May 16, 2009	Common Goldeneye
Presque Isle	Presque Isle Ponds	May 16, 2009	Long-billed Dowitcher
Mercer	Little Turtle Flowage	May 16, 2009	Franklin's Gull
Manitowish Waters	Discovery Center Trails	May 16, 2009	Orange-crowned Warbler
Ashland	In town	May 21, 2009	House Wren
Ashland	In town	May 21, 2009	Chimney Swift

Yes, the Discovery Center Bird Club now has 214 species for our life list. I think that it is really commendable that we have been able to add 8 new species already in 2009!

The Sharp-tailed Grouse was spotted by Ed Marshall and Guy David while participating in the International Crane Count. Guy was able to return on a later date and find either 2 or 3 Sharp-tailed Grouse in the same area. One was photographed and the photo was sent to Andy Paulios of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative. Andy's reply indicated a great amount of interest in the report and he indicated that the WDNR's Sharp-tailed Grouse Study Team will be checking the area this summer. The Common Goldeneye and Long-Billed Dowitcher were found at the Presque Isle Ponds during Birdfest 2009. Guy David and David Foster lead the outing, so in preparation Guy scouted the area the day before Birdfest and was surprised by how many shorebirds were occupying the shoreline of the main pond. Not feeling confident in shorebird identification, Guy asked Darwin Wile to accompany the field trip to help with shorebird identification. Thanks to Darwin, whose expertise in shorebird identification is outstanding, the group was able to identify several shorebird species, including the Long-billed Dowitcher.

The Orange-crowned Warbler was recorded during the Sunrise Warbler hikes during Birdfest, and the House Wren and Chimney Swift were observed

Location	Date	Species
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and identified by the group that traveled to Ashland for a day of birding.

Wow! All of this and the breeding bird season is just getting seriously underway! Who knows what treasures are yet to be found in 2009? Y'all better just join in on the fun and see for yourselves!

## Listening to an American Bittern

By Jim Krakowski

On May 5, 2009, on Squaw Creek, Pike Lake Chain in Price County, my wife Cynthia and I observed an American Bittern performing its "courtship pumping song." We had been hearing an American Bittern "singing" for the last few days in the marsh adjacent to our house on Squaw Creek. I've heard this bird many times in the past, in many parts of the country, but never have I observed the bittern while it was singing! I always wondered what type of contortions this bird went through to make such an unusual sound. On this May 5 evening, the Bittern was sounding off with the "oonk-a-lunk" song below our deck in a cattail marsh. I got out our scope and we watched a spectacular show for the first time.

The bird started out in its typical upright pose imitating a 30" stick protruding from the marsh. The bittern's bright yellow eyes appeared to be bulging out as it checked out the surrounding marshlands. Then it went into a crouch, and snapped its bill several times (this can be heard if close enough). This was immediately followed by an inflation of an upper throat pouch, then an inflation of the lower, neck pouch. The upper pouch inflated about an inch; the lower pouch ballooned out more and included the sides of the neck (5-6 inches). The lower neck and upper chest feathers flared a bit during the pump song. The bird's body bounced up and down a bit as it performed the pumping song. We also noticed the bird's black, neck feathers flared and were more prominent during the song than at rest.

The bird was still sounding off this morning (5/23); we hope it has found a mate. It was truly an awesome display, one that we won't forget!

## Birdfest – Five Year Data Report

By Guy David

Birdfest 2009 is completed and in many ways it was the best one ever! The Bird Club members owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for our volunteer organizers and NLDC staff that did an outstanding job of planning, organizing, and conducting the event. Thank you so much to all who helped!

For my part I was asked to lead 2 field trips, take photos during the event, and record the list of bird species observed during the event. I am excited to report that despite exceptionally adverse birding conditions all of these tasks were successfully completed.



*Bruce Bacon displays a Swainson's Thrush that he captured and banded during Birdfest 2009. The olive colored back, light breast markings, and distinct white eye ring or spectacles help to distinguish the Swainson's from other thrush species.*

*Photo by Guy David*

Photos of participants and birds were obtained. A couple are included with this article, many will be given to the Discovery Center for archival purposes, and I will have some additional work to do just in case I might be asked to do another slide show for our annual January social. Phew, new club officers, did you catch the BIG hint?



**Number of Bird Species Observed During Sunrise Warbler Walks and Bird Banding**

Total	Avg	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
86	49	49	36	52	60	47

This data set reveals that the number of species seen during 5 years of Sunrise Warbler Walks and Bird Banding during Birdfest has ranged from a low of 36 species to a high of 60 species. The average number of species recorded over the 5 years is 49 per year. This means that in any given year participants have a reasonable chance of seeing or hearing about 50 species of birds on Discovery Center grounds or nature trails during Birdfest.

Studying the data makes it become even more interesting. If one had not recorded and analyzed the data from each year, one might conclude that there are about 60 species of birds present around NLDC Warbler Walk trails around Birdfest time. In fact, our recorded data reveals that 86 species of birds have been recorded during these activities over 5 years! Of the 86 species, 27 of them were reported only once in 5 years and 11 were reported 2 times in 5 years.

Powell Marsh Vista

Five years of Birdfest field trips to Powell Marsh Vista has yielded a total of 53 species of birds. A summary of the annual data for this field trip follows.

**Number of Bird Species Observed During Powell Marsh Walks**

Total	Avg	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
53	24	24	30	36	19	9

It appears that in any given year one could expect to observe about one half of the possible number of species that are available during this field trip. Well, maybe, but if one were to eliminate the 2009 data because the extreme wind most likely affected the outcome to a significant degree, then the average becomes over 27 per year.

As was true for the Discovery Center birding excursions, a large number of the total species were observed only one year. There were 26 species observed only once but the news actually is better than that on an annual basis because the

*Zach Wilson records bird species on the Birdfest 2009 species charts prepared by Donna Roche.*

*Photo by Guy David*

After completing observation lists for 5 Birdfests now, the club is establishing a clear pattern of species that are likely to be encountered during Birdfest. The official species count for Birdfest 2009 is 89 species, which I think is a significant accomplishment given the severe wind conditions that were encountered during all of the field trips.

In comparison, there were 94 species recorded during Birdfest 2008 and 100 species recorded in 2007. During the formative years of Birdfest we were content to record the species observed each year and to compare the results from year to year. Now that we have 5 years worth of data it is possible to use the data to establish an even better understanding of our favorite birding destinations that are customarily used during Birdfest.

Sunrise Warbler Walks and Bird Banding

For example, a 5 year tradition for Birdfest has been to begin the day with the Sunrise Warbler Walks using various sections of the Discovery Center Nature Trail. The Bird Banding activity also has been a regular feature, all on Discovery Center grounds. When the data from those 5 years are examined the following is revealed:

2007 outing was exceptionally productive compared to the other 4 years.

Little Turtle Flowage

For this field trip destination, let's go right to the data.

**Number of Bird Species Observed During Little Turtle Flowage Walks**

Total	Avg	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
91	41	33	42	51	36	43

The Little Turtle Flowage Wildlife Area appears to be a migration hotspot with 91 species observed in only 5 field trip days for an average of 41 species per trip. Of the 91 species, 36 were detected one year each and 22 were recorded 2 years.

It is interesting to compare the Little Turtle Flowage and Powell Marsh Vista data sets. Before every club member runs out and decides to only sign up for the Little Turtle Flowage field trip during future Birdfests, you should consider the possible reasons they seem so different.

For example, during some years the Birdfest group that traveled to Little Turtle Flowage was actually divided into 2 groups while there. One group would walk out to observe the marsh area; the other group would go on a walk that took them through a wooded area. To my knowledge, the Powell Marsh trip does not include a woodland walk which means that the woodland bird species would typically not be observed or recorded.

Another thing to consider would be the possibility of data error. Looking again at the 2009 data, one can see that the productivity of the Little Turtle Flowage group did not drop off for 2009, despite the windy conditions. The Powell Marsh productivity dropped severely, but did it really? It could be that the appointed data recorder for that particular trip did not succeed in compiling and reporting a complete record.

The areas included in this report are those that were utilized all 5 years for Birdfest outings. Data is being compiled for the other Birdfest field trips but none of them were used more than 3 times. Following is a table showing all field trips and the results obtained.

**Annual Birdfest Species Counts**

Location	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Discovery Center	49	36	52	60	47
Powell Marsh Vista	24	20	36	19	9
Little Turtle Flowage	33	42	51	36	43
Frog Lake and Natural Pines	9		21		25
Van Vliet Hemlocks		23	25	24	
				31	
				a.m.	
Middle Gresham River				20	
				p.m.	
Turtle Flambeau Flowage		32	30	18	
Big Lake, Rice Creek				39	
Presque Isle Ponds				15	34
Mercer, Iron County Road Trip					23
Manitowish River			56		

My final comment is that this report only focused on total species recorded. Even though some field trips in some years did produce the greatest number of species, there is much more that measures success. For example, unique habitats such as Van Vliet Hemlocks and Frog Lake will harbor species of birds that most likely will not be found during the other outings. Locations such as these also will yield an experience that is unique in other ways as well.

**Bear Depredation on Sapsucker Nests**

*By John Randolph*

In the April, 2009 issue of *The Auk* (journal of the American Ornithologists' Union), Tozer et.al. reported a study done in the summer of 2008 in Ontario, which showed black bear depredation of 17% of 315 nests of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers in Sugar Maple stands, compared to only 1 (2%) of 46 Hairy Woodpecker nests in the same stand. The authors reported that the Hairy's preferred nest trees, which are of harder substrate than Yellow-bellies' nest trees, would be much more difficult for bears to chew or tear open. The authors identify chick begging calls as a major risk factor for bear predation. While they suspect that begging calls from pre-fledglings of both species would attract

bears, they note that bears would have a much harder time getting to the nests of the Hairy Woodpecker than those of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

## Our Weekend in Paradise

By Judy Cassady

Jon and I spent May 1-3 in Paradise - Michigan, that is! We were the only NLDC Bird Club members who participated in this year's Nicolet College Outdoor Adventure at Whitefish Point to view the spring hawk migration. John Bates and Mary Burns, also NLDC Bird Club members, were our esteemed and very knowledgeable leaders. We were 13 adventurers in two vans, one driven by Mary Burns and the other driven by John Bates.

In John Bates' 1997 edition of *A Northwoods Companion, Spring and Summer* he discusses the spring hawk migration at Brockway Mountain Drive located near the tip of the Keeweenaw Peninsula in the U.P. So when I read of the Whitefish Point adventure in the Nicolet College booklet, we started planning. Our NLDC Bird Club bids farewell to the hawks and other migratory species in September at Hawk Ridge, MN. So it seemed fitting that we would go to the U.P. to welcome them back and see them on their journey further north. Whitefish Point on Lake Superior is at the far northeastern tip of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, south and west of the Keeweenaw Peninsula.

The evening of May 1, Friday, we attended an owl banding program at the Whitefish Point educational center. Standing in the moonlight under a clear sky, we enjoyed the awesome sight of long-eared owls seeming to fly across the moon continuously above our heads. Sometimes an owl would be spotlighted in the lighthouse beacon. After the slide show program and while we waited for the banders to check their nets, John Bates pointed out several constellations - Cassiopeia as a wide "W" on its side and the Big Dipper pouring into the little dipper, among others. The banders brought a saw-whet owl for photos before banding. We went back to the hotel before the reported banding of 21 saw-whets, 12 boreals, 20 long-eared, and 3 barred was

completed.

Saturday morning we arrived at the Point in time for an interesting program and demonstration of a barred owl. Then we walked through a wooded area where we saw ruby-crowned kinglets, golden-crowned kinglets, red-breasted nuthatches, and white-breasted nuthatches. The golden-crowned kinglets were so numerous in one area that I had a really close up view of several of these small songbirds. From the wooded area, we walked out to the shore where we viewed many sharp-shinned hawks, ring-billed gulls, Canada geese, and common loons, a red-throated loon, and red-breasted mergansers. Jon managed to find a large piece of driftwood that served as a birdwatcher's "lazy boy" recliner.



*Jon Cassady finds an easier way to do his birding at Whitefish Bay.*

Photo by Judy Cassady

From the shore and woodland corridor, we crossed the parking lot to the hawk platform that the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory personnel had built on top of a sand dune. In the area around the platform, we saw purple finches, red winged blackbirds and a great number of yellow-rumped warblers. We observed the "kettles" of sharp-shinned hawks, broad-winged hawks and red-tailed hawks. Watching the five sandhill cranes fly, one behind the other, nearly 360 degrees around the platform area was also a thrill for me. Later we drove to a small protected harbor where we found a

red-necked grebe, common mergansers, and female buffleheads. At a sandy beach near a bridge we found a watchful kingfisher, a brown creeper and on the water in that area were mallards, cormorants, and a green-winged teal. Caspian terns were also noted.

some shrubbery. A couple of small birds flew into the shrubs and seemed to enjoy being there. Jon and I watched them for awhile and determined that they were white-crowned sparrows --yet another species to add to John Bates' list. John's official total was 74 was a couple more than his list for his last trip to Whitefish Point.

Needless to say, I didn't write about all the birds we saw and heard. In addition to all the "official" birding stops on this trip, we "birded" all the way to Whitefish Point and all the way home. Birdwatching, like many other hobbies, is addictive!



*The Whitefish Point adventurers, leader John Bates second from right*

Photo by Judy Cassady

Saturday evening we dined at the lodge styled restaurant, brewery and pub at Tahquamemnon Falls. We had been seeing "Watch for Moose" highway signs on several roads in the area. We searched for moose in every likely habitat along the roads, our drivers even slowing to look. The only moose I saw, though, was the one mounted on the wall at the restaurant.

Sunday morning after breakfast I found a pair of phoebes in a tree near the hotel. Later we traveled to Tahquamemnon Falls where we heard and later saw a winter wren. On our hike to and from the falls we encountered (heard and/or saw) in addition to the winter wren, white throated sparrow, blue jay, hairy woodpecker, yellow-rumped warbler, yellow-bellied sapsucker, evening grosbeak, chipping sparrow, raven, crow, and red-tailed hawk.

We picked up lunch at a Subway, then found a road side park where we enjoyed lunch and more birding. Jon and I were sitting at a table beside

#### Bird Club Members:

I have agreed to continue doing *Bird Songs—The Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club*—for 2009-2010. Please note that this newsletter is both mailed to members and posted on the Bird Club web page of the NLDC website ([www.discoverycenter.net](http://www.discoverycenter.net)).

The next issue will appear in September. Please send all contributions to me by September 1, 2009. Attach them to email to [davdfost@aol.com](mailto:davdfost@aol.com).

