

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the
Discovery Center Bird Club

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

John Randolph

Tomorrow morning, Friday the 13th, I'm hoping for some really good luck in seeing some new species for our modest Great Backyard Bird Count weekend. Should that not happen, I'm going to make an effort to pay close attention to detailed features of our regular birds. I do expect to see our relatively faithful female Red-bellied Woodpecker, whose orange/red at the base of her bill contrasts with the brighter red of her nape.

For quite some time, the Bird Club has been enjoying excellent support and assistance from Heather Lumpkin, Discovery Center Research and Monitoring Coordinator. In addition to setting up the room and audio/visual equipment for monthly Club meetings, which is greatly appreciated, Heather's skills and vitality have contributed much to our ongoing experience. I'm particularly looking forward to her bird banding presentation this coming summer.

It's my understanding that at least four of our Club members are planning to attend the Feb. 27 – March 1 "Spring Kickoff" for the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas Survey. This entails presentations, workshops, and training sessions designed to prepare volunteers to participate in surveys this coming season (an email re the event was forwarded to all members recently). Heather is the Survey Coordinator for Vilas County.

At our Annual Meeting in August, the Bird Club will need to elect a new president, as I will have served six years on the Board, the maximum allowed. Please be thinking about leadership transition.

2015 Christmas Bird Counts

Guy David

The Discovery Center Bird Club sponsors two Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) in our area each year. The 2015 Manitowish Waters CBC, organized by John Bates, was conducted on Sunday, December 14, 2014. The 2015 Minocqua CBC, organized by Guy David, was conducted on Saturday, December 20, 2014.

The annual CBC effort is organized internationally by the National Audubon Society. Audubon establishes the dates for the CBC each year and sets the parameters regarding how the CBC will be conducted. The official count period for the 2015 CBC was Sunday, December 14, 2014 through Monday, January 5, 2015. Every local count has a compiler, in our case John and Guy, who is responsible for scheduling the local CBC, recruiting participants, collecting all of the data for their respective CBC, and reporting the data to the National Audubon Society's CBC Database. Everything that one would need to know about the CBC as a citizen science effort can be found at this Web site:

<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>

The 2015 CBC was the 115th year that Audubon has run the count. The two CBC's that the Discovery Center Bird Club hosts are among over 2,300 such counts that are conducted each year. Last year there were over 71,000 participants in the national CBC including over 60,000 in the field and over 10,000 participants at feeders. Audubon touts the CBC as the "longest running Citizen Science survey in the world." Since Citizen Science is one of the mission bedrocks of the Discovery Center, the bird club, as an affiliate of the North Lakeland Discovery Center, finds that organizing and conducting the CBC's are exceptionally mission consistent for both the club and the Discovery Center.

Our local CBC efforts are relative newcomers to the CBC program. The Minocqua CBC was first initiated in 1962 and was conducted occasionally until 2006 and it has been conducted annually since then. Therefore the Minocqua CBC data includes 17 years' worth of Citizen Science data. The Manitowish Waters CBC was first initiated in 1993 and has been running annually since then for 21 years.

The outcome of the CBC each year is variable. In any given year our CBCs may record approximately 21 to 30 species. The outcome often is dependent on variables such as weather, number of participants, and, of course, the presence of birds in our area in the winter time.

This year the Manitowish Waters CBC was conducted on a very foggy day and low visibility which certainly made observing birds more of a challenge. When birds were found they were difficult to see clearly, especially when color was an important distinguishing feature. On the other hand, the temperature was fairly balmy, making it easier to be out and about looking for birds. The Minocqua CBC enjoyed improved conditions so birds were more observable.

Last year, the 114th Count, as reported by Audubon, 66,243,371 birds were tallied; 62,857,532 in the United States, 3,021,397 in Canada, and 364,442 for all other countries combined. In the United States, 652 species were tallied last year and 291 species were tallied in Canada. Considering these huge numbers, one might think that the results of our local counts don't mean much, but they do! Such numbers cannot be achieved without every contribution to the overall data.

For our 2015 Minocqua CBC we tallied 28 species and 1,418 individual birds. That was one of our best outcomes, essentially tying with our result from the 2008 count when 27 species and the same number of birds were tallied. Given all of the variables that affect the outcome of any given CBC, one has to wonder, what are the odds that the exact number of birds would be recorded between one year and another? Comparing Minocqua count results over 17 years, the average number of species for the Minocqua count per year is 20 with an average of 644 birds tallied. Therefore we can safely declare that the result of our 2015 CBC was well above average.

The 2015 Manitowish Waters CBC, despite the challenging conditions, also had an excellent result! Participants recorded 27 species and 817 birds. The 21 year average outcome for Manitowish Waters is 25 species and 1,156 birds. This means that an above average number of species were found this year while a below average number of birds were tallied.

Over the years there often are unique species recorded. The Manitowish Waters effort has recorded a total of 59 species over 21 years. Quite a few species have been tallied only during 1 or 2 counts, including White-crowned Sparrow (2010), Belted Kingfisher (2005), and Red-tailed Hawk (2012). The Minocqua count has recorded 53 species over 17 years. Species that have been seldom recorded include the Cedar Waxwing (2008), American Robin (2008), Red-headed Woodpecker (1988), and Cooper's Hawk (2015).

Both of our local CBC efforts are enjoyable experiences that include a social component. Getting together with the same field crew each year has become a fun tradition for some, getting together sometime during the day at a local establishment to enjoy a meal and share stories is another component. For feeder watchers, having "their" birds "count" is something to appreciate.

If you would like to participate in a CBC contact John Bates or Guy David and get your name added to their contact lists or contact the Discovery Center. You will need to provide your contact information to be included on the CBC contact lists.

The following table shows the comparable results for the 2015 Manitowish Waters and Minocqua CBCs. Combining the two counts, a total of 34 species were tallied for our 2015 Christmas Bird Counts!

Species	Minocqua	Manitowish Waters
Canada Goose		1
Trumpeter Swan		8
Mallard	4	
Hooded Merganser		1
Ruffed Grouse	5	21
Wild Turkey	50	3
Bald Eagle	9	5
Cooper's Hawk	1	
Rock Pigeon	10	
Mourning Dove	44	19
Great Horned Owl	1	
Red-bellied Woodpecker	7	1
Downy Woodpecker	17	29
Hairy Woodpecker	20	19
Pileated Woodpecker	23	9
Northern Shrike	1	
Blue Jay	81	67
American Crow	172	55
Common Raven	20	23
Black-capped Chickadee	379	212
Red-breasted Nuthatch	93	80
White-breasted Nuthatch	58	33
Brown Creeper	3	3
Golden-crowned Kinglet	12	8
American Tree Sparrow		3
European Starling	6	
Dark-eyed Junco	2	3
Northern Cardinal	3	
Common Grackle		1
Purple Finch	11	37
Red Crossbill		3
Common Redpoll	122	25
Pine Siskin	102	81
American Goldfinch	162	67
Total Species	28	27
Total Count	1418	817



Male Crossbill



Female Crossbill
Photos by Guy David

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

The Discovery Center Bird Club's Life List stands at 264 species. The following table depicts the number of species added to the club life list during each of our 11 years of record keeping. (I can't believe I have been doing this for 11 years!)

Year	Number of New Species
2004	111
2005	51
2006	30
2007	5
2008	9
2009	12
2010	19
2011	3
2012	14
2013	6
2014	4
Total	264

This record continues to prove that all that we have to do is to keep at it, be observant, and keep good records for great results. At the end of 2013 the club had tallied 260 species. So far the club has been able to add species to our life list every year. During 2014 the club conducted 38 outings and added 4 new species to the club's Life List as depicted in the following table.

White-winged Scoter	Melanitta fusca	10/23/2014	Lake Nokomis, Bearskin Trail
Spruce Grouse *	Falciennis canadensis	8/28/2014	Conover area
Black Vulture ^	Coragyps atratus	5/31/2014	Washington Island
Grasshopper Sparrow	Ammodramus savannarum	5/31/2014	Washington Island

This list of 4 species shows that each addition to our life list is becoming more challenging. The "low hanging fruit" have been picked! In order to add to the life list during 2014 we needed an outing that was researched, organized and led by club members (Krakowskis) to find our first Spruce Grouse.

Another species, the White-winged Scoter, involved a club member (Jon Cassady) leading the club on a fall outing to a new area. Only 3 club members (Jon and Judy Cassady, John Randolph) braved the elements on that day but they "lucked out" by finding the Scoter. That wasn't the end of it though! I recorded the species on eBird on behalf of the club and an eBird

reviewer contacted me to require more information since it was considered to be a rare sighting for the time and place. Thankfully, John Randolph collaborated with Jon and Judy Cassady to write up a detailed description of what they saw. Their effort was successful and the record was accepted. This was an excellent example of the importance of making detailed observations to the point of being able to describe a bird completely and accurately enough to get the record accepted by the eBird team. Outstanding!

The other 2 new species were recorded during field trips that club members participated in during the Washington Island Birding Festival at the end of May, 2014. So, 4 new species were added to the club's Life List this year due to traveling to a different area of the state, having some great luck and an excellent effort at identification, and a targeted outing to find a particular species!

I am proud of our club's efforts to get out to look all over the place for birds. I also am proud of the increasing competence of our club members as birders. When I think back to our early days when participants in our outings didn't have such great optics as many of us do now, and how easy it seemed to be to pass on so many birds that we saw as nothing more than "little brown jobs." Now when we encounter a bird we do not immediately recognize I hear participants begin to describe what they are seeing. Such improvements in equipment, knowledge of bird species, and ability to describe characteristics of a bird yields improved success in group identification of the birds we encounter!

In our early days, participants seemed to be satisfied quite often to wait for somebody else to identify a bird. If it didn't happen, then we would move on. Lately, I have been much more likely to observe a lively discussion over what was observed and why a bird was a certain species. We've come a long way, birders!!!!

Annual Report

Despite conducting 38 outings during 2014, club productivity in terms of the number of species of birds recorded during the year dropped off a little from recent years. During 2014 the club tallied 177 species. This still is a great result! A record of our recent year lists follows to illustrate our relative success.

Year	# Species
2014	177
2013	184
2012	191
2011	180
2010	193

What one can derive from this data is that we have set a high standard as a club in terms of the success of our outings. I wonder, if we were to poll club members and ask for their Annual List of birds, how many of us would surpass this record.

It is difficult to know why some years are better than others in this respect. I suspect that the club missed a few species this year because we had fewer outings outside of our north woods home territory during 2014. I also suspect that our success at finding local birds has been just as good as usual.

I have to acknowledge, though, that the number of species recorded for life or during any given year is but one small achievement for the club. Most members don't participate in the bird club to build impressive life lists of birds. I doubt that many of us are out to prove anything to anybody.

Speaking for myself, I diligently record birds during my personal outings and during club outings and report to eBird. That is rarely why I am out there though. The main reasons are that I simply enjoy the outdoors and benefit a lot from observing nature as best I can. Knowing what I am seeing brings a degree of satisfaction, and if I can get a good photo, that is even better. I also enjoy sharing these experiences with others. I feel blessed to have our bird club consisting of people who have similar reasons for participating. The social aspect of knowing so many great people because of the club certainly is a prime reason to join in.

So, it's all good! Let's get out there during 2015 and have many great times together!



Cedar Waxwing in January 2015 in Minoqua. Photo by Guy David



Ice cold woodpecker, all fluffed out due to a temperature of 10⁰ below zero.
Photo by Guy David

Iron County WBB Atlas Request

Bruce Bacon

I am the WBBAtlas coordinator for Iron County and would appreciate volunteers to survey blocks in Iron County. I will know the exact locations early in March after the county coordinators' meeting in Wausau. From the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas website people can find out where blocks are available in Vilas, Oneida and Iron counties. My understanding is we will be using the same blocks as 10 years ago, so some bird club members may have already surveyed in Iron County and could perhaps do the same blocks again. Volunteers will have 5 years to spend time in their block and data will be submitted via eBird. The sign-up starts March 14th. Thanks!" If anyone is interested in helping in Iron County please email Bruce at brbacon@centurytel.net or call 715-476-0016.

Long Eared Owl Sighting

Liz Stone

In January my husband, Dick Theile and I received a tipoff that there were long-eared owls at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, near Saginaw, Michigan, and decided to make a road trip from our home in Ann Arbor. The drive was definitely worth it! We were amazed to see THIRTEEN long-eared owls clustered together in a brushy area. Some were sleeping and amazingly well camouflaged, but there were four owls who stared right at us, only about 12 feet from where we were standing. We hope to go back to Shiawassee to look for migrating waterfowl when it gets a little warmer, and will see you all in the Northwoods in May.



Photo by Dick Theile