

BIRD SONGS

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Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

By Judy Cassady

Hello, Bird Club Members!

I'm writing this on a sunny, not especially warm spring (?) afternoon. My crocuses are showing their purple and gold faces. Our bees survived the winter, and Jon had ordered another package, so we'll have two hives this year. While we were in Ohio for a week in April, though, the electric fence around the hive was apparently not working properly. We came home to a damaged hive. When Jon was doing the repair work, he saw two large bear paw claw marks. Our bees not only survived the winter, but successfully defended their hive!

We've always enjoyed our April trips to Ohio to visit relatives. For the past few years our daughter, who lives in upstate NY, has driven over to meet us there. So we enjoy an extra visit with Diana and our grandson Lewie. We get a preview of spring in Ohio: spring flowers, redbud and dogwood blooming in the woods, trees leafing out, and green grass. Beautiful! Of course, we see birds, too,

earlier than we'd see in northern Wisconsin. We stayed with my youngest sister, Larain and family, this year. They live in farm country and have a huge yard with a woods behind their garden area. The song of the meadowlark was unmistakable. We recognized both sight and sound of the rufus-sided towhee and the bluebird. The American kestrel was perched on a wire across the road. A flock of starlings seemed to like whatever they were finding in the newly mowed yard. The male and female killdeers made sure the starlings kept their distance from the nest in the clover patch near the gravel driveway.

As we were going out the long driveway our last morning in Ohio, Jon stopped the car. He had seen the killdeer chick at the edge of the driveway. The chick then skittered across the driveway, its gray downy feathers blending in with the limestone gravel. Meanwhile the male killdeer was doing his best to distract us from the chick. With his broken wing act and his bright rufus covert feathers clearly visible, he was putting on quite a show. The female was circling around letting "dad" handle the danger. In a recent conversation with Larain, she couldn't confirm the survival of the chick. I count the sighting of the killdeer family and the other

birds in Larain and Tom's yard as a blessing. Spring birds and flowers are the Creator's promise of new life. We were on our way to my mom's funeral when the killdeer chick surprised us.

Judy

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

Life List

As was noted in my January 2011 article, the Bird Club's life list now sports 237 species. Nineteen new species were added during 2010, making that a banner year since the club already has recorded most of the "easy" ones that commonly occur in the areas we regularly visit. However, do not despair; there are over 180 more species that occur in Wisconsin that we haven't found yet during any of our club outings.

Sandhill Crane



Photo by Guy David

Since there were no winter outings scheduled during the first 3 months of 2011, we already are behind on our annual list compared to last year. The great news is that winter will return in a few months so we still have a good chance to record northern Wisconsin's winter species for 2011.

As of this writing, the club has had 2 Thursday morning outings for 2011. The first was to Powell Marsh Vista Flowage on April 21 and the second to the Willow Flowage Nature Trail on April 29. There was club activity during the International Crane Count Day but there were no records sent to

me by any of the groups so that record will be missing for this year. Normally I participate in the count and at least am able to record the sightings for my group, but this year I was out of town on the count day. Too bad, I heard that the crane counters had a great time in the wind, cold, and snow!

Even though I only have records for 2 outings in 2011, we have good results. The April 21 outing to Powell Marsh netted 25 species and the outing to the Willow Flowage netted 38 species. There were 21 species observed at the Willow Flowage not found at Powell Marsh, so the club's 2011 annual list stands at 46 species after only 2 outings!

Last year by the end of April the club had already had 6 outings and had recorded well over 60 species of birds. Compared to last year, missing this year were an early March trip to Iron County, and trips to Buena Vista Grasslands and the Mead Wildlife area.

During 2010 the bird club observed and recorded 193 species of birds throughout the year, our best year ever. Will this year be better? I see no reason why we couldn't top the 200 species in a single year plateau this year. After hearing about upcoming outings at the club's May 2 meeting, and knowing that Bird Fest 2011 probably will be the best ever, I think we are in for another outstanding year.

Let's go get 'um!

The Bird Club Gets Them



Photo by Guy David

Daisy the Duck Returns



Photo by Joan Galloway

Daisy Returns

by Joan Galloway

On April 27th a mallard hen that I have named "Daisy" appeared at our door for the fourth consecutive year. In the fall I always hope that she'll make it safely back and forth from her winter destination avoiding bullets and other obstacles.

People ask me how I know that it is "Daisy" Since our house is located 25-30 feet above the lake, she has to fly up and down from the lake and waddle up to the doors looking for us. She knows which doors we come out of, too. She, also, was banded two years ago. Oops, got to go as she's up here for her breakfast!

Clyde the Pelican

by Jon Cassady

Judy and I are birders but fishing has always been my first passion. I have a fishing buddy named Rex. For years we have had a spring and a fall fishing adventure up here in the north woods. Last year both Rex and I were invited to spend a week fishing in Florida with another fishing buddy named Ron. Rex enjoyed our Florida fishing adventure so much that he decided to rent a modular home in a community known as Palm Lake in Sebastian for the winter. Rex and his wife Carol invited us down for a couple weeks of fishing and birding this February. The first day we were down there, I met Tom at Ron's house. Tom suggested we try fishing

the Sebastian River. He told us where the boat landing was and so, the next morning, Rex and I were on the Sebastian River fishing. We started catching Lady Fish and a few Sea Trout right away and suddenly a Brown Pelican landed right beside our boat. I could see by his colors that he was just a juvenile. Every time I would cast, he would raise his wings and position himself between me and my fishing lure. When I would hook a fish, he would attempt to get the fish before I could get the fish in the boat. So it was really a circus trying to outwit this Pelican. I hooked a Lady Fish and somehow managed to avoid the Bird and get the fish in the boat. While I was taking the hook out of the fish's mouth, I heard Rex say "you hooked him". I thought Rex was talking about the fish. So I just ignored Rex and took the fish off the hook. Then, I realized that Rex was talking about the Pelican. The Pelican was in the process of pulling my other fishing rod into the river. He had somehow managed to get the hook of the lure that was on my other rod in his left wing. I grabbed the other fishing rod and "played" the Pelican up to the boat. He was hooked pretty good, so I grabbed him and pulled him into the boat. Rex was sure he would attack me but he did not. I managed to get my forceps on the lure and pull the hook out of the bird's wing and let him go. I thought that would be the end of it, but a minute later, the bird was back in the boat standing on the seat beside me. I noticed he had a band on his right leg. So he had been handled before. We sat there looking at each other for a while and then the Pelican took off. He never bothered us again. We named the Bird "Clyde" and decided he must have come back just to say "thank you". Sebastian, Florida is on the east coast of Florida on the Indian River just south of the Kennedy Space Center. It is a great place to go fishing and birding.

If you are looking for a nice quiet place to take a break from our long north woods winters, you should check out Sebastian. Maybe you will even get a chance to say hello to Clyde.

Amazon Woodpeckers and What They Teach Us

by David Foster

Suzy and I travelled in the Peruvian Amazon region this past February. The geography of this area is incredible in its scale. The Amazon river basin takes up roughly the top half of South America. The river's tributaries flow from several countries to form the main river in eastern Peru, which then flows into Brazil for two thousand more miles before it empties in the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic mouth of the Amazon produces the largest volume of freshwater outflow in the world—a hundred miles out from the Brazilian coast into the Atlantic. To generate this enormous volume of water, the Amazon basin is fed by hundreds of rivers that begin with snowmelt in the Andean mountains of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, flow down the eastern mountain slopes, and converge to form the main river in the jungles of Peru and Brazil.

The enormous diversity of this geography gives rise to a huge array of plant and animal species adapted to the habitats created by mountain, jungle and water. There are over 1900 species of birds found in Peru—almost twenty percent of all bird species identified in the world! Peru has one-seventh of the land area of the continental United States (including Alaska), but almost three times as many bird species. For example, in Peru there are over a hundred species of hummingbirds, compared with about twenty in the continental United States (many of them occasional southwestern visitors from Mexico); there are over two hundred kinds of flycatchers in Peru, compared with about forty in the United States (many of them also occasional visitors from Mexico and Caribbean islands); there are almost a hundred kinds of tanagers in Peru, compared with six in the continental United States. There are also a hundred and fifty species of antbirds in Peru (none in the USA), many of them similar in plumage and size, all groundbirds sharing similar habitat niches as they feed on insects stirred up by ants. There can't be any place where localized evolutionary adaptation is more on display than in Peru.

One spectacular example of this natural abundance is a comparison of large woodpeckers in the USA and Peru. In the USA there is only one large woodpecker with a big red crest—the pileated. In Peru there are three pileated look-alike species just in the Amazonian basin, all so nearly identical in plumage that

it's hard to imagine how their loved ones can tell them apart. They co-exist in the forests and river edges of the rivers that flow into the Amazon. Here is a photo of one of them, the Crimson-crested woodpecker, compared with our Pileated woodpecker:

Crimson-crested woodpecker



Photo courtesy of Richard S. Shirley

Pileated Woodpecker



Photo by David Foster

Two other large, red-crested woodpeckers also are native to the Amazonian lowlands—the red-necked woodpecker and the linneated woodpecker, both of which are nearly identical to the crimson-crested woodpecker. In turn, they are eerily similar to the pileated. All three of these Amazonian species thrive—like our own pileated—in tall-growth forests and forest edges, hammering at dead trees for ants and beetles. Yet despite the apparent similarities among these Amazonian woodpeckers, they are just different enough in their specific needs—certain kinds of trees, forest size, proximity to water—that habitat diversity is crucial to their flourishing. And diversity is what the Amazonian

jungle still offers more of than nearly anyplace else in the world. Yet in the Amazon, as in most of the rest of the world as well, logging, mining, and river-dam construction continue at a rapid pace, reducing the diversity birds and all other living creatures need. Seeing these woodpeckers flourish in their native areas is a reminder of what we all have to lose if we are not careful.

BIRDFEST 2011 COMING SOON!



Bird Fest 2010 was a big deal!

The club's Bird Fest 2011 will be fantiastic! Laura Erickson will be the keynote speaker. She is author of four books, winner of the National Outdoor Book Award and several conservation, research, and writing awards, and contributing writer for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. She's been producing her radio program, "For the Birds," for a quarter of a century, since May, 1986. She lives with her husband, dog, two indoor cats, and a licensed education screech-owl. We are happy to have her back this year!

Birdfest will feature early morning birdwalks, field trips between 8 AM and 11:30 AM, then afternoon programs by Laura Erckson, Terry Dorsey, and Gwynn Calvetti. The day will culminate in a final sharing of observations, a raffle drawing, and dessert.