

# **BIRD SONGS**

Newsletter of the  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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(Note: this is my last *Bird Songs*. Anyone interested in this rewarding editing opportunity may contact me or the club president.)

## **Officers**

John Randolph, President  
David Foster, Secretary  
Carne Andrews, Treasurer  
Jim Krakowski, Program Chair  
Linda Dunn, Membership

## **President's Message**

*By John Randolph*

Last weekend, during the Discovery Center's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Birding Festival, a remarkable number of bird species were seen and heard, despite north wind, cool temperatures, and periodic snow showers. I thought the Festival programs were excellent, and much work was done to create yet another wonderful event. Today, in the Minocqua area, I'm complaining about too-warm temperatures (in the low eighties).

Our 2013 Thursday morning Bird Club outings, planned by Donna Roche, have been very productive, both in "good looks" at particular birds, and number of species seen and heard. As for hearing, it's fun also to listen to the calls of frogs and the American Toad. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has a very useful DVD, "Wisconsin Frogs and Toads: Your Guide to Vocalization and Identification". As



with migrating birds, some frogs start making their presence known earlier in the spring than others, such as the Wood Frog, which makes somewhat of a quacking sound.

It has been particularly interesting to me to see additional or different coloring in birds whose own regular beauty is striking enough. For instance, several times this year, I've noticed what I consider to be extraordinarily lovely purple on the head of Mallard drakes (instead of the also very nice green). I gather that angles of light contribute to an iridescent phenomenon (I have seen pictures of loons with green heads). On another occasion, I saw a male Indigo Bunting close by on a feeder, in bright light, with quite pretty green cast on the wing, a tasteful color complement to the shade of indigo blue.

This may be the last *Bird Songs* (Bird Club Newsletter) for the indefinite future, as we have not heard from anyone willing to take over editor responsibilities from David Foster, who has been producing quarterly issues for five years. Again, I really appreciate the work Dave has done – there is a lovely format already set up, published online on the Bird Club's portion of the

Discovery Center's website. The Club president does a column every issue as does Guy David with his Life List Quarterly, and other members have often provided engaging content, including color pictures. One option, in the absence of a newsletter, would be to send out an annual report via e-mail, listing Club activities for the year, sightings made, etc.

## **Moving North—An American Bird Success Story!**

*By David Foster*



Red-Bellied Woodpecker  
*Photo by John Randolph*

Any northwoods resident with a suet feeder could witness an American bird success story—the Red-Bellied Woodpecker. As John Randolph reports, Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been appearing regularly at his feeder in Oneida County in the past winter and spring: “this year [2013] I've seen both female and male Red-bellied Woodpeckers more often and over a longer period of time than any time in the six and a half years [we've been here].” And they are still moving north: in Natural Lakes in northern Vilas County, “Red-bellies” have appeared at several feeders during the 2012-13 winter, and are still in the area in late May.

Unlike the Northern Flicker, whose overall numbers are declining, the Red-bellied Woodpecker is thriving as a species. It has grown in numbers as human development creates open woodlands, suburbs and parks comprised of mixed pine and hardwood forests which it favors. As a result, the Red-belly has expanded its range

northward in the Great Lakes region and New England over the last century and is also expanding northwestward in the Great Plains,” according to the *Complete Birds of North America* (National Geographic, 2006).

You may hear its call—a “loud *quirr*” as David Sibley describes it—before you see it. The Red-belly does not migrate regularly but may wander southward depending on the severity of the winter.

## **Life List Quarterly**

*By Guy David*

### *Life List*

The bird club has concluded our 2012 birding with 253 species of birds on the club's life list. As of this writing, our count now stands at 254 species with the addition of the Red Crossbill during a February outing lead by Zach Wilson. During that outing the group also found and positively identified a Hoary Redpoll, a species that was first added to our life list during the 2012 Christmas Bird Count. What an excellent start to our new year of birding!

### *Annual List*

The club's annual list for 2012 ended at 191 species. That was a great achievement but I'm still wishing and hoping for a 200 species year pretty darned soon. It is possible! Maybe this year!

Many years, the winter birds are hard to tally because the club doesn't host many winter bird outings when the boreal species are most likely to be present. This year the club's annual list is off to a good start thanks to the February outing. Several species were located and identified that may well not be observed again this year.

After four outings so far this year the club's Annual List already stands at 63 species. The February outing netted several “winter” species. Outings in April and the first week in May netted

several migratory species that may not be seen again this year unless we encounter them during their southern migration in the fall.

As everyone knows, winter this year was extended late into April and early May due to colder than normal temperatures, frozen ice on the lakes, and snow on the ground. Some migratory species therefore lingered in the area waiting for improving conditions further north. That phenomenon worked to our advantage by giving us improved chances to observe those species.

Our first Thursday outing during the last week in April was spent visiting the two open water areas around the Minocqua area that we knew of. That was where the migratory birds were located and observable. It turned out to be a very productive outing with 41 species observed.

The next outing during the first week in May was spent at Powell Marsh Vista. There we found the Vista Flowage to be about 85% iced over yet, but the flowage south of there was free of ice and a bonanza for migratory waterfowl. Despite the freezing drizzle turning to snow that morning, six hardy club members enjoyed a very memorable couple of hours of birding.



Bird Club Group at Mead Wildlife Area on way to Kirtland Warbler area.

*Photo by Mead staff member*

During the next few weeks the club's annual list will have its greatest growth spurt of the year, again due to migration and the club being out there looking. Beginning with the 2013 Birding

Festival, during which we often net over 90 species of birds in one day, most of those will be migrants that weren't in the area during the first week in May. Then, during the week after Birding Festival, 6 club members are registered to participate in a Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation Tour to see Kirtland Warblers. Not only do we stand to add the Kirtland Warbler to the club's Life List, the group probably will fatten up our Annual List while birding at some other hotspots along the way!

If getting together with other interested people to enjoy birds and birding is a reason to be active in the Discovery Center Bird Club, then the club is off to another very successful year.

## You Lookin At Me?



Boreal Owl—February 2013

*Photo by Peter Rasmussen*

Club member Peter Rasmussen of Harshaw, WI had an unexpected visitor this winter--a Boreal Owl that stayed for several days in a tree close to his house. He took multiple pictures, including one of the bird dropping on prey in the snow. The Boreal Owl, a rare wintertime visitor to Wisconsin, is a small owl native to the boreal forest of Canada, Alaska and Eurasia.



## How We Nudge Natural Selection— Kirtland's Warblers and Cowbirds

By David Foster



Kirtland's Warbler—Photo courtesy the Wisconsin DNR, by Robert Royse

In late May a group of Bird Club members visited a preserve for Kirtland's Warblers in Adams County, managed by the Wisconsin DNR and the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. This tract contains big stands of jack pine, the breeding habitat of the Kirtland's. Previously the Kirtland's Warbler was thought to nest only in a small area in the central Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Scientists and birders were delighted to find another colorful warbler in Wisconsin.

But—why aren't there more Kirtland's? First, because they breed only in stands of young jack pine, which require forest fires (which we put out) or extended hot weather to seed. Second, the Brown-headed Cowbird is adept at laying its eggs in the Kirtland's nests. As DNR ornithologist Kim Grveles says, "Kirtland's warblers are especially vulnerable to cowbird parasitism. Their open-cup nests are easy targets for the sharp-eyed cowbird."

Of course, cowbirds parasitize the nests of many birds. In the cowbird photo below you can see how much bigger the cowbird chick is than the Northern Cardinal egg next to it. The egg never hatched. When the young cowbird left the nest, still unable to fly, observer Sheri Badgley watched the cardinal parents "still protecting the bird" as it made its way on the ground to a low branch. She wasn't able to track it further.



Cowbird hatchling beside Cardinal egg  
Photo by Sheri Badgley

But the cardinals had raised only a cowbird, no young cardinals. And so it is with Kirtland's Warblers—many of their eggs or chicks are displaced by cowbirds. And if we don't like this outcome? Reduce cowbird parasitism by human management.

Of course, "reducing cowbird parasitism" is a scientific way of saying, "let's eliminate some cowbirds." Thus, as the Club group was told by a DNR technician during the Adams County visit, the cowbird cage shown below is made to capture as many cowbirds as possible. They are then eliminated, permanently. Cowbirds are a flourishing species—Kirtland's less so. In this way we nudge natural selection--choosing to reduce one species' success in order to increase the chances of another species we have decided we like better.



Cowbirds in cage in Adams County preserve  
Photo by David Foster

(See this link for more about Kirtland's Warbler:  
<http://dnr.wi.gov/wnrmag/2009/04/warbler.htm>)

## A Very Special Observation

By Guy David

One of the benefits of continuously being watchful for birds is that one has an occasion now and then to observe something special. Such an event happened to me on the evening of May 7, 2013.

I had no plans to go birding that evening after a full day of working around the yard at chores that were necessary to get done after the long delayed spring. After Bryan Hoover from the Tribal DNR called that evening to inquire about a bird that he saw earlier while taking a walk in Powell Marsh, I was soon on my way to see for myself.



Whooping Crane with Sandhill Crane

*Photo by Guy David*

Bryan told me about a very large white bird with black wing tips that he saw with a Sandhill Crane. When he said that the bird actually was larger than the Sandhill Crane, all I could think of was —“Whooping Crane.” I have never seen one north of the Mead Wildlife Area and I couldn’t remember any reports of any this far north either. I had to go to see if I could find it after Bryan described the location on the tribal portion of Powell Marsh.

I proceeded directly to the area Bryan described and was disappointed. I saw 3 Sandhill Cranes but no white crane. I decided to proceed further south to another area of the marsh where I have customarily seen cranes, thinking the bird might have moved since Bryan observed it. Excitement soared when I spotted something large and white in the marsh just north of Chewelah Lake. Bingo! Whooping Crane!

The bird was located about 300 yards from my position but I could easily observe it via my spotting scope to confirm the details needed to identify the

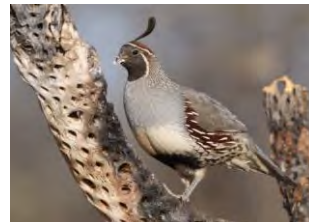
species. The Whooping Crane was in the company of 7 Sandhill Cranes and actively feeding in belly deep marsh vegetation. While watching it for about 45 minutes I could see that it had leg bands so I recorded the pattern of the bands and got some photos for documentation. I could observe that the bird had a green band (upper) and red band (lower) on its right leg. The bird also had a white band on its left leg that was larger than either of the bands on the other leg.

As usual, I reported my observations for the outing on eBird and included 3 photos of the Whooping Crane as proof for documentation. An eBird reviewer quickly followed up my rare sighting report, giving me the information to report it to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I hope that I will receive a report from FWS regarding the origin of the banded bird.

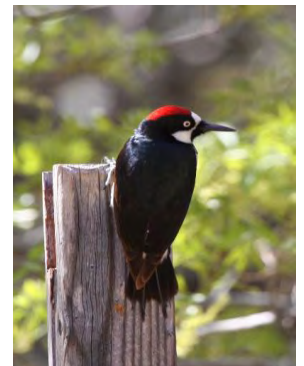
To my knowledge, that evening was the only time that the Whooping Crane was observed in Powell Marsh. Others reported looking for it the next morning but not having any luck. It would have been great if the bird had stayed around for a while so others could have enjoyed the unique and special opportunity.

I owe a huge note of thanks to Bryan Hoover who first observed the bird and then called me to inquire about it. Were it not for that, I would have missed the opportunity too.

## Arizona Birds 2013, by Guy David



Gambel's Quail



Acorn Woodpecker



Hepatic Tanager

