

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the
Discovery Center Bird Club

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Officers

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



President's Message

By John Randolph

Our Club had its last regular 2011 Thursday morning birding outing in October, and it's been a wonderful year. Walking through a striking variety of beautiful settings, with a nice range of habitat, with a number of our very skilled and experienced members helping us identify and enjoy many species -- what a way to live in the north woods! Donna Roche provided the week after week organizing energy and inspiration, with Jim and Cynthia Krakowski arranging a number of enjoyable and productive trips. It is true that a few of the most dedicated birders were occasionally slightly annoyed when some of us were distracted by wildflowers or mushrooms, but we are a congenial group of people. Also, programs at our monthly Club meetings have been very informative and of high quality.

We are close to confirming Tuesday, January 10, 2012 for our Annual Club Social at Smokey's Restaurant, and will be providing more information soon. Guy David will again provide a lovely photographic review of the past Bird Club year.

Carne Andrews is taking the lead in exploring possible arrangements for an overnight birding trip to the Sax-Zim Bog in Minnesota, west of Duluth, an excellent winter birding site with species that we don't often see in our area. I'm looking forward to the Christmas Bird Count, future counts and surveys, and the never-ending, stimulating challenge of learning more about birds.

2011 Winter Bird Counts:

Dec. 17—Area CBC—contact
Zach@discoverycenter.net

Dec. 29—Minocqua Bird Count—
contact bgdavid@wildblue.net

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

Life List

The last Life List species added this year was species number 240, the Mute Swan that was encountered on June 30, 2011 during the club's trip to the Ashland, WI area. This isn't too surprising

since most of the club's birding since then has been in the immediate geographic area of the club's home base. Also, the larger the club's life list becomes the harder it will be to find new species we have never observed before. In addition to just plain good luck during an outing, it will take more work to continue adding to the club's life list.

There are some chances. The club has been hearing about potential planning to go to new areas next year such as Wyalusing State Park, or going to the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology Annual Convention in the Madison Area. If those club field trips occur, I am almost certain that more species will be added, if only because the club would be exposed to bird species found in southern Wisconsin but not northern Wisconsin.



American Golden-Plover sighted at Rainbow Flowage Fall 2011

Photo by Guy David

If any club member hears of the presence of any unusual species and gets the club to go look for the reported species; that could net new species for the club life list. For example, in 2009 a club member learned about a Varied Thrush that was visiting a bird feeder in Rhinelander. That member informed the club about that and arranged a successful trip to go see it. A few years ago a member took action to make sure that the club took advantage of the northern owl invasion which netted both the Great Gray Owl and the Northern Hawk Owl for the club's life list!

WINTER BIRD ID WORKSHOP:

Friday, Dec. 2, 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM,
North Lakeland Discovery Center.
Contact bgdavid@wildblue.net

So, maybe this winter some unusual species will appear within striking distance. If discussion about a visit in February to the Sax-Zim Bog pans out, that could present some great possibilities! If the Gyrfalcon that has appeared in Ashland in some past winters takes up residence again, that would also be another possibility if we act on it. Or, maybe it could be as easy as a club member having a Hoary Redpoll coming to their feeders and deciding to share that with the club. Who knows?

Annual List

Last year the club recorded 193 species for the year which made 2010 a record breaking year for the club. When I wrote this column for the August newsletter the club's annual list included 157 species so far for this year. As of this writing the 2011 annual list includes 176 species. Adding 19 new species for 2011 is a very good result for a number of great outings. Following is an accounting for the new species recorded since August.

A trip to the Ashland area on August 30, 2011 yielded: Northern Pintail, Red-breasted Merganser, Semipalmated Plover, and Common Nighthawk. A Thursday morning hike on a portion of the Bearskin Trail on September 15, 2011 yielded a Bay-breasted Warbler.

This year, in contrast to the past couple of years, the club was very fortunate to find a shorebird hotspot. During a Thursday morning outing to the Rainbow Flowage at the end of Oxbow Road the participants were treated to numerous shorebirds and a wonderful variety of seven new species for the year including: Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Sanderling, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Horned Lark and American Pipit. The participants got wonderful views of these species, making the long walk through mud and muck more than worth it.

The club continued their Thursday outings throughout October, sometimes under trying conditions, but still succeeded in adding seven additional species for the year.

On October 6, 2011 the group visited the southern portion of Powell Marsh. Of the nineteen species found that day, the Ruby-crowned Kinglet turned out to be the first of the year. That was a lucky find since that species usually is found during spring migration but somehow was missed this year.

On October 13, 2011 there was a steady rain in the morning and only the most hardy and dedicated among the group ventured out on the Willow Flowage Nature Trail. They were rewarded for their efforts with observing another first of the year, a Great-horned Owl! Wow!

For the October 20, 2011 outing on the Raven Nature Trail the group also braved adverse conditions since it was very windy and cold! Never-the-less, the hardy souls still managed to come up with nine species but nothing new for the year! I just thought it was worth mentioning here because they deserve A+ for trying!



Club members at Woodson Art Museum, Wausau, October 27, 2011

Photo by Guy David

October 27, 2011 marked the final Thursday outing for year when the club traveled to the Wausau area to do some birding and to visit the Birds in Art Exhibit at the Leigh Yawkey-Woodson Art Museum. Thanks to arrangements made by Jim Krakowski, Mary Backus and her friend Sue lead the group to Bluegill County Park where we found

twenty-six species. Of those, three of them were new for the year including: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, and Fox Sparrow. In summary, with the addition of nineteen new species to the annual list since August, the club's annual list total for 2011 stands at 176 species so far. That means that the club still is short 17 species compared to the 2010 record. Regardless of that, 2011 already is in second place for all previous years and we still have some winter species to find. With successful Christmas Bird Counts, there is a chance to add some more species for the year. However, since the breeding season and migration seasons are essentially over for the year, it is highly unlikely that 2011 will yield those 17 species during the remainder of this birding year!



Young Red-tailed Hawk

Photo by John Aldridge

Fall Visit to Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory

By Sarah Johnson

Sometimes places are cool, without having to try. Such is the case with [Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory](#) (HRBO) in Duluth, MN. Over the years, the Club and the Center have taken trips to view the fall raptor migration. This year, the Center put together a trip. I led this, due to my past involvement at Hawk Ridge (during graduate school, I volunteered at the Ridge for two years).

For those of you who have yet to make the trip – Hawk Ridge is an outdoor overlook space, along the northern side of Duluth’s Lake Superior shoreline. The views of the woods and Lake Superior are outstanding, and the birds fascinating. Every year, thousands of birds concentrate in this spot during fall migration, and thousands of people gather to view the action. The banding, counting, and education that happen are due to the efforts of the non-profit HRBO, along with the Town and other non-profit partners.

The big, visible birds migrating through are hawks, vultures, eagle, osprey and harriers. The HRBO crew counts the birds, and band as many as they can. Data is gathered and sent to a centralized database, allowing monitoring figures to be used by professionals such as wildlife researchers and forest habitat managers. So, not only is this place cool, but it’s valuable for future habitat management and can be an indicator of when something is going wrong, or right, in our natural world.

In August and September, you’ll see a number of “smaller” birds. These birds – Broad-winged Hawks, Merlins, Kestrels, and Sharp-shinned Hawks – need to migrate earlier. They have longer to go (Broad-winged Hawks fly to South America), and their food sources (snakes, frogs, dragonflies) are often warm-temperature dependent. In October and November, the Ridge sees greater numbers of Bald and Golden Eagles, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Turkey Vultures and Northern Goshawks. During our October 15th visit, we were fortunate to see most of these species in good numbers:

Hawk Ridge Sightings, Oct. 15, 2011

Turkey Vulture	Bald Eagle	Red-tailed Hawk	Northern Goshawk	Sharp-shinned Hawk	North. Harrier
45	111	355	13	351	8

--Table by Sarah Johnson

We did see other species, too, bringing the total birds counted to 896. A great count for a mid-October day! One other really fascinating thing to

witness is the post-banding release of these magnificent birds.

HRBO has 3 banding stations where certified banders lure birds in. Our group participated in a behind-the-scenes tour to see how this process is carried out (think pigeons, bow traps, and mist nests). Once the birds are caught, data gathered, and bands placed, they are then transported to



Sarah releases her Red-tail Hawk
Photo by John Aldridge

the overlook. The birds are handled by volunteers and staff, and information about each species is shared with the audience. All the while, staff and volunteers encourage HRBO’s “Adopt A Raptor” program. For a donation, people can “adopt” a banded bird. This means that if the bird is found anywhere, you receive follow-up info on that bird. It also means that you get to handle and release the bird back to the wild. I was the adopter of an immature Red-tailed Hawk, and got to toss this bird up to continue its migration – with everyone cheering the bird’s release and the re-start of its journey. I hope the Club and/or the Center can continue to visit this spot annually – it truly is a wonderful experience!

A Walk in Sapsucker Woods

By Ed Marshall

A walk in Sapsucker Woods has the charm of being in a beautiful and diverse natural environment located near the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York. Around the turn of the twentieth century, admirers of Cornell donated this parcel to the university; over the years it has developed into the premier site for the study of birds in the world. The place came by its name from a walk in the woods by one of its early directors, Arthur "Doc" Allen, who discovered the first known nest of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) in the area. At that time the Sapsucker had not been known to nest this far south, and Doc Allen was so delighted to find the nest that he named the place Sapsucker Woods.

Sapsucker Woods is not attached to the main campus of Cornell, but is situated in the countryside northeast of Ithaca. As you walk from the parking lot, you notice the modernist appearance of the building. The second thing you notice is the lack of any formal landscaping. Everything is devoted to natural habitat. Along the sidewalks are shoulder high patches of native plants and grasses.



Photo by Ed Marshall

Upon entering the building, the visitor notices large windows overlooking a pond. Arranged along the

windows is a row of chairs. There is a spotting scope available for viewing and the sounds from the exterior can be heard inside by use of microphones and a stereo system. Did you forget your binocs? Don't worry—there's a pair for you at the visitors desk. The remainder of the visitors area has displays of birding paraphernalia and art work. An example is a cabinet that holds mounts of nearly every species of hummingbird on the continent. There is a well stocked gift shop with many items of interest to birders and loads of publications.

The main building sits on a ten acre pond surrounded by 224 acres of woodland, grassland and wetland. There are four miles of walking trails through the property, including dry woodland trails and boardwalks across the bogs. They stretch across the property and around the pond and connect to the Lab building.

It was an enjoyable way to spend the morning of Oct. 24th and I hope to return for a longer visit.

P.S. They talked me into becoming a member!

White Crows

By Guy David

Among the many reasons that I enjoy the outdoors and the pursuit of birding is that nearly every occasion results in something unexpected. Sometimes, the unexpected also is highly unusual. Friends who golf with me have had to understand that even though I am trying for birdies and eagles, always without success as a golfer, I always am aware of the non-golf related wonders of my surroundings. Thus, one afternoon in August while golfing on the Plum Lake Golf Course in Sayner, WI, I stopped to investigate a fairly large white bird that was not immediately familiar to me. My friends acknowledged that there was a bird there but that it wouldn't contribute to getting a birdie, so we moved on. I continued to wonder about that bird though.

At the conclusion of our round as we were driving out of the golf course area I spotted 2 of those large white birds. If I were driving I probably would

have irritated my friends by hitting the brakes. But, I wasn't, and we rushed off to our next destination. Now I was wondering about TWO large white birds that were unfamiliar to me.

Gulls? No, wings were rounded, not pointed and angular. Egrets? No, short legs, just not a fit at all. Snowy Owl? Gotta be kidding, way out of season, no large round head! A raptor? Didn't get close enough to observe the shape of the bill. A Rock Dove? Too small, shape not right. Domestic chicken? No, stance was not upright enough and the flight pattern was no match. Stumped? YES!



White Crows

Photo by Guy David

Sometime during the ensuing evening it finally occurred to me that they might have been white crows! The general size and shape of the birds, their rounded wings and tail, the manner in which they walked and flew, it all fit. I had to go back to try to confirm the sighting because I had never seen crows that were anything but completely black. I went back to the area early the next morning and the birds still were there, next to the road, associated with normally colored crows. This time I had my optics along and I was able to quickly view them to confirm the shape of their bill, and the characteristics of their legs and feet. They definitely were white crows! I also could easily observe the color of their eyes and they were dark, and there also was a little dark on the bill of both

white crows. This confirmed that they were not true albino crows and that they were leucistic.

Once I was able to confirm the species, my next priority was to get a photographic record. I was excited to be able to get a good close-up photo of one of the crows and to get some photos showing that there were two of them present in the same time and place. I surmised that the white crows were siblings and that they may have been related as members of a family consisting of some of the other crows that also were in the area.

After reviewing the photos at home I decided to share some with a few Wisconsin experts. They all confirmed my sighting and they decided to publish an article on August 24, 2011 titled "Leucism in Wisconsin Birds" on the Wisconsin eBird Web site where a couple of my photos were featured. Any reader who is interested in the article can find it at <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/wi/> By the time this newsletter is published you will have to search for the article at the bottom of the Web site. When you do, be sure to click on the title to read the full article where the author also included a couple of very interesting references on leucism and albinism of birds. They are well worth reading.

So, when people ask me, when do you go birding? My usual response is "always". Remaining aware of birds while doing almost anything else can reap wonderful rewards from time to time.



Fox Sparrow at feeder—November 2011

Photo by David Foster

Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI)

By Guy David

On September 30 and October 1, 2011 I attended the WBCI annual meeting in Green Bay, WI. This was the first time that I had attended such an event and found it to be an outstanding experience. Heretofore I had never imagined there was so much outstanding bird science being conducted in the State of Wisconsin. The conference was attended by well over 100 of the most prominent birders and researchers from around the State and surrounding states.

The agenda for Friday was the Ornithological Symposium: What's up with bird science in WI? There were 10 presentations including topics such as:

1. A New Era of Secretive Marsh Bird Monitoring and Beyond
2. Offshore Lake Michigan Waterfowl Survey
3. Nicolet National Forest Bird Survey: What We've Learned
4. Patterns of tree-species use by neotropical song birds during spring migration stopover in the Driftless Area
5. Avian Associations with Old-growth Forest Characteristics in Even-aged Northern Hardwoods
6. Spruce Grouse Ecology in Wisconsin
7. Golden-Winged Warblers in the Upper Midwest: Productivity, Habitat Associations, and Management Implications
8. Using new technology to track Wisconsin Common Loon Migrations
9. Impacts of climate change on birds
10. Monitoring for Midwest Bird Conservation: Highlighting Wisconsin's Role and Successes.

I took copious notes, gathering too much information to share via this newsletter article. However, Ryan Brady, WBCI Bird Monitoring Coordinator, and Andy Paulios, WBCI Coordinator provided the following snapshot of some of the research results.

□ Oaks, ashes, and elms are all highly-preferred trees for migratory warblers during spring migration, but all of these trees are expected to drastically decrease in abundance in Wisconsin over the next century.

□ Golden-winged Warblers, traditionally thought to be an early-successional forest specialist, are utilizing more mature forest stands both for nesting and especially for brood rearing after fledging.

❖ WBCI's statewide marsh bird survey needs more volunteers and results so far indicate that Wisconsin is home to more than 15,000 American Bitterns.

□ Volunteers have conducted over 3,000 point counts in 20+ years in the Nicolet National Forest Bird Survey!

□ Thousands of waterfowl can be found in areas more than two miles east of the Lake Michigan shore, including over 20,000 Long-tailed Ducks off the Door Peninsula in November 2010.

□ Managers can improve forest bird habitat by creating more canopy gaps, leaving trees to grow and become snags, and increasing downed woody debris.

□ Spruce Grouse typically favor lowland black spruce and tamarack bogs for nesting but may shift to upland red and jack pine to raise their broods and survive the winter.

□ Data from citizen science bird studies, including backyard programs like Cornell's Project Feeder Watch, are proving invaluable to determining the impacts of climate change on birds.

□ Wisconsin's Common Loon population winters along the southeast Atlantic Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico but mostly outside of the BP oil spill impact area. Whew!

The Saturday morning session were birding workshops aimed at helping participants become better birders and citizen scientists. Two sessions were held in the computer labs of the UW-Green Bay Campus, to help participants learn and apply important skills. We were offered a one-hour session on using online tools and learning how to achieve levels of certification as bird surveyors. The other session focused on eBird-- how to use eBird, advanced eBird skills, and documenting our sightings using eBird.

I would like to introduce elements of both of these presentations to the bird club in the near future. I think anybody interested in birds might like to learn more about these activities and skills. I came away convinced that our club members who help with the bird club's bird survey projects would benefit from the bird certification program. In addition, I also want to encourage our members to utilize eBird to a much greater degree than now is the case. I think that, with a minimum amount of training, most members would be interested in contributing to bird science in such a way.

The third session on Saturday was a large-group session focused on advancing the fall birding skills of participants. There was a presentation on the Migrant Water Birds of the Great Lakes. The presenter left me in awe of his identification skills of distant birds. The second presentation focused on the identification of hawks in flight. The presenter's photography of raptors in flight and his ability to describe the visual details that one could utilize in that skill development left me wishing I were a lot smarter with a much better memory! Unbelievable! But, then, I had to remind myself that he does that sort of thing for a living!

It was a great surprise to see Sarah Johnson at the conference too. I suspect that Sarah also picked up a lot of ideas and I wouldn't be too surprised if one or more of the presenters were invited to the Discovery Center for all of to learn from sometime in the future. If that happens, be sure to attend. It will be worth it!

The real dictionary definition for 'Christmas Bird Count'

n. A year-end migration of woolly-capped binocular users into wooded areas of the Western Hemisphere.

One theory suggests it's a century-old ritual involving a counting of birds. A more plausible explanation is that it's how the thick-soled species burns off calories gained from excessive winter feeding.

-Donna Roche, from
Bird Brain Teasers