

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the
Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

John Randolph

On the last Thursday of October, a drive to a park in Wausau, followed by a delightful visit to the very striking Bird in Art exhibition at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum, we completed our 2014 season of weekly bird walks. Donna Roche has been a superb leader of these outings, and several other Club members have initiated and led some wonderful Thursday morning trips (a few day trips as well). The esthetic beauty of the varied habitats, the cardio-pulmonary benefits, and the almost certain guarantee of some really "good looks" are elements that I so appreciate.

I just checked with a friend in Harshaw, and she confirmed that a Red-headed Woodpecker is still coming to her feeder (this morning, November 14th, post-major snowfall the last few days), in addition to Red-bellied, Pileated, Downy and Hairy

Woodpeckers. She had sent me pictures several months ago, before we had a pair of adults and three juveniles come to our place, and while ours left some time in September, I'm very happy to know that at least one is still around. Out of our windows, we saw what I guess will be our last Mallards of the season four days ago, as our lake is now completely frozen and snow-covered.

Hopefully, we'll be seeing Pine Grosbeaks and other Canadian visitors in our area this winter, as there are reports of Pine Siskins, Common Redpolls, and Evening Grosbeak sightings. I'm almost feeling sorry for our squirrels, watching them tenaciously work on our new feeder ("Squirrel Buster Plus"), and inevitably falling off. However, I did see a cute but much lighter Flying Squirrel hang on until I took the feeder in for the night.

Looking forward to the Christmas Bird Count, I'm also still savoring the wonderful October trip to Trempealeau

National Wildlife Refuge, nicely organized by Carne Andrews. The overnight trips the Club takes each year are another special benefit that I greatly appreciate.

Life List Quarterly

Guy David

The first three quarters of the Discovery Center Bird Club's birding year has been very interesting, as always. I have been busy for much of the year taking care of family matters so I have personally missed the majority of outings and activities this year. Therefore I must begin this column by noting my sincere thanks and appreciation to the club members who have faithfully been recording bird species observed during the outings and reporting those lists to me.

In addition to organizing and leading the club's Thursday morning outings this year, Donna Roche certainly has shouldered most of the responsibility to make sure that our species observations were recorded and reported to our members. In addition, Heather Lumpkin (Birding Festival), Judy Cassady (Door County Weekend), John Randolph and Cynthia Krakowski provided important assistance. It is because of their help that the club's eBird record continues to be complete and intact. I am so proud of the fact that the bird club has been recording observations and sharing our data with the International Birding Database during all of our outings since 2004.

It has been a very interesting birding year in 2014, but, of course, I would always say that! Except for the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts in December, the club's birding year is pretty much completed. Of course, if somebody comes up with a "gotta see" vagrant migrant, maybe we'll get together to search for it. Winter possibilities could include such interesting birds as Black-headed Grosbeak, Varied Thrush, Townsends Solitaire and others.

Annual List Report

The annual list for 2014 includes 172 species so far. I anticipate that the club will add a few species to this total yet this year during the Christmas bird counts. There are some winter species that are missing from our annual list since we haven't been able to do much winter birding since January 1, 2014. Thanks to Carne Andrews' effort we did have a wonderful winter trip organized to spend a day at Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota. That gave us outstanding potential for winter birds but it was unrealized due to a heavy snow storm the day of the outing.

Despite having 36 outings this year it is likely that the club's annual total for 2014 will fall below recent years. We are severely limited with our shorebird sightings this year due to high water everywhere which meant a lack of decent mud flats for us to search. We also will be missing some big-water waterfowl species because we just didn't hit them during our trips to Ashland and Superior. We might

have hit on a couple of species of raptors to add to our tally had the club had an organized trip to Hawk Ridge. Our only owl report for 2014 is the Barred Owl. There also are a few species of grassland birds and birds that occur south of our normal birding territory that might have been observed if we would have had a seasonal outing to central/southern Wisconsin.

But, that is enough of that. The number of species observed in any given year is but a small part of why we go birding together. The best statistic of all for this year, as far as I am concerned, is the number of participants that we have had during outings and during meetings this year. The average participation in our outings is at a historical high for 2014. I don't have numbers for monthly meeting participation but I bet that is the highest ever, based on how full the Bobcat Cabin has been for meetings I have been able to attend!

Life List Report

As I have observed in the past during this report, our opportunities for adding new species to the club's life list will diminish every year as we tally increasing numbers of available species. Therefore I regard it is quite significant that the club has added 4 new species so far for 2014. The club's Life List of bird species currently stands at 264 species. One of the new species was found during a north woods excursion and the other three were found during extended outings to other areas of Wisconsin. In order of discovery, the

following are the new species and a word about each.

Grasshopper Sparrow

Washington Island May 31, 2014

Black Vulture

Washington Island May 31, 2014

These species were observed by club participants during the Door County Birding Festival field trip. Six club members participated in the trip. The Black Vulture is a species that rarely is found in Wisconsin and, when it is found, it usually is in far southern Wisconsin.

Spruce Grouse

Vilas County August 28, 2014



Jim Krakowski did some research on this species and then successfully lead 12 birders on an outing to locate one. The bird was exceptionally cooperative and every participant was able to view the bird and many got decent photos of it.

Three club members braved a tough birding day to visit a portion of the Hiawatha-Bearskin Trail in the Lake Nokomis area. Jon Cassady researched this new area for the club and led the group. The Scoter was observed on Lake Nokomis and studied by the group via spotting scope and binoculars. Then they compared their observations with field guide illustrations and agreed upon the species that they saw.

The species was a rare enough sighting for the date and place so an eBird reviewer challenged the report. John Randolph responded to the challenge by writing a description of their observations, in cooperation with the Cassadys. I haven't heard about the outcome of the challenge but, according to bird club regulations, a bird is recorded as an official observation of the club if 2 or more members agree on the report. John's report was further supported by the fact that he had the chance to view a well-documented White-winged Scoter last winter below the paper mill dam in Rhinelander.

Loon nesting on an artificial nesting platform similar to those that will be placed on the Manitowish Waters Chain of Lakes in Spring 2015 as a part of a new citizen science project focused on increasing loon productivity.

Volunteers Needed for Loon Nesting Platform Project on the Manitowish Waters Chain of Lakes

Heather Lumpkin
Research and Monitoring Coordinator
North Lakeland Discovery Center

A summer in the Northwoods just wouldn't be complete without hearing the beautiful yet haunting yodel of the Common Loon echoing across the lake on a still evening. This lake-dependent species is influenced by changes in both water quality and availability of suitable nesting substrate. Floating artificial nesting platforms increase the nesting habitat available to loons and may increase reproductive success. The North Lakeland Discovery Center is seeking volunteers to assist with a new citizen science project that will build, install, and monitor 10 new artificial loon nesting platforms on the Manitowish Waters Chain of Lakes in 2015 in an effort to increase nest productivity for this iconic Northwoods species.



The lakes in the Manitowish Waters Chain currently host at eight breeding loon territories for which productivity data have been gathered over the last four years by Mike Meyers, Wildlife Biologist with the Wisconsin DNR. The lakes on the Manitowish Chain experience seasonal fluctuations in water level. In the fall water levels are lowered about 3.5ft. When the ice has broken in the spring, water levels are increased again. These water level fluctuations coupled with shoreline development may be lowering nesting loon productivity, and so the Manitowish Chain is an ideal location to determine if the addition of artificial nesting platforms can increase loon productivity.

The North Lakeland Discovery Center received a \$5000 grant from the Wisconsin Citizen-based Monitoring Partnership Program to coordinate the Loon Nesting Platform Project which will construct, install, and monitor 10 new nesting platforms on the Manitowish Waters Chain of Lakes during 2015. Over the winter and early spring platforms will be built by volunteers. These platforms will be installed in April and then monitored by local residents. Loon alert signs and public outreach programs will be used to increase awareness and knowledge of loon ecology and conservation among student groups, visitors, and residents. Loon productivity data collected by citizen scientists will then be compared to existing productivity data from loon pairs that have established breeding territories on the Manitowish Waters Chain of Lakes in order to assess the effects of artificial nesting platforms.

The North Lakeland Discovery Center is looking for volunteers to help with a variety of different aspects of this project. We need help during the winter to build the platforms. We are also looking for volunteers with fishing boats that have an outboard motor who are interested in assisting with platform installation in April. Volunteer monitors will be needed during the spring and early summer to monitor platforms weekly from boats (kayaks, canoes, pontoon boats, and fishing boats), and it may be possible to monitor a few platforms from land. Please contact Heather Lumpkin (heather@discoverycenter.net or call 715-543-2085) if you are interested in volunteering for this project.

FLEDGLING FOOTNOTES: EVENING EXPLORATIONS

Article & photos by Amy and Tom Sheldon



A favorite northwoods pastime is our evening explorations. We slowly drive back roads, (are there any other kind?), half an hour before dusk/dawn to one hour after dusk/dawn. This is the time when crepuscular animals, like Barred Owls, are

most active. In August we were ecstatic to find two Barred Owl families, on Crab Lake Dock and Big Lake roads. At the annual Discovery Bird Club dinner Dave Foster encouraged us to share our experience with other members.

Tom and I are definitely not owl experts. In fact we were just humbled when having to remove our screech owl nesting boxes after realizing their range doesn't extend this far north. We also struggle to find owls, and agree with renowned owlers Pat and Clay Sutton's quip "spotting owls is a challenge; it takes patience, commitment and a great deal of time. Consider yourself lucky if you actually see an owl one out of ten times you try."

Barred Owls live year round in mixed forests of large trees, preferably near swamps or other bodies of water. This makes the Van Vliet Hemlock area ideal habitat. They roost on branches during the day with their cryptic barred feathering, propensity to sit near tree trunks with obscuring branches making them nearly invisible. Tricks to day time spotting of roosts are to find "white wash" (their white excrement, like candle drippings on trunks and branches) and pellets of indigestible prey around tree bases.

Barred Owls are nonmigratory and keep a six mile radius of territory. So chances of finding them in previously reported areas are excellent. One way to attract them is with vocalizations. They are most responsive during their breeding season in February and March. Their call is characteristically slowly rising and descending series of hoots, "who cooks for you, all?". To assure the most success play the voice for 5-10 minutes at a time with rest intervals of 10 minutes. We try,

as with all recordings, to be respectful of the birds. We have heard them calling in July during day light hours as we canoed Lake Van Vliet. We have also tried alternative sound lures, like an injured rabbit, only to attract an un-wily coyote!

When the light is failing, photography becomes difficult and you may want to use a powerful flashlight to view the owls. Just be careful as the light may aggravate the birds that can aggressively attack. We know someone who was injured by their talons glancing off a flashlight, wisely held in front of his face, or things could have been worse. This year even our weak camera flash provoked one parent owl to elongate its neck (despite appearances their necks are long); gyrate it back and forth, hiss like an angry cat and then fly at our pick up truck.

Given that any owl will prey on a smaller owl you also want to be careful with taping that you are not contributing to increased predation of the smaller species. As the Barred Owl has expanded its territory into fire suppression managed forests of the northwest, this has become a concern for the Spotted Owls. A strategy for aiding the Spotted Owl is to remove the slightly larger Barred Owls from their territories. Besides smaller owls Barred Owls will also eat chipmunks (yes!), mice, voles, rabbits, reptiles and amphibians.

One reason old growth forests are essential to Barred Owl survival is that they provide suitable nesting sites like abandoned nests of hawks and ravens. They also like large squirrel nests and tree cavities. So, during the day investigate these structures for possible owlets.

Our birding duo functions smoothly due to Tom's keen eyesight. True to form, on Bear Lake road, perched on a snag, he sighted a Common Nighthawk. This bird,

while common and widespread is still mysterious as no one knows where in South America it really spends its winter. Its numbers, are in steep decline due in part to the fact it must nest on flat surfaces like the ground or flat roofs. Like all ground nesting species predation, particularly from domestic cats, is a problem.



Common Nighthawk

The Nighthawk relies on nighttime insects to satisfy its appetite. I was able get within a few yards before it flew; its characteristic white wing patches flashing and emitting the plaintive “peent” call. This particular bird took our breath away with the sunset reflected on its specially adapted retina. The warm summer apricot and violet rays of sunshine capture the fleeting beauty of our cherished North woods.

Cooper’s Hawk Sighting

Article & Photo by Elizabeth Stone

On Oct.18, this Cooper's Hawk was perched on the roof of our bird feeder at our home in Ann Arbor, then it flew to a nearby branch where it posed for my husband, Dick Theile. We could see the grey cap, red eye, and yellow legs beautifully. Needless to say, we had NO songbirds at our feeder for the next couple of hours!

We had a great week at our Northwoods home Sep.27-Oct.5, but it was a pretty rainy week, so our bird photos from that week are limited. However, we were thrilled to see a female red crossbill at Red Arrow Camp on Oct.3.



FALL MIGRATION TRIP

Carne Andrews

On the weekend of October 17-19, sixteen Bird Club members enjoyed a fall migration trip along the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trails of the Mississippi/Chippewa River and Central Sands Prairie Regions. First stop on the way to the Mississippi Flyway was the James Newman Clark Bird Museum on the UW-Eau Claire campus. We were met by Lynn Janik, chair of the Biology Dept., who provided a history of this collection of over 300 bird species found in Wisconsin collected by Clark who farmed in nearby Dunn County. Also included are two cases of exotic birds from around the globe that Clark had either traded for or purchased. The specimens were impressively well preserved over 100 years ago by Clark himself.

From Eau Claire we drove to the National Eagle Center on the banks of the Mississippi River in Wabasha, MN. Here we expanded our knowledge of Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles in their native habitat through extensive displays, interactive learning stations, observing live tethered eagles at close range, and attending an engaging feeding and educational interpretive presentation.

The final leg of the first day followed the Wisconsin Great River Trail, the only designated National Byway in Wisconsin, paralleling the Mississippi River with stops at the Nelson Creamery and Rieck's Lake Park observation deck, the best site along this route to see Tundra Swans during fall migration. Although we'd wait until the next day to see Tundra's, large

numbers of Green-winged Teal, Mallards, and American Coots were sited along with a Great Blue Heron, a Pied-billed Grebe, a Bald Eagle, a dozen Great Egrets, several Double-crested Cormorants, and Rock Pigeons. After checking into the Little Bluff Inn in Trempealeau, we wound down the day in the relaxing atmosphere of the historic Trempealeau Hotel for a taste of its famous walnut burger and scrumptious cuisine.



Photo by Guy David

Saturday morning dawned overcast with intermittent light mist as we eagerly gathered at 7:30 AM and rendezvoused with our guide for the day, Scott Lee, local nature educator and long-time president of the Friends of the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). On the way to the refuge, we stopped at an observation deck in Perot State Park overlooking the convergence of the Trempealeau and Mississippi Rivers bordered by 500 foot limestone bluffs on the Wisconsin and Minnesota sides of the river. The riverbanks and surrounding wetlands

provide attractive habitat for migratory waterfowl, wading birds, and raptors flying through this area spring and fall. From afar, American White Pelicans, Great Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Greater Sandhill Cranes, Canada Geese, a Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, and an American Robin initiated the day list.

As the clouds cleared, the remainder of the morning was spent on the 6,000 acre Trempealeau NWR on the observation deck across from the Visitor's Center, the Pine Creek Dike, and Kypes Dike. The views from each location afforded views of 44 species and variable sized groups of 12 duck species: Wood Ducks, American Widgeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintails, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, Common Mergansers, and Ruddy Ducks; innumerable Canada Geese, Sandhill Cranes, American Coots, and Ring-billed Gulls; 9 Tundra Swans, 17 Double-crested Cormorants, 16 Great Egrets, 15 American White Pelicans, 8 Bald Eagles, Pileated, Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy Woodpeckers; a Northern Flicker, Belted Kingfisher, a Mourning Dove, an Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal, Cedar Wax-wings, a lone Yellow-rumped and only warbler, and several of our common northwoods summer and winter residents.



Trempealeau Mountain and the Trempealeau River bottomlands with the Mississippi River in the far background. It was a beautiful fall day!

Photo by Guy David

Following lunch, the Trempealeau Lakes State Wildlife Area separated from the Mississippi River by marshes and floodplain led to 10 species observed adding Turkey Vultures and Killdeer to our trip list. The afternoon concluded with a stop at the Trempealeau Elementary School where extensive wildlife and impressive avian displays expose students every day to the rich resources in their natural surroundings. Over 170 avian species are displayed in a floor to ceiling 32' long display with an upper Mississippi River mural background.

Sunday morning we drove to the Necedah NWR and were treated to 25 species highlighted by the sighting of 2 Whooping Cranes, first sighted by Anne Swift, from the observation deck behind the nature center. Although the targeted Red-headed Woodpecker had already migrated south, 3 Great Blue Herons, 13 Dark-eyed Juncos, and a Snow Bunting were added to the trip list on the auto-tour through the refuge.

Following the auto-tour, we headed east and north to our final destination, the 6th Avenue Marsh in Adams County. Last stop but certainly not least! Thanks, Guy, for the suggestion to stop at this new club destination! New trip observations included 4 Cackling Geese, 3 Trumpeter Swans, a Northern Harrier, a Red-tailed Hawk, an American Kestrel, 6 Buffleheads, 150 Brewers and 50 Red-winged Blackbirds estimated. Large numbers of approximated 600 American Coots, 400 Sandhill Cranes, 150 Canada Geese, and 1000 Mallards were also observed.

Thanks to all who attended this fun-packed and informative fall migration trip!



Minnesota bluffs in full fall colors from the Trempealeau, WI area.

Photo by Guy David

Birds and Brats

Judy Cassady

Selling raffle tickets at Save More Plaza for the Hazelhurst Lions Club inspired Jon Cassady to introduce a new fund raising event for the NLDC Bird Club. Jon had brought his binoculars to our Lions Club

post on the porch at Save More. Between raffle ticket sales we were amazed and delighted with the number of species of birds we saw. The location of Save More Foods, across HWY 51 from Lake Minocqua, and just north of the pond seemed an idea location to find birds.

At the Bird Club's annual meeting in August, Dwayne Swift reported that, having completed the Master Naturalist course classes, he was required to have a special project. The management at Save More was very accommodating when we inquired about the possibility of selling brats at their Brat Shack to raise money for two "song finders". The SongFinder is a digital bird song hearing device designed to enable people with hearing loss hear more bird songs in the field.

Saturday, Sept. 13 from 9 am to approximately 3 pm 10 Bird Club members enjoyed a partly sunny day with temperatures in the 50's. We sold a lot of brats and hot dogs, closing the day with about \$300. profit including donations. We had visitors who were seasoned birders, and some interested beginners. Our bird visitors, 16 species, included 2 Bald Eagles, a Cooper's Hawk, a Red-tailed Hawk, and a Merlin. Two Sandhill Cranes flew over. Two Common Loons and a hundred plus Ring-billed Gulls were seen on and around Lake Minocqua. The pond hosted two Wood Ducks, 13 Mallards, and 2 Pied-billed Grebes. Four Red-winged Blackbirds, 2 Song Sparrows, and 2 Swamp Sparrows were spotted in the shrubs at the edge of the pond.

All in all, it proved to be a very successful and enjoyable day. We're already talking about another Birds and

Brats event in the spring. One of the SongFinders has been purchased and can be seen at the Bird Club's library at the Discovery Center.



Photos by Cynthia Krakowski

Fun Times on a Birding Trip to Ashland



Cynthia Krakowski, Donna Roche, and Carne Andrews picking mushrooms during a birding trip to Ashland. They don't look like they are feeling too guilty!

Photo by Guy David

*Thank-you to all the contributing authors & photographers of these very informative and interesting articles and photos!
Please consider submitting articles for the March 2015 issue.*

Ingrid Stephan, editor