

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

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Northwoods Birding Festival Musings

Guy David

Have you noticed? Our annual birding festival at North Lakeland Discovery Center is so darned much fun! It's all about birds and birding together while kicking off the Discovery Center Bird Club's high season each year. The festival is our biggest birding event of the year in terms of number of participants, variety of habitats visited, and cumulative number of species recorded over time.

As many of you know, I have been the data recorder for the bird club since the beginning. I haven't been notified by the club's Board of Directors that I have been either removed or reappointed for another season, so I guess I'll just keep at it for another year since I also am so

darned fascinated with the bird club's success in finding and recording bird species that keeps building over time. Take the 13 years of our birding festival, for example.

The day began with 5 groups out for early morning warbler walks for an hour or so, covering a lot of the NLDC Birding Trail system. Then, after some refreshments there were 70 or so people divided into 8 field trip groups that spread out among a great variety of habitats within reasonable driving distance from NLDC. There also was the ever successful bird banding station happening throughout the morning. In the end, after all groups tallied their species, we discovered that 93 species of birds were recorded. Darned good, I say, but what else can be determined by tallying these species on a chart for one day?

All of the festival bird species data have been accumulated by me over the years in an ever increasing dataset by using Microsoft Excel. Well, after 13 years of having festivals and accumulating bird species data, there are a few more things to be known from our efforts. Much of this would not be known were it not for keeping and doing something with the records from 13 days of birding festival efforts. Asking questions, one can find out what the record tells us.

Question: How did this year's species count compare with other years?

This year we recorded 93 species, so how does this total compare with other years? The average number of species recorded over 13 years is 88 species per year, so this year was above average. This compares with the 2007 festival when 100 species were recorded and 2012 when 68 species were recorded. There were 5 years when 93 species was exceeded, 6 years when the count was less, and 2 that were equal.

Question: What is the cumulative number of species recorded over 13 years and how does this year compare to all species recorded so far? The data shows that there have been 170 species of birds recorded during the birding festivals over 13 years. This means that 2017 yielded 54.7% of all species recorded over time. Ah...imagine the potential each year!

Question: Were any new species recorded this year compared to all previous years? Yes! The 4 new species added to the cumulative total included Semipalmated Plover, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern

Mockingbird, and Eastern Towhee. Were you there for any of these sightings? Were you excited? I was because I can lay claim to sighting the Semipalmated Plover for our Powell Marsh Vista Group!

Question: How many species have been recorded during each and every festival over 13 years? The answer is 35 species. We can consider this group of species to be our constants that we always can count on. I wonder how many of you could list which species these would be. I bet some of you could actually come pretty close if we had a contest! Just for kicks, I also checked to see how many species were recorded 12 out of the 13 years and learned that included 11 species. Many of these species are fairly common and one could consider it to be surprising that they were missed during any given festival. An interesting related fact is that none of these 12 species were missed the past 3 years. Yeah, we're getting good at this!

Question: How many species have been recorded only once in 13 festivals? That would be 33 species including the 4 new species added this year. It could be fun to hypothesize why these species weren't recorded more often. Here are some of my ideas.

- Looking over this list of species I can guess that some were simply rarities, or are uncommon for the time of year or place.
- Another idea is that the festival was moved to a week earlier beginning in 2013. This fact may have made it more likely that some later migrants are being missed since then. On the other hand, being earlier the past few years may have increased our tally of early migrants. Bird species present from one week to the next during May is a likely variable. However, varying weather conditions from year to year also has an effect.
- Some of these species are difficult to identify so a knowledgeable birder needs to be in the right place and time. Some species may have been encountered during other years but simply weren't recognized by any in the group. Citing myself as an example, this year a flock of 20+ shorebirds flew over our group and none of us had sufficient experience or observational prowess to be sure of what species they were.
- Another variable is the places utilized each year for the field trips. Over 13 years there have been 15 different locations utilized. We know that differing locations with varying habitats would net

variables in terms of bird species observed. Of the 15 locations only 3 have been used every year including Little Turtle Flowage, Powell Marsh Vista Flowage, and the Discovery Center trail system. Breaking this data down a little, there is good reason for these to be popular places. This year the Warbler Walks and Bird Banding yielded 40 species but over 13 years we have accumulated 105 species, just on Discovery Center grounds. Our most productive field trip has been Little Turtle Flowage that has yielded 114 species over the years and was the best again this year with 55 of our 93 species. Closely following in productivity is Powell Marsh Vista Flowage area with 112 species accumulated including 43 species this year.

As I proposed in the beginning, our birding festival is about camaraderie via birds and birding. If that is true, this information supports my point. As long as we are doing these things anyway, it is worthwhile to keep records and to take some time to look at the data once in a while. For this article I interpreted data that I have been accumulating in a spreadsheet. In addition to this, all of this data also has been entered into bird club eBird records, making our data available to us as well as all ornithological researchers all over the world!

Again, I ask, do you eBird? If not, please begin, now!



Powell Marsh Birding Festival participants enjoyed a rare sight as Trumpeter Swans swam about in front of a nesting Common Loon. *Photo by Guy David*

The Eagle's Breakfast

David Foster

On a small island in the west bay of McCullough Lake in northern Vilas County, a loon had for two weeks been on a nest at the tip of the island, visible from the water and the nearby treeline. Our friend Peggy Wolf was monitoring the nesting bird. Early in the morning on June 5, Peggy, hearing the loon thrashing and calling in the water, discovered a bald eagle sitting on the nest. Here is Peggy's description:

The eagle had landed on the ground directly on top of the loon nest and stood there! There may have been two eggs, because the eagle flew away with something in its talons. Mama Loon was screeching and rising out of the water with her chest pushed out and wings extended and flapping. After the eagle flew away, Mama cooed and swam back and forth in front of the nest, sticking her head under the water, as if to see if her egg was there. Then, after hours, she left. I haven't seen either mama or papa loon since.

A pair of loons -- possibly this pair -- have successfully nested on this island for the last several years. The previous nests were among weeds on the lee side of the island, far less visible than this year's.



The loon's nest

Photo by David Foster

The Great Wisconsin Birdathon

Sarah Besadny

The Up North Hammerheads participated for the second year in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon. The Birdathon is a program coordinated by the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation to raise funds for various bird conservation initiatives. Any team that is birding on behalf of a not-for-profit organization splits the funds they raise, half going to their not-for-profit and half going to the bird protection initiatives.

On May 22nd, 16 bird enthusiasts started out at 6:00 in the morning (some very dedicated participants started out even earlier than that!) to find as many bird species as possible. We birded many different habitats from the Mercer area and Powell Marsh area, down along the Hwy 51 corridor, over to Dove Road and finished up in Minocqua. By the time we wrapped up for the day the team had tallied 112 species! Wow!! We had set a target goal of 110 species and we were all thrilled to beat that goal by 2!

We set a fund raising goal of \$2,500 based upon the very successful results we had last year. Well, we beat that goal as well! At the time of this writing the team has raised \$2,530. Also as of this writing the Great Wisconsin Birdathon for 2017 has raised \$90,008. We're very pleased with our efforts and contribution to the Birdathon. What a wonderful way to help support bird protection initiatives!!

I don't think I'm speaking just for myself, participating in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon is a blast!! It's a wonderful opportunity to spend an entire day outside, looking for birds, spending time with friends and applying some strategy for maximizing the number of species seen – and all the while helping raise funds for bird protection. Consider joining the team next year! All are welcome.



Most of the Up North Hammerheads birdathon team. Missing from the photo are Guy David (who was taking the picture), Jean Hanson, Jon and Judy Cassady and Vanessa Haese-Lehman.

Birding Rarities and Opportunities

Guy David

Part of the great fun of being a birder is the possibility of encountering a new species or some oddity for the first time. While I'm not among them, there are a lot of birding enthusiasts who watch the online birding reports and then travel far and wide to be among those who get to see every rarity within reach. I admit to checking the Internet once in a while and if a species that I haven't seen is reported near to where I live, I may take time to go and check it out.

What I have come to enjoy is just getting out there to my favorite area bird haunts just to see what is there. I count our club's weekly outings as one of my main birding activities during the summer. Once out there, one never knows what could happen!

The first two club outings since the 2017 Birdathon netted over 40 species each time, so thus we witnessed together the arrival of many species as a result of their migration. Seeing and hearing the birds was rewarding for each of us, but sometimes something special happens. Take, for example, the Common Yellowthroat singing for a prolonged period in a very visible fashion from the top of a tall cherry tree at Presque Isle Ponds. Everyone got to watch this bird via spotting scope for as long as they cared to. I also was able to take photographs, one of which I submitted for this newsletter. What a great opportunity for those who were there! We regularly spot Common Yellowthroats during our outings but they usually are flitting about and skulking in the shrubs giving us only fleeting views.



Common Yellowthroat

Photo by Guy David

I also recently spent a cold and dreary morning in the area of the Powell Marsh Vista Flowage. Since it was lousy weather, I had the whole place to myself the entire time I was out there. While out there I recorded 41 species via eBird, mostly the usual suspects. But, among them, were two rarities!

Early in May I was out in the tribal area of Powell Marsh when I spotted a bird from a distance that was very black. There were a lot of Red-winged Blackbirds in the area but something about this bird suggested it was different. I was able to work my way closer to the bird for a better observation and then could see that that the bird was totally black except that it had a large white patch on it's shoulder. It was a Lark Bunting! While I had seen flocks of this species in Arizona I had never seen one in Wisconsin. According to the range maps, this bird should not have been east of the Dakotas! I documented this bird via eBird and included a photo. I expect that this bird report will be mentioned in an upcoming issue of [The Badger Birder!](#)



Lark Bunting

Photo by Guy David

Another rare species for the time and location was a Ruddy Duck. I have observed this species many times while wintering in Arizona, but they have been few and far between in Wisconsin. This bird was very cooperative and I was able to get some nice photos, one of which I provided for this newsletter. It was a unique discovery and I was happy to document via eBird.



Ruddy Duck, female

Photo by Guy David

The second rarity wasn't a rare species but it was a variant of a common species! Far into Powell Marsh, in the third pool to the south from the Vista Flowage parking area, I found a flock of about 24 Canada Geese. One is tempted to not pay much attention to a flock of geese because they are so common. But, I scoped the flock and one bird looked different. My first thought from considerable distance was Greater White-fronted Goose but the bird didn't really match up. So, I worked my way further south on the brushy and rough dike to try to get closer. I stopped my forward progress when the birds appeared to be getting a little nervous so I stopped to look for the "different" bird. What I observed was obviously another Canada Goose but this one had a lot of white on top of the head where it should be black. The bird had the usual white band under the chin but the band was much wider and longer than those on the nearby normal geese. Thus I determined that the bird was a leucistic Canada Goose. This bird wasn't as remarkably leucistic as the birds Carne Andrews pictured in her March 2017 Bird Songs article on leucism in birds, but it certainly was unique! Due to distance I was unable to get a real clear photo of the bird but I did get one that was representative enough for documentation purposes.

Getting out birding with our club or even going out alone during bad weather can have rewarding results. In these recently cited cases, having an unusually great opportunity to observe a common species, stumbling upon a rare species for the time and place, or finding an unusual uncommon variant of a common species all enriched my recent birding experiences!

Remember, birding is always fun and eBirding is always rewarding. What? Did I say eBirding was rewarding? Well, consider this. All of the bird club members, including those who weren't there, receive an emailed checklist of birds observed during every club outing. It is rewarding for me to be able to do this. BUT...bird club members who were participants in an outing and also have an eBird account also can get a shared eBird checklist from me. The checklist therefore becomes their own personal eBird record for their life lists and the checklist that

I shared sometimes include photos of birds that I took during the outing. Even more rewarding for me. Sometimes I receive an appreciative note, thus helping me to make an even stronger claim that eBirding is rewarding!

Do you eBird?

Life List Quarterly - June 2017

Guy David

Life List Report

I am thrilled to report that, incredibly, the club has already added a new species to our life list this spring! Thanks to the Birding Festival and a field trip lead by John Bates, the Northern Mockingbird became our latest addition! This means that the club now has 268 species on our life list. Of course, numbers being relative, our actual count depends on what we include as part of our achievement. The number could be 270. Let me explain.

Last year in October our club observed an unusual goose at Maslowski Beach in Ashland, WI. We studied and photographed the white goose and struggled to decide whether it was a Snow Goose or a Ross's Goose. It seemed to have features of both species. Photos of the bird were sent to local experts Ryan Brady and Andy Paulios who reported back to us that they were familiar with the bird and that they had determined that the bird was a Ross's x Snow Goose, a hybrid. So if that bird were added to the club life list, our count would be 269 species.

Fast forwarding to May 22, 2017 our club participated in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon. During the Birdathon one of our groups lead by Vanessa Haese-Lehman reported a Brewster's Warbler! While the Birdathon authorities allowed us to count the bird as a separate species, it actually is recognized as a hybrid that resulted from breeding between a Golden-winged Warbler x Blue-winged Warbler. According to David Sibley, these two species hybridize regularly. His explanation can be found on page 428 of his book, Sibley Guide to Birds. So, if we

were to count that bird for our life list, we would have 270 species. But do we?

While the Ross's x Snow Goose and the Golden-winged Warbler x Blue-winged Warbler are different birds to include in our record of life long observations, I have chosen to not include them on the club's life list because they are not recognized by authorities as distinct species of birds. While I suppose one could claim that the club has recorded 270 "types" of birds, following rules set by national organizations, we have recorded 268 "species" of birds. See? It depends on how you count them!

Man! This gets complicated. Anyone else want to take over the job of tracking our club's species data and writing this column?

The club's 268 species includes only those species of birds that are recognized as species by the American Ornithological Society. A quick check of the AOS Website revealed that there are over 760 species of birds that are recognized as breeding in North America and Canada. Well, as a club, we haven't taken to wandering all over North America and Canada. Almost all of the species on our Life List have been recorded in Wisconsin, mainly northern Wisconsin. I think it is pretty impressive that we have recorded observing about 35% of the North American species recognized by the AOS!

So how are we doing toward finding Wisconsin birds? Pretty darned good! The current Checklist of Wisconsin Birds includes 437 species. This means that we have recorded over 61% of the species of birds recognized as occurring throughout Wisconsin! If you are interested in seeing the entire Wisconsin Checklist of Birds, you can find it here: <https://wsobirds.org/checklist-of-wisconsin-birds>

Annual List Report

As for 2017 as of the date of this writing, the bird club has participated in 6 organized activities and Thursday morning outings. This included Birding Festival, the Birdathon, and 4 Thursday morning outings. Our collective results so far this year includes 129 species plus the Brewster's Warbler. This means that we are on an approximate par

with this time last year when we had recorded a similar number of species by early June.

As I reported in our March Bird Songs newsletter, last year we recorded 171 species. At our pace so far this year, it would appear that we are on a similar pace of discovery as last year. There is a lot more fun to come, so be sure to join in our adventures as often as you can!