

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

Carne Andrews

"WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY"?

It's early autumn in the northwoods! A great big "happy" for me living in northern Wisconsin is the change of seasons. Every few months, I'm inspired to celebrate the diversity in our natural world and how it impacts plans for everyday living and recreation. Each season holds its joyful memories of the season past and the promise of the one to come.

The changing of seasons also correlates with our individual bird watching habits and our NLDC Bird Club activities as guided by the life cycle of birds and their adaptations to the change of seasons. What is

more miraculous than these fragile creatures flying, in most cases, hundreds if not thousands of miles twice each year to breed, to raise young, and to survive despite wide swings in weather conditions and natural disasters such as the southern and eastern coastal regions of the USA recently endured. It gives one pause to contemplate the impact these severe storms will have during fall migration.

Reflecting on the past three seasons of our club's activities, I'm also inspired by what makes me happy and most thankful about being involved in the NLDC Bird Club: a core of dedicated members engaging in weekly hikes, projects and field trips; growing relationships and friendships both locally and around the state; a wide variety of monthly presentations by knowledgeable experts in their fields to advance public and personal education; new members interested in learning more about birds and assuming leadership positions; a full board of directors with new energy and ideas; a well-organized weekly schedule of varied outings attended by passionate birders, faithfully showing up even in the worst of weather; sustained accurate record keeping; an informative newsletter; a stable financial status enabling continued support of our mission and goals; and worthwhile citizen science endeavors to engage in.

Now with the recent passing of the fall equinox, I invite you to join in the pleasures of a new autumn! With the forests bursting in magnificent color, the rustle of leaves underfoot, cooler temperatures, migrating birds calling from above and returning winter birds frequenting yard feeders again, come join in the last month of the Bird Club's many activities wrapping up with Birds in Art in Wausau on October 26th...all guaranteed to bring you happiness, too!!!

Where Does the Discovery Center Bird Club Go

Birding?

Guy David

Well now, the subject of this article may seem to be a little silly to our club members. Of course we all know where we go birding, we have been to these places together, many times in some cases! However, one

of my great faults probably is to ask questions that may not need answering, and this may be one of them. Being the indefatigable questioner, I will press on anyway.

Have you heard of eBird? Ha...gotcha! Of course you have, if you have taken any time to read my previous missives in our club newsletter. But do you know about ALL of the things that one can discover by keeping eBird records and occasionally taking some time to review them? The thought occurred to me that many of our club members don't know about our birding location records within eBird.

So here goes, more information that you maybe didn't know you wanted to know. In many BIRD SONGS articles over the years I have made reference to birding within our "Home Range" where over each year we find many of the usual suspects. In this issue of BIRD SONGS you will find my Life List Quarterly column and therein I mentioned the benefits of going beyond our usual stomping grounds to find other species. The eBird data includes a lot of information regarding our club's birding habits.

Our "Home Range", for sake of definition, I will set as areas within 50 miles where we go for our weekly outings. In mapping terms, eBird organizes all data into Major Regions, Country, State / Province, and County. Discovery Center Bird Club eBird records reveal that all of our listed species in the world were found in the Western Hemisphere, North America, and in the USA Lower 48 States. All true, we haven't organized birding trips outside of these parameters. Yet.

When one explores the State / Province tab we learn all of our Life List Species that have been recorded in Wisconsin (266 species) and Minnesota (68 species). When one clicks on the "266 species" tab a spreadsheet appears that reveals a list of all of our Wisconsin species in one column, the location where the club first recorded each species in another column, and the date of first sighting in a third column.

Our Wisconsin locations are many but our Minnesota locations reveal that our records were created as a result of visits to Hawk Ridge, Sax-Zim bog, Duluth -- Canal Park, and the Duluth area in general. But what about those Wisconsin locations? Without looking at our eBird records

could anyone tell me how many places we have visited? How often we visited each area? Which of these areas is our most frequently birded location? Could any of us name all of them? Hmmmm...maybe I should stop here and run a quiz during our October club meeting. Aw, don't worry, I just can't stop now! Besides that, it is easy to do with eBird! That is what the "County" tab comes in handy for. The first thing that pops out of the data is that the bird club has compiled 851 Checklists for 302 locations. Yes, we get around!

The State of Wisconsin includes 72 counties. According to our eBird records we have birded in 28 of those counties. The latest additions to our list are Brown County which is the recently visited Green Bay area and Shawano County which includes the Navarino SWA where we stopped on the way home from Green Bay. Well, 28 counties are too much to list here but what else can be determined?

Here is a question I bet most of our regular club birders could answer. In which county have we recorded the most species over the years? You would be right if you answered "Vilas County". Going back to my remark herein about our "Home Range", I would include Vilas County (191 species), Oneida County (179 species), and Iron County (161 species). Surprised? I bet not! Next on the list, which is outside of our "Home Range" is Ashland County, which has yielded 153 species.

Instinctively, I bet that many of our club members could tell us our most popular locations within Vilas County. I also was able to extract that information from our eBird record by looking at our locations records within eBird. Selecting for Vilas County and then selecting for "# of eBird Checklists" I discovered that our greatest number of eBird checklists were recorded for the "North Lakeland Discovery Center Trails" location where the club has recorded 87 checklists over the years. Another part of the record shows that 6 checklists were created more generically for "North Lakeland Discovery Center" so that would total 93 checklists.

AH HA! Were you thinking Powell Marsh? If yes, well, you were close! What does the data show?

Over the years the club has recorded data for two distinct areas within Powell Marsh, Powell Marsh SWA (54 checklists) and Powell Marsh LDF Tribal Reservation (30 checklists). A closer examination of our record reveals that Powell Marsh Checklists were recorded for a few other specific areas within Powell Marsh SWA adding up to 4 more checklists for a total of 88 checklists.

While eBird data can yield a lot of general data about checklists that have been contributed, it doesn't give information about why the North Lakeland Discovery Center yields the greatest number of location checklists for our club. In addition to recording almost all of our bird observation data in eBird over the years, most of you may not know that I also have been maintaining some spreadsheet data over those same years. It is that data that helps me to make some claims about why the Discovery Center?

Here is where our club members can collectively beam some pride and polish some buttons over what we do as a club. One big reason is that we have been compiling birding data for all of our birding festivals. I have been keeping bird observation records for birding festival and can show that with the warbler walks and bird banding records we record +/- 6 eBird records each year. Another reward for these records is that the birding festival kicks our annual list off with up to 100 species in the one day event! That's nearly 60% of all of the species on our annual list for this year.

Many club members also will remember from our early club years that Zach Wilson, the NLDC Naturalist at the time, recruited the bird club to conduct point count surveys on the Discovery Center Trails. As far as I know, that data was kept by the Discovery Center and not ever recorded in eBird. If it had, there would be many more checklists to our Discovery Center credit! It was that data that was utilized by the club to create the Discovery Center Birding Trail, yet another great source of pride for our club.

Wouldn't it be a great project if the Discovery Center could locate all of those records and if a club member would volunteer to enter that data into our eBird record?

Now you know, in much more detail, the answer to the question of “Where Does the Discovery Center Bird Club Go Birding?” In summary, the answer is United States, Wisconsin, and Vilas County at the North Lakeland Discovery Center and Powell Marsh. Hey...great choices, right?

The following three photos were taken by Guy David during a special Club outing prior to a monthly meeting presentation by Zach Wilson



Several club members surround an artificial loon platform as Zach Wilson inspects the nest. Two loon chicks had hatched and left the nest just a few days before our visit.



Part of the group who enjoyed visiting a loon platform with Zach Wilson



After visiting an artificial loon platform with Zach Wilson, members and guests listen intently to Zach's presentation about the Iron County Loon Project

Ed's Gift to All Who Love the Northwoods

Sarah Besadny

Discovery Center Bird Club charter member, Ed Marshall, has gifted almost 100 acres of land to the Northwoods Land Trust, a gift that will be appreciated by those who love the northwoods for generations to come. The property was originally owned by Vilas County but when the County started selling off smaller properties Ed and a neighbor purchased 78 acres about 30 years ago. Over time they bought more land adjacent to the original parcel. Ed co-owned the land until about 16 years ago when he bought his neighbor's share of the investment.

Ed's love of the land led to the option of gifting it to the Northwoods Land Trust rather than selling it off for potential development. The property was dedicated September 29th and is now called the Marshall Wildlife Conservation Area.

Ed has enjoyed seeing a variety of wildlife on the land. Wood Ducks, Trumpeter Swans, Pied-billed Grebes, Canada Geese, Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons and otters are seen in and around the large beaver pond. A variety of warblers including Ovenbird, Black-throated Green and Chestnut-sided fill the woods with song as you walk the trails in the summer months. Ed has seen coyotes, wolves, deer and squirrels as he's walked the land over the years. Just this past spring Ed selected the beaver pond as his site for the Annual Midwest Crane Count.

The Marshall Wildlife Conservation Area is open to the public and can be used for hiking, birding, snowshoeing and hunting. To get there take Highway 70 west out of Minocqua for about 13 miles. Turn left (south) onto East Squaw Lake Road, continue for a little more than a half mile and take the first right turn onto North Squaw Lake Road and within about 300 feet is a trail head on the left.

Thank you, Ed, for your generous gift to protect the land for wildlife and to open it to the public for all to enjoy!



Bird club members on the new dock installed at the Marshall Wildlife Conservation Area
Photo by Guy David



Ed Marshall at the dedication of the land he donated to the Northwoods Land Trust
Photo by Sarah Besadny

Life List Quarterly

Guy David

In a typical birding year for the club we begin our weekly field trips late in April and continue through the end of October. Our field trips in the spring roughly correlate with northward bird migration. For this column I thought it would be interesting to report how our annual birding list accumulates through the seasons.

Actually, this year our first outing for the season was on May 1 and there were 4 weekly outings to specific locations plus 2 special events, Birding Festival and the Birdathon, where club activities included multiple locations. Therefore during the month of May the club accumulated 24 eBird checklists and a total of 114 species.

During the month of June the club conducted 5 weekly outings, four of which were to specific locations and one of which was to the Ashland area where we visited several locations. The month of June netted 12 checklists and 92 species of birds. A total of 80 species duplicated species recorded in eBird during May but 12 of those species were new to our 2017 Annual List.

The month of July resulted in the club conducting 5 weekly outings, each to specific locations in our normal birding region. These outings netted 71 species. One of these species, the Green Heron, was the only addition to our 2017 Annual List during July. With fewer areas being visited compared to previous months and migration having given way to local breeding species, we would expect that new species being added for the year would decline during this time of year.

The club's August birding also involved 5 weekly outings to local areas. For these outings our productivity approximated July with an accumulation of 69 species for the month. Interestingly, we added 2 species to our annual list, the Least Sandpiper and the Tennessee Warbler. Chances are, our discovery of these species in northern Wisconsin in late August represents species beginning their fall migration. The Least Sandpiper breeds in the Tundra and the Tennessee Warbler breeds in the boreal forests of Canada. Ah, the seasons march on and birders are witness to this phenomenon.

As of the date of writing this report it is mid-September. So far the club has conducted 1 weekly outing that was to the Marshall Wildlife Conservation Area and an overnight field trip to the Green Bay area. There we birded several locations and joined a Wisconsin Society for Ornithology field trip to the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary and the Cat Island Causeway, a restricted access location. With fall migration well underway and given that we accumulated many hours of birding, we acquired 8 eBird checklists and 81 species. Woweee! One trip yielded more species than June, July, or August! Bird club members who participated in the field trip got to experience birding with several of the top Wisconsin birders in a couple of great birding habitats!

So far for the month of September we have already added 11 species to our Annual List. Some of these species were found simply because we visited an area outside of our normal birding home range. Some of these were species that were present due to fall migration and, among these, many could have been found but were missed by us when these species were migrating north in the spring. I think this has been a great outcome but, alas, there could have been more!

When I reported our eBird outcome for the WSO Field Trip I had recorded 63 species that I personally either saw or heard. Some of these I would have missed were it not that I was in the presence of so many great birders who were calling out their sightings and helping with the identification of difficult to identify species, at least for me. Then, a couple of days later, I read the online WSO Field Trip Report and learned that the group that we were a part of had reported 84 species for the day! Yikes! I had missed a BUNCH! I guess I shouldn't be surprised, after all, the collective observations of the flock often is greater than an individual at any given time.

So one could conclude that a collective effort at recording the results of an event exceeds the effort of one person, in this case, me! For me, there is a lesson here.

After I completed my eBird reports I shared them with the bird club's eBird records. I also shared them with all members who participated in the field trip that I knew to also have eBird accounts. Since then Denise

Herzberg reported that Lesser Scaup were observed and the Krakowskis reported the addition of a Northern Rough-wing Swallow. That helped the productivity of the club but, collectively, we still fell well short of the WSO's record.

Explaining myself and my eBird efforts for the day, I freely recognize the superiority of some of the birders leading the WSO Field Trip. Powers of observation, knowledge of what visually or auditorily separates some species from others, and experience with birding in the area and knowing what to expect all makes a difference. So much to learn!

I don't mean to dwell on shortcomings so onward to our collective future of birding together. We have been having a wonderful year as the Discovery Center Bird Club and I remain so proud of our accomplishments. I am so thankful that we have members like Donna Roche who makes sure that we get organized and go birding somewhere every week of the season. Our trip to finding over 70 species of birds in the Green Bay area wouldn't have happened were it not for Carne Andrew's leadership.

The Green Bay trip was phenomenal. Maybe one or more of our club members are thinking of organizing one or more club field trips for us for 2018? I hope so! Carne has told me that her idea for the Green Bay field trip actually was spawned last fall, so now is a good time for members to think about how you could contribute to the fun in the future.

As for the club's Life List, our lone addition so far for 2017 is the Northern Mockingbird, so our Life List count remains at 268 species. Regarding the club's Annual List, our official eBird count stands at 150 species, 11 of which were added so far in September. More fall migration and Christmas Bird Counts are yet to come! See you on the trail!



Red-eyed Vireo surrounded by summer's bounty

Photo by Mark Westphal



Trumpeter Swan resting in Powell Marsh

Photo by Guy David

Have You Seen This Loon Behavior?

Joan Galloway

On July 17th I had just come down to check the plants on our dock on Clear Lake on the Manitowish chain when I heard a commotion out from the dock. I heard a mother mallard duck quacking loudly and her young ducklings peeping distressfully. When I looked out I saw a common loon grab a young duckling and dive with it. I never saw the duckling again!! The mother duck, still quacking loudly, left with her other duckling swimming to shore. When the loon surfaced, it followed the mother and duckling as they swam. It only stopped when the ducks reached the safety of cover on the shoreline.

I contacted Zach Wilson about the incident. He was not aware of loons killing ducklings. However, he had recently had someone else report of loons bothering ducks!

After relating this incident to Karen Dixon, she found on Wikipedia that loons do forage on ducklings!

A Photo Journal of the Green Bay Field Trip

The following pictures were taken by various Bird Club members while on a field trip to the Green Bay area in early September.



This is our intrepid leader, Carne, checking out an observation platform at Bay Beach

Photo by Denise Herzberg



This photo, taken at L.H. Barkhausen Waterfowl Preserve, hides some participants, but at least you can see Guy who is usually the photographer. Jim has spotted a bird!

Photo by Denise Herzberg

Green Heron

*Photo by Mark
Westphal*



Great Egret

*Photo by Mark
Westphal*



Photo of shorebirds above
and a Caspian Tern at left

Photos by Mark Westphal



Several club members joined 70+ birders on a WSO Field Trip to Cat Island (restricted access) to view many species of birds

Photo by Guy David