

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

Carne Andrews

Remembering the Past, Celebrating the Present, and Building a Future

Most of the mailings from organizations arriving daily this time of year reflect on the successes of the past year. The storied past of the Discovery Center Bird Club stands on its own and 2017 was no exception. However, some noteworthy memories that come to mind are the weekly well-organized Thursday outings, ongoing excellent club event and bird species record keeping, outstanding presenters at monthly meetings, ten new club members, a second successful fund raising Birdathon, a new fall field trip to the Green Bay area, and a full board of director's contingency for the first time in several years.

While it's always fun to look back, it's even more exciting to look forward taking an inventory of where we are now. Celebrating the present this December includes above average number of participants and species recorded in the two are Christmas Bird Counts in Minocqua and Manitowish Waters and welcoming John Heusinkveld, the new Executive Director of the NLDC. I recently met with John and Annie McDowell, our new NLDC Bird Club liaison, to discuss the 2017-2018 affiliate Letter of Understanding. While there remains a couple items yet to be decided, I'm confident our continued discussions will again result in a mutually beneficial agreement.

With the end of the year looming this week and a new year about to begin, plans for 2018 are already under way! To mention a few: watch for an announcement for a return field trip to Sax-Zim Bog in January guided by Heather Lumpkin Gerth; DCBC members will be assisting with the "Celebrate Birds" event at Winter Park in Minocqua January 13 and 14; Duanne Swift, Program Coordinator, is putting the final touches on another great slate of monthly meeting presenters; and the Board of Directors recently approved a change for the August annual meeting and social to be held at Aberdeen Lodge in Manitowish Waters in August!

Even though our weekly outings and monthly meetings won't resume until May, there are several upcoming opportunities to stay connected with your avian interests and stave off cabin fever. Check out Project Feeder Watch and the Great Backyard Bird Count on line, both long standing worthwhile Citizen Science programs. When looking for an educational outdoor activity, refer to the schedule in the NLDC Winter & Spring Program Guide for Owl Prowl and Night Hikes, monthly Library Brown Bags, and Interpretive snowshoe hikes.

None of the successes of the DCBC would be possible without your continued involvement! Thanks to everyone for being part of this enjoyable and rewarding year! Warmest wishes for a healthy new year filled with new avian-related adventures as we continue to build our club's legacy in 2018!

Minocqua Christmas Bird Count Report - **2017 Edition** *Guy David*

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for Minocqua has been conducted off and on since 1962. Beginning in 2006, the Discovery Center Bird Club has organized and conducted this CBC every year since then. This CBC has been conducted 20 times since 1962 and the bird club has organized this event for 12 continuous years now. What a good thing it has been for our club and its members!

A “wow” factor for the 2017 CBC is that 19 club members joined in the field count effort! In addition to that there were 7 feeder counters this year and I believe that they all were nonmembers of the bird club. All of these contributions were very important to the overall outcome.

The club owes a big thank you to Donna Roche for doing all of the local recruiting and organizing once again this year. This was the third year in a row that Donna has shouldered this responsibility for the club. Donna did a great job of gathering the tally reports from all field and feeder counters and then mailing them to me. I have compiled the data and added it to my CBC records that I have been keeping since 2006 and will utilize the data for this report. My final step will be to log into Discovery Center Bird Club’s account on the Audubon CBC Website to record our data for this season.

Our 2017 CBC results included 25 species of birds and 872 individual birds accounted for. This result compares favorably with recent years. For example, 25 species of birds found during the CBC represents the fifth highest total over 20 years! Over the history of this count the average number of species recorded per year is 20 species. Over the 12 years the club has conducted this count the average number of species has been 24. So, the club had a better than average year according to this metric.

In terms of the number of individual birds recorded, the 872 birds somewhat exceed the average over 20 counts which is 688 birds per count. However, since 2006 the club has had some exceptional years due to significant winter finch invasions, driving the club’s 12-year average up to 938 birds per year! For example, the 2008 and 2014 CBC tally equaled 1,418 individual birds both years!

While these facts may be interesting to data wonks like me, the numbers really aren’t the most important thing about the CBC endeavor! Our annual effort must be a good time if nineteen club members take their precious holiday time to participate. This event also simply is a perfect match for the reasons that the bird club exists. Following is text that I copied from club Regulations accompanied by my observations regarding how an event like the CBC matches our purpose:

The purpose shall be to provide opportunities for all interested persons to engage in activities related to birds and birding. Self-explanatory.

The Club will serve as an organizational entity through which Club members may participate in or lead:

- *Birding skill improvement activities.* Participation results in experiences by which we learn about what species to expect in December in northern Wisconsin. Finding and having to

identify the birds for it to count makes us be keen observers of species identification clues.

- *The pursuit of bird observation during all seasons and in all types of habitats. Self-explanatory.*
- *Opportunities to engage the public in learning about and attaining an appreciation of birds and all that is necessary to sustain or improve bird populations.* Inviting the participation of persons who are not club members, including the CBC as a North Lakeland Discovery Center program, and any publicity gained via the activity fulfills this goal.
- *Research activities designed to contribute to mankind's body of knowledge regarding birds. Examples of activities include recording life list data both locally and nationally (eBird), bird banding, bird counts, and breeding bird surveys.* While I make every effort to ensure that all of our birding output is included in the eBird database, the CBC is an added dimension in that it is included in a national program organized by the National Audubon Society. In addition, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology coordinates over 100 count circles in Wisconsin and nationally there are over 10,000 participants. By submitting our data via the Audubon website our data becomes part of all data collected nationally for the 118th season! Here is the Website for those of you who are interested:
<http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>
- *The support and development of ecosystems conducive to bird conservation.* To this I simply claim that the more we experience and learn about birds, the more we care!

Okay, enough philosophizing, if you read up to this point, you must be wanting to know about our 2017 CBC data! I hope I'm not becoming delusional but here are some additional observations!

- **57** Total number of species discovered over 20 years.
- **1** The number of new species added to this list in 2017. Thanks to the discovery of a Pied-billed Grebe by the Randolph / Cassady crew!
- **9** The total number of species that have been observed only once in 20 CBCs. Included with the 2017 Pied-billed Grebe are a Common Grackle (1964), Red-headed Woodpecker (1988), Wood Duck and Boreal Chickadee

(1997), Red Crossbill (2008), Hoary Redpoll (2012), Cooper's Hawk (2014), and Ring-billed Gull (2015).

- **3** The number of species that have been recorded all 20 seasons. Included with this list are Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, and White-breasted Nuthatch.
- **3** The number of species that were recorded during 19 out of 20 seasons (and the year they were missed) include the Hairy Woodpecker (1965), Common Raven (1964), and Red-breasted Nuthatch (1962). I don't think these were missed due to lack of existence in the area those years. Looking back at the records I can surmise that the outcome was related to effort since those years there was only one party of 3-6 birders out to cover the territory those years.
- **2** The number of species missed during 2 of 20 seasons including Bald Eagle (1963, 1964) and Downy Woodpecker (1964, 1965). By now readers should be convinced that your participation and effort every year is important and appreciated. Effort counts!
- **9** The number of species recorded in 2017 that were not recorded in 2016 (and the total number of years they were seen) including Common Merganser (2), Pied-billed Grebe (1), Barred Owl (Count Week) (4), Gray Jay (3), American Tree Sparrow (2), Northern Cardinal (4), Purple Finch (6), Common Redpoll (9) and Pine Siskin (12).
- **4** The number of species recorded in 2016 but not 2017 (and the total number of years they were seen) including Rock Pigeon (10 years), Cedar Waxwing (2 years), White-throated Sparrow (2 years), and Dark-eyed Junco (8 years). Data like this establishes that every year is unique and it is important to get out there every year!
- **4** The number of species reported in 2017 by feeder counters and not field counters including Barred Owl (Count Week), Gray Jay, Northern Cardinal, and Purple Finch. Without these contributions these species would have been missed. If I were granted a wish there would be double the number of feeder counters. Any ideas out there about recruitment next year?
- **4** The number of species reported in 2017 by field counters but not by feeder counters including Common Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and American Robin. These typically are not feeder species so field observations are very necessary.
- **25.60** The number of party hours traveling by car that were reported.
- **2.91** The number of party hours on foot that were reported. If I were granted yet another wish, we would have more field counters with rosy cheeks, runny noses and cold finger tips exploring good habitats on foot. If there were, we may not have missed known winter residents like the Brown Creeper and irregular migrants that are otherwise reported to be present this year like the Red Crossbill.

- **0** The number of party hours reported owling. Regardless of this we were fortunate that a friend of the club reported a count week Barred Owl to Donna this year.
- **28.51 and 217.10** The number of party hours and number of party miles donated by all of our field counters this year. What a great note on which to end this report! Thank you to EVERYBODY who helped with the Minocqua CBC this year! Every element of every contribution was very important to the outcome and I sincerely hope that this wonderful effort continues on into the unforeseeable future!

A Tale of Two Crossbills

Carne Andrews

In mid- November, fellow DCBC club member, Katie Foley, and I spotted and slowly approached a flock of Red Crossbills in the middle of County Hwy K west of Boulder Junction. When the birds finally flushed to nearby spruce trees, six were lying dead in the road, obvious victims of a previous vehicular collision. One female actively attempting unsuccessfully to fly was transported to the Northwoods Wildlife Center (NWC) in Minocqua. Following evaluation by their capable and caring staff, it was determined this fragile first year female Red Crossbill had a broken left wing with the potential to fully recover and be returned to the wild. She was placed in a small covered cage after the wing was splinted to rest and heal.

Weekly checks were encouraging. After about a month, she was able to fly short distances while gaining strength and was eventually placed and continued to thrive in a large outdoor aviary. A week later, the NWC called to discuss the particulars of a release. It was exciting to be offered the opportunity to return her to a site close to where she had been injured and where other Red Crossbills had since been sighted in Boulder Junction. The actual release the following day occurred with startling speed as she flew up to a nearby Red Pine branch as soon as the box lid was opened. It took only a couple of minutes to get her bearings before she flew off to rejoin her flock!

I hadn't seen any Red Crossbills in the north woods for the past three years so was somewhat surprised to receive a call from the NWC a few days after rescuing the female Red Crossbill, requesting transportation for a male Red Crossbill who had been injured in a similar incident near Land O'Lakes involving a large flock that sustained a couple dozen casualties. After retrieving and delivering the injured male to the NWC, it also was evaluated, treated and cared for by the staff for several weeks. Unfortunately in this case, the wing was so severely damaged it was unable to heal in proper alignment inhibiting the ability to fly.

In cases where injured animals and fowl are unable to be returned to the wild, the NWC is able to connect with nature centers throughout the mid-west willing to

provide a home for them. You will be interested to know this male Red Crossbill rescued in northern Vilas County has been adopted by the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary in Green Bay, WI, where the DCBC participated in the WSO Fall Warbler Field Trip this past September!!!

Please remember, all wildlife is in harm's way along roadways. Please slow down and come to a complete stop if necessary to avoid a life-threatening collision. If you encounter an injured animal or bird, contact one of three organizations the DCBC support's with donations and volunteers for advice: Northwoods Wildlife Center in Minocqua at 715 356-7400; Wild Instincts in Rhinelander at 715 362-9453; or the Raptor Education Group (REGI) in Antigo at 715 623-4015.

INTERESTING NOTE and ALERT TO BREEDING BIRD SURVEYORS: Ten types of Red Crossbill have been identified based on distinct flight calls and adaptations of bill size and shape to open cones of various conifers found across North America. Red Crossbills are irruptive "follow the food" passerines in the finch family. They have distinct bills crossed at the tips for extracting seeds from cones. Rarely seen at feeders, small to large flocks are often seen in the middle of roads picking salt. Studies reveal Red Crossbills can breed in every month of the year reproducing at temperatures from 45 to minus 9 degrees F. In fact, winter is the peak of breeding season in Colorado because the young are able to digest and thrive on seeds regurgitated by their parents! (Stensaas, Sparky.2015. Winter Finches & Friends of North America, pp 3 & 53-55.



Red Crossbills

Photo by Mark Westphal

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge

Guy David

I am fortunate to be among our bird club members who gets to go birding outside of Wisconsin on occasion. Having this opportunity means visiting birding hotspots that our bird club has not had the chance to visit during our field trips and outings.

This year, in late November, Bonnie and I joined another couple for a birding trip to Bosque del Apache NWR in the central Rio Grande valley of New Mexico, USA.

This renowned birding hotspot was discovered by us several years ago while traveling from Wisconsin for a vacation in SE Arizona, late in February. That became an annual stop to spend a day at the refuge and marveling at the diversity of bird life and the wonderful access to observe and photograph waterfowl. Those times always were rewarding but we would be hearing stories of how Sandhill Cranes and white geese (Snow Goose and Ross's Goose) had already begun to depart for northern breeding grounds. We would always get to see some of those birds but were left wondering what it was like when they were there in their greatest numbers.

We learned that the Friends of Bosque del Apache conducts a highly successful annual event called the Festival of the Cranes during the weekend before Thanksgiving. This would have to mean that the birds are there at that time of year. Thinking a big festival means crowds, we decided to visit there the week after the festival.

When we arrived on November 26 our first stop was at the Visitor Center to inquire about how the festival went and if any particularly special birds were present on the refuge. We learned that the festival had 4,500 registrants! Whew, 45 times the best attendance at our own Discovery Center Birding Festival! We also learned where to be in the evening around sundown and in the morning around sunrise to witness the spectacle of the white geese and Sandhill Cranes as they settle in for the night and rise to leave for feeding areas in the morning. We were disappointed when we were told that the geese weren't cooperating yet this season since they were only being seen far out in the refuge, distant from viewing vantage points.

We began birding that afternoon and stayed until after sunset, making sure to be in the recommended location to view cranes coming in for roosting. Our sundown experience was wonderful, as advertised. We were at the hotspot as the sun was getting low in the sky. It was a large but shallow pond that was located right on the entrance highway in the refuge. All we had to do was park the car and walk about 100 yards to stand on a berm to observe. The pond was loaded with hundreds of Sandhill Cranes and numerous ducks which were mostly Northern Pintails and

Northern Shovelers. We stayed well into dusk and observed as cranes came flocking in to settle in for the evening. There were no white geese when we left.

The next morning, we arrived at the refuge well before sunrise with the intention of going to the recommended morning hotspot to watch the cranes coming in to a harvested cornfield. We didn't make it! As we entered the refuge we approached the pond where we stood the evening before. While there were no white geese when we left the evening before the pond was LOADED with them when we returned in the early morning light! Suddenly, unlike the ranger's claim, the geese had become "cooperative"! We stayed at the spot and watched and photographed the masses of geese and cranes as they grew more restless until, after sunrise, they lifted en masse to leave for their day time feeding grounds. Rest assured, we were astounded by the spectacle as those birds flew over and around us!

After the pond emptied of birds we proceeded to tour the refuge for the rest of the day. Eventually we did arrive at our intended early morning destination and the Sandhill Cranes certainly were there, several hundred in number, with 1 lonely American Egret standing among them. The refuge planted a corn crop in the area and had harvested part of the field so the cranes were amassed in the harvested area enjoying the grain that was on the ground.

As we roamed the refuge we managed to record 54 species of birds, which made it a good birding day by any measure. However, the incredible spectacle of white geese reeling about in the sky for much of the day was the crème de le crème. Literally by the 10's of thousands! For me, it was a religious experience that caused me to ponder the wonder of it all.

I submitted a few photos to accompany this article but they seem so inadequate to show the grandeur that we witnessed. It reminded me of trying to capture the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls in a photograph or several hundred!

Information about the location and nature of this wildlife refuge can be found by clicking on this link: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Bosque_del_Apache/

Additional information may be obtained by visiting the Website of the Friends of Bosque del Apache which can be found by clicking on this link: <http://www.friendsofthebosque.org/>



White geese rising from a single pond in Bosque del Apache NWR. Guy estimates the photos represent about 15-20% of the birds in the flock. *Photos by Guy David*





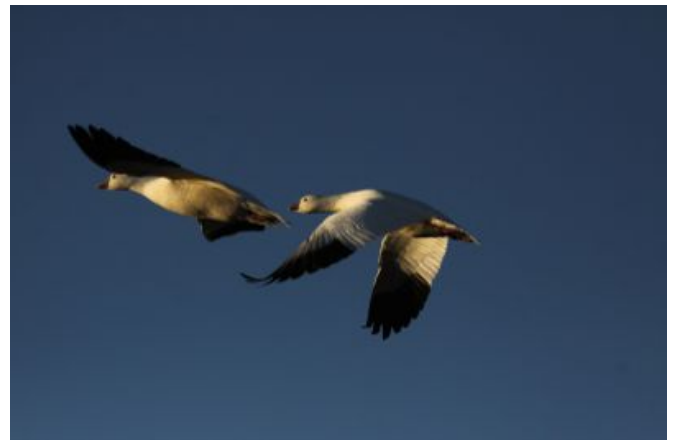
Snow Goose (left) and Ross's Goose (right). Note the "grin patch" on the Snow Goose and the lack of a "grin patch" on the smaller bill of the Ross's Goose.

All photos by Guy David



Ross's Geese in flight

Snow Geese in early morning flight



Life List Quarterly

Guy David

With the completion of the 2017 Minocqua Christmas Bird Count (CBC) the birding year of the Discovery Center Bird Club now is completed. Thank you to our club leadership, members, North Lakeland Discovery Center, and friends for another wonderful year of birding!

With all of our wanderings as a club we have successfully found and identified 161 species for 2017. Our fourteen-year Life List remains at 268 species with the lone addition of 1 species in May that was found during a Birding Festival field trip to the Frog Lake and Pines State Natural Area.

I delayed writing this report until after the results of our Minocqua CBC is completed in hopes that the club would collect at least one more species for our annual list. While the CBC did not yield any new species for our life list, the addition of the Common Redpoll during the CBC did increase our annual list bounty by 1 for the year! Following is a table depicting our annual list totals over 14 years ranked by the total species count each year.

Year	Species Count
2010	193
2012	191
2013	184
2011	180
2014	177
2016	174
2009	169
2017	161
2006	158
2008	154
2015	151
2007	150
2005	150
2004	111

This data shows that 2017 can be judged to be an average year in terms of the number of species found during bird club outings. We can be very proud of this fact. If anyone is wondering about the value of participating in our club, we can collectively point out that if one goes birding with us only once a week for 2-3 hours each time one can be assured of witnessing 150 or more species of birds as a result. Another thing to ponder in terms of this data, one could wonder about why the variation of 111 species in one year to over 190 species in some years? Looking back

at our records I believe that productivity per year is strongly related to the following factors: number of outings, participant knowledge and experience at identifying birds, success of major birding events such as Birding Festival and Birdathon, and the number of outings outside of our home range are key variables.

I well remember our inaugural bird club outings in 2004. There were 13 outings and almost all of them were in our home range area except that year featured our first field trip to Hawk Ridge in Minnesota. Getting 111 species that year was remarkable. Our birding groups were smaller, there was a lack of leaders who were confident to lead the group to new (to us) birding hotspots, there actually were participants without binoculars or who had optics one couldn't clearly see through, and our collective knowledge of knowing bird species when we heard or saw them was nowhere near what we have today. Improvements in all of these areas is a direct testimony to the service that our club provides!

The years when our club exceeded 190 species also are directly related to the same factors, except that there was exceptional success in related factors during those years. During 2016 we conducted 30 outings almost all of which were organized through the incredibly dedicated efforts of Donna Roche during May through October. The exception was a field trip to the Green Bay area organized by President Carne Andrews.

During 2010 (193 species) there were 37 outings that included 1 winter outing touring Iron County; 5 outings in April including field trips to Buena Vista Grasslands and Mead Wildlife Area; 1 June trip to Horicon Marsh; 1 September trip to Tiffany Bottoms; and a club organized trip to Wisconsin Point and Hawk Ridge in September.

During 2012 (191 species) there were 39 outings. That year featured a February field trip to Ashland and Sax-Zim Bog north of Duluth. There also was a June trip to Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area. There was a day trip that included the Ackley State Wildlife Area east of Merrill and the Raptor Education Group (REGI) near Antigo.

Thus, it is shown that big birding years involve some winter outings to find migrating boreal species, early spring outings to find early migrants, and field trips to birding hotspots outside of our home range to find species that generally are not found in our area of north central Wisconsin.

The success of any club has everything to do with voluntary leadership and participation. My challenge to all of us for 2018 is to think about things that the bird club could be doing and then doing something about it. How about volunteering to organize a winter trip to Buena Vista grasslands to witness the Snowy Owl invasion that is happening this year? Maybe serve as the bird club's liaison to the 2018 Discovery Center Birding Festival? Or helping as a participant and donor to the 2018 Birdathon? By the way, did you know that by the completion of Birding

Festival (93 species) and the Birdathon (110 species) the club had recorded nearly 70% of our 161 species for 2017?

So that's it for 2017. It is up to all of us to think about how we can make 2018 another great year for the Discovery Center Bird Club. What will you do to lead, participate, and help in all of the endeavors that make our club something very special to be part of? We are blessed to have a full Board of Directors who are working hard at planning and organizing our activities. If you have an idea for something you would like to do for the club, contact one of them. When they call for participation or help, please chip in.

A "Lifer" and Lessons Learned

Guy David

One of the potential rewards one can obtain with birding is to come upon, identify and document a species of bird that one has never found before in one's life. It is even better when the species is a rarity for where it was found.

On November 15, 2017 I joined a group of 14 other birders in Green Valley, AZ for a trip to Patagonia, AZ. Being about a one-hour trip we agreed to meet at the Patagonia Town Park where there are public restrooms. While there, naturally, everybody started wandering about with binoculars to see what birds were around. The park is vegetated with large trees and very little undergrowth so it didn't appear to be too exciting to me but we were finding birds, so we lingered a while.

Our group had divided into two smaller groups. My group was really excited about a Red-breasted Nuthatch, ho hum to me. The other group all of a sudden was clapping, yelling, and motioning to us to come see what they discovered. Upon arriving at their location, they excitedly pointed out a Yellow-throated Warbler! NOW I'm excited! Out on a bare branch, relaxed, preening, showing off in plain view, and a great photo op.

But, wait, my camera and telephoto lens were back in my car, about a block away. Oh, well, just relax and enjoy it, and record it on eBird. After a few minutes it appeared to me that the bird was happy to be where it was so, maybe, I could get to my car, bring my camera back and get some kind of a photo to document the find.

So, after maybe 5 minutes of time to retrieve my equipment, I returned to the spot. The group of birders had moved on but one guy, knowing I was getting my camera, stayed behind. When I arrived, he told me that the bird had moved but if I stood "right here" I could see it and maybe get a shot.

Success! I did get some nice photos, some of which are included herein. What a beautiful bird! A rarity for Arizona and a lifer for me! Smiles all around!

So, what can be learned from this experience and what does it have to do with this bird club newsletter? First, birding with a group of friends, such as members of our bird club, can yield opportunities that otherwise would have been missed. In this case, I would not have been there and, even if I were there on my own, I probably would have missed this bird.

Second, being with other knowledgeable birders provides more eyes and ears for detection, gets one to habitats that one may otherwise have not visited, and provides a certain level of local knowledge of where the good spots are to go birding, especially when new to the area.

Third, less time is needed in the field guides when coming upon unfamiliar birds. Somebody in the group probably will recognize the species and provide information on how to distinguish the bird from others.

Fourth, great birds can literally be found anywhere!

Fifth, it is great to be among friends who will look out for you. The guy who cared enough to wait for my return while keeping an eye on the warbler made it possible to quickly refind the bird and get photos.

Sixth, having a group sharing an experience together enriches the discovery of each new interesting thing along the way.

The Discovery Center Bird Club is so fortunate to be populated by fellow birders who represent all that is good with group birding. I feel fortunate to know that I have experienced similar situations during our club outings and birding friends always are ready to do the best thing for our common experiences.

Thus, my bird club membership will be renewed as soon as the call goes out and you can bet that I will be along on as many of our outings and field trips as I can. I'm looking forward to more good times together with all of you. With that, Merry Christmas and a wonderful New Year to all!



Yellow-throated Warbler

Photos by Guy David

