

BIRD SONGS

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Discovery Center Bird Club

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Roadside Diner

Article and Photos by Mark Westphal

If you are a frequent traveler on the roads of Vilas or Oneida counties, more likely than not you have seen our nation's symbol, the bald eagle, feeding on a dead deer. Most of the time we pass this scene by. Often driving about 55 mph, we keep our fingers crossed that the eagle stays put so as not to become another patient at a wildlife rehabilitation facility or worse. Early this April with snow still on the ground, I came upon this not so uncommon sight as my wife, Tina, and I were heading home after a trip to a local grocery store. Having already passed by the eagle, I asked Tina if she wouldn't mind turning around so that I could observe and hopefully photograph the eagle. Being the understanding spouse that she is, she obliged.

Not all “eagle on roadkill” situations provide good opportunities for viewing, but this time all the pieces worked together. Traffic was light and there was plenty of room to pull off the road. The carcass was back far enough from the pavement so that any eagles coming or going were safe from any traffic concerns. With my understanding wife at the wheel, I was free to observe and take pictures without being distracted by any vehicle observation responsibilities.

Sitting in our car, watching the eagle eat its fill, was literally a window into the life of this majestic bird. With two-inch talons anchoring it to its meal, I watched the eagle tear off bite-sized pieces of venison which quickly disappeared down the bird’s esophagus. The eagle was doing what all creatures need to do.... they need to eat to survive. It was making the most of a good opportunity to find food without expending anymore precious energy than necessary. It was simply following mother nature’s rules of basic survival. We often marvel as an eagle swoops down and snatches a fish from a crystal blue lake. For some reason an eagle scavenging a roadkill is somehow less romantic. My guess is that an eagle is much more pragmatic. A meal is a meal!



As I watched the single eagle feed, another eagle flew in to check the menu. Moments later a crow cautiously approached the vanishing carcass, hoping to steal a morsel or two. No doubt other creatures had shared in this opportunity. Some came in the daylight. Perhaps others with four legs, visited under the cover of darkness. While I felt a tinge of sympathy for the deer that had met its untimely end, I also came to realize that the deer’s life and death continued to serve a purpose. The deer was changing into life and energy for other birds and animals. Nature is, indeed, the original and most efficient recycler. In the natural world, nothing goes to waste.



Upon returning home, I downloaded the photos I had taken onto my computer. I thought the image of the eagle standing on the deer ribcage with meat in its beak looked really cool. I eagerly shared the photo with Tina. Although she appreciated my efforts and enthusiasm, she indicated that such a graphic photo would not be gracing the walls of our dining room any time soon. Oh well, at least I can still share these photos with my fellow birders.

I have always been fascinated by the fierce look in the eyes of an eagle. I marvel at the grace and power of their wings. We can be grateful that the Lakeland area has such a healthy population of bald eagles. While the site of an eagle soaring in our Northwoods skies is certainly not rare, it is a site that I will never take for granted.



Summary of the Annual Midwest Crane Count and the Great Wisconsin Birdathon

By Sarah Besadny

Crane Count: It seems like ages ago, but the Annual Midwest Crane Count (AMCC) was conducted on April 13th, and therefore is covered in this quarterly newsletter. This year, like last year, wasn't ideal weather for the Count but because the Count is always held on the second Saturday of April, many intrepid birders headed out to count cranes from 5:30 a.m. – 7:30 a.m. Last year when we had a blizzard, only one crane was counted in Vilas County for the AMCC. This year there was lots of snow on the ground and several count sites weren't accessible, but we were still able to count 27 cranes. In comparison however, three years ago we had more usual Spring weather and we tallied 87 cranes. Data is important and keeping the protocols consistent from year to year helps researchers to understand bird migration and health of the population. Many thanks to all who participated this year, including many Discover Center Bird Club members.

The Great Wisconsin Birdathon: The Great Wisconsin Birdathon first started in 2012 and is coordinated by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. Anyone can participate and 4 years ago our Bird Club decided to form a team called the Up North Hammerheads (hammerhead is a reference to a woodpecker and because our Club logo is the Pileated Woodpecker ... well, you get the connection). Teams pick any day they want between April 15 and June 15th to bird as long as they want trying to tally as many bird species as they can and to get sponsors to donate to the team's efforts. Money raised by the Great Wisconsin Birdathon goes to support several bird protection initiatives. Also, because we bird on behalf of the Discovery Center Bird Club, half of what we raise comes back to our Club to help us support not-for-profit bird organizations and to provide programming open to the public.

This year we held our Birdathon day on May 21st. It was a great day to be out birding. Eleven Bird Club members and a guest started birding at 6:00 a.m. and we finally wrapped it up about 7:30 p.m. We had a great time as we tallied a total of 94 species! Only 94 you say? Well, we didn't find a darn House Sparrow in Minocqua and the water levels were so high everywhere we went we didn't spot one shorebird. As much fun as it was to see every bird we saw, the day is about raising funds and our team did a terrific job! We have raised \$2,820. Many thanks to the team and to everyone who sponsored the Up North Hammerheads.

Birding in Spain

Article and Photos by Elizabeth Stone and Dick Theile

This May, we took a birding trip to Spain, and recommend Spain highly as a place to learn European birds. Bird populations in Europe are dwindling for a variety of reasons (overhunting in the Mediterranean during migration, habitat loss, changes in agricultural practices, and environmental toxins). However, in Spain, birds are doing relatively well, and many internationally important migration areas are receiving money for habitat protection from the European Union. Spain is famous for raptors, but offers a variety of classic European birds at the southern edge of their range, as well as Mediterranean birds at the northern edge of their range. We traveled in a small group of six, along with our American trip leader, Carlos Sanchez from Naturalist Journeys, and several local Spanish guides. In 13 days, our group tallied 186 species, and our personal total was 181 species, including 155 lifers. From Madrid, we rode west to the Gredos Mountains of Castile y Leon and hiked through alpine meadows surrounded by wild ibexes, with a variety of raptors overhead. Next, we headed south to the Extremadura, a region of picturesque farms and forests which is home to Monfragüe National Park and the plains of Trujillo. Driving further south, our group entered Andalucia, and found many waterfowl and shorebirds in Doñana National Park and the Odiel Marshes, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In addition, we had a highly successful night outing for nightjars and owls. Looping back towards Madrid, we birded the steppes and saline lagoons of Castilla-La Mancha for grassland species, marsh species, and more waterfowl. Throughout the trip, we were immersed in Spanish culture, sampling a variety of tasty local foods, watching a flamenco show, and viewing ancient castles. Contact us for recommendations if Spain is your next birding destination!



European Greenfinch



Great Spotted Woodpecker

Eurasian Jay



Views From Above and Below – The Story

By Guy David

On June 20, 2019, 13 club members and guests led by Donna Roche ventured to the Ashland area for a day of birding. The club sponsors a trip to this area usually at least twice a year and it always is one of our memorable annual field trips. This particular day turned out to be extra special for our group!

One of the regular birding hotspots that we frequent in Ashland is the Xcel Energy Hot Pond. Over the years we have learned that there is a Peregrine Falcon nesting box atop the power plant so we stopped to see if we could spot nesting falcons. When we trained our optics toward the nest box we were immediately rewarded by sighting a Peregrine Falcon perched on the roof near the nest box. Success! Ready to move on!

While we were there one of our group members noticed a lady sitting in her van who seemed intent on watching the nest box. By striking up a conversation with the lady it was learned that her husband was part of a bird banding group that would be banding the falcon chicks that morning. Hmmmm...maybe we should stick around to see what WE could see.

Shortly thereafter we noticed a cloud of Rock Pigeons take flight from the rooftop as did the adult falcons. Then we could see 4 people on the roof with hard hats and one carrying an upright broom approaching the nesting box. Why the upright broom? It soon became evident that the adult falcons were in a panic and began to dive bomb the banding party. The broom helped keep the falcons away from the hard hats! We could hear the birds calling and see them desperately trying to protect their nestlings. They surely could not realize that the human intruders were friendly toward their cause.



The Bird Club watching from below
Photo by John Radloff



Banders with protective gear
Photo by Guy David

We watched the banding group proceed to cover the entrance to the nest box to prevent the nestlings from jumping out and then removing 4 chicks one at a time to perform their banding routine. The banders noticed that we were intently watching from below and they accommodated us by holding up the chicks to display them to us. We could see them through our binoculars and some of us got a better view through our spotting scopes. I even managed to digiscope some photos from our perspective. The entire process took about 25 minutes, from around 10:00 am to 10:25 am!



Banding Peregrine Falcon Chicks

Photo by John Radloff

After the nest box was secured and the banding group left we waited around for another 10 minutes or so to see if the adults would immediately go to the nest box. They didn't while we were there. We did observe them flying by, presumably to check on the chicks in the box, but they did not enter the box. My guess is that they stayed away to not attract further unwanted attention to their chicks. The next time they would visit the box would be to deliver food as they returned to their normal routine.

As we left the area to move on to our next birding hotspot, we had several questions about what we had witnessed. Our next stop was at Maslowski Beach. As we were birding the area a stranger approached us who turned out to be one of the members of the banding group. He was the guy in the green jacket that we had seen. His name is John Radloff, a regular birding volunteer in the area. Among the things that we learned from John was that the 4 banded chicks were about 3 weeks old and that 2 were male and 2 were female.

Two male and two female
Peregrine Falcon Chicks

Photo by John Radloff



It was remarkable that John Radloff cared enough to seek out our group to interact with us and answer all of our questions. He definitely added a lot to the quality of our experience that day! What a unique thing it was for us to be able to observe such an event from the ground level far below, then have one of the participants come to speak to us, and then for that participant to also share his photos from the rooftop operation!



Bander John Radloff (green jacket)
speaking to the Club about banding
the Peregrine Falcons

Photo by Mark Westphal

John Randolph forwarded several emails with photos from John Radloff to his bird club contact list, some from above provided by John Radloff and some from below provided by me. I asked Sarah Besadny, our Bird Songs editor, to select some photos to include with this article so that the event would be preserved via the bird club's newsletter and webpage. Enjoy!

Species Profile: Ruby-throated Hummingbird – **(Archilochus colubris)**

Article and Photos by Sarah Besadny

Ruby-throated hummingbirds (*Archilochus colubris*) are marvelous, minute, masters of the wing. These beautiful creatures are what first got me interested in birding. They are fascinating birds to watch and even more fascinating when you learn of their incredible characteristics.

Hummingbirds are only found in North, Central and South America making them a New World bird. It is estimated that there are 320-330 species of hummingbirds. More than a dozen species of hummingbirds spend their summers in the US and the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only species regularly found east of the Mississippi River.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds spend the winter in Central America. Beginning in January, they make their way towards the Yucatan Peninsula, gaining weight as they go. The “usual” weight of a RTHU is .12 ounces. By the time they are ready to leave the Yucatan they have nearly doubled their weight. Why? Because they need that stored fat to FLY ACROSS THE GULF OF MEXICO to continue their migration north through the US. Can you imagine? That tiny creature flying across the Gulf – that’s almost 500 miles! Males migrate about ten days earlier than females. The males (the ones with the ruby throats) begin to show up in the US in February and by May we begin to see them show up at our feeders here in the Northwoods.

Banding records have shown that hummers often show up at the same summering spot and use the same perch and often nest tree as they did in prior years. Males will feverishly defend their territory – usually an area ranging from 18-22 square yards to up to an acre. The size of the territory depends upon the available food supply.

Hummingbirds do not form pairs. The male is only interested in defending a territory and reproducing. He does not build a nest, incubate eggs or feed the nestlings. Females reproduce starting in their second year (two seasons after they were born). If the female has nested in the area in prior summers she may rebuild her nest if the energy necessary for rebuilding isn’t greater than building from scratch. The female builds her nest before she starts looking for a suitable male. She picks a suitable nesting area based on available food – both nectar and insects. Bob Sargent, an expert on Ruby-throated Hummingbirds wrote in his Wild Bird Guide to Ruby-throated Hummingbirds: “Site selection must be considered carefully. Nearby food sources, camouflage, proper limb size, and protection from predators are all factored into the decision. The limb must be strong and flexible, able to withstand being severely blown about by the wind. It cannot droop lower than three yards when battered by heavy rainfall. The limb selected is almost always

about a pencil size or slightly larger in diameter and is located near the tip of a downward-sloping branch. It is normally on the bottom story of limbs, with ample foliage above it to offer shade from spring and summer sun.” All of this decision-making coming from a bird whose brain is the size of a BB!

The nest is made from plant down and soft plant material and then sap and spider webs to keep it all together. The walls of the nest are flexible to accommodate needed space as they babies grow. The nest walls are covered in lichens that grow on the tree in which the nest is built so that the nest is camouflaged.



Fledgling Ruby-throated Hummingbird ... in a well camouflaged nest

The female lays two eggs about 2-3 days apart. The incubation period on average is 14 days and then it's another 18-23 days until the babies are ready to fledge. When the baby is born it is about the size of a honeybee. Once the birds have fledged the mother will continue to feed the birds for another 7-10 days.

Jim and I were lucky enough to have a Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest right outside our bedroom window when we lived in Philadelphia. It was thrilling to watch the two babies grow (especially watching their bills grow from tiny stubs when they are born to long bills by the time they fledged). It was nerve wracking to watch the nest get thrust around in high winds or to watch the babies move their rumps over the side of the nest to poop without falling out of the nest before they could fly!

Some other fascinating facts about Ruby-throated Hummingbirds:

- They beat their wings about 50 times a SECOND
- Their heart beats 250 times a minute at rest and 1200 beats a minute when feeding
- They fly on average 30 miles per hour, but up to 50 miles per hour during an escape and 63 miles per hour when they dive

Female Ruby-throated
Hummingbird feeding her
two babies



We are lucky to have these beautiful birds here in the Northwoods and it's easy to get great looks at them if you have a nectar feeder. You can witness their feistiness defending the feeder, watch them hover with wings moving so fast it's just a blur and maybe even see them fly backwards – hummers are the only bird able to fly backwards. If you put out a feeder (or lots of feeders!) please also take on the responsibility of ensuring that the feeder is kept clean and filled with nectar. The feeder can be cleaned with mild soap and warm water or soak it in a solution of vinegar and water if it is really dirty. If the nectar begins to get cloudy before the feeder is empty, it's time to change the nectar. Nectar is easy to make. It's a ratio of 1 part sugar to 4 parts water. So, let's say you will make 4 cups of nectar, boil 4 cups of water and then stir in one cup of plain white sugar until it is dissolved. Let it cool down before filling a feeder. Do not use raw sugar or honey and please do not use red food coloring. Young birds will be showing up at our feeders in July so make sure you're ready with fresh nectar and clean feeders so that you can enjoy these beauties up close!



Resources used for this article were:

- Wild Bird Guide to Ruby-throated Hummingbirds by Robert Sargent
- The website hummingbirds.net

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

As many of our bird club members know, Bonnie and I have sold our home in Lac du Flambeau and we are moving to our home in Arizona in July, 2019. Because of this fact, this Life List Quarterly will be my last. Writing this column has been a commitment of mine to the Discovery Center Bird Club since the beginning. It has been tremendously rewarding as I have never been at a loss for birding things to write about for the club. The reason? Well, it's because there always have been really interesting things going on with the club as we enjoyed so much time together in the pursuit of birds. Our club has never lost that focus as our prime objective.

I looked in my computer files and found the first Life List Quarterly that I wrote in September, 2004. It is reproduced herein under the "Looking Backward" section of this column. I think it is nice once in a while to look back from whence we came.

Looking Backward (to 2004)

"Maintaining the NLDC Bird Club's Life List has been a very interesting endeavor. It is exciting to see the growth of the club's observation records, beginning with our inaugural meeting and outing to the Powell Marsh Vista.

The Club Life List is being maintained as a computer file using the Microsoft Excel computer program. As a spreadsheet program, Excel is useful for easily recording and summarizing the club's observation data. This data can then be studied to reveal interesting information about the club's observations and success.

The spreadsheet is based on the taxonomic list of 422 species recorded in the state of Wisconsin and verified by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (WSO) Record Committee. Using this list helps to ensure that our recorded observations are "likely" for our geographic area. In addition, using this list also allows an easy way to learn whether we observed any unusual species. The reason for this is that the WSO list identifies rare, casual, accidental, and extinct species for Wisconsin.

Since this spreadsheet constitutes 11 printed pages, there is too much information for this newsletter. A printed copy of the club's complete data will be available for viewing during our October club meeting. A summary of our data from May through August follows.

- 1. 9 Number of outings for the period.*
- 2. 89 Total number of species observed so far.*
- 3. 38 Greatest number of species for one outing (Bearskin Trail, July 26, 2004).*
- 4. 8 Lowest number of species for one outing (August 27, 2004 when we focused on bird banding).*
- 5. 0 Number of rare, casual, and accidental species recorded.*
- 6. Species recorded most commonly during club outings, in decreasing order.*

No. Outings	Species Observed
8	<i>Common Loon, Blue Jay, Black-Capped Chickadee, and Song Sparrow.</i>
7	<i>American Crow, American Robin, American Gold Finch</i>
6	<i>Red-Breasted Nuthatch and Chipping Sparrow</i>
5	<i>Mallard, Great Blue Heron, Red-eyed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow, and White-Throated Sparrow</i>
4	<i>Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-Rumped Warbler, Black-Throated Green Warbler</i>
3	<i>9 species</i>
2	<i>22 species</i>
1	<i>37 species</i>

A comparison of club data against the species that we might have been able to find yielded the following results. Please note that for this comparison, only those groups that include 10 or more species on the WSO list were included.

<i>WSO Group</i>	<i>No. Species in the Group Included on the WSO List</i>	<i>No. of Species in the Group Observed by the NLDC Bird Club During the Period</i>
<i>Ducks</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Hérons and Bitterns</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Hawks</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Sandpipers</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Gulls and Terns</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Woodpeckers</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Flycatchers</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Owls</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Thrushes</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Warblers</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Sparrows</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Blackbirds</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>5</i>

Now that the club has these observation records, we have the potential for some interesting discussions during upcoming club meetings and outings. Items that we might discuss include these questions.

- 1) Why did we “miss” recording some species we know to be common in our area?*
- 2) When planning outings, when and where might the club go to record local species we “missed”?*
- 3) How did club choices for outings affect the outcome of species we recorded?*

- 4) *What skills might club members work on to help observe some local but less commonly observed species?*
- 5) *How might this list be different if we focused our observation records on*
 - a) *Bird feeders,*
 - b) *Birds found around our homes,*
 - c) *Warm and sunny days?*
- 6) *When and where else in Wisconsin might the club visit to find birds not commonly found in our local region?*
- 7) *Should club outings be planned to:*
 - a) *See our locally common and easy to find species?*
 - b) *Find and record less commonly observed species in our local area?*
 - c) *Find and record species found in Wisconsin but not usually in our local area?*

In summary the NLDC Bird Club had a wonderfully successful first quarter and we are off to a great start! Looking together at the results of our observations will give club members an inexhaustible field of possibilities for planning our future."

The Present

How about THAT for a dose of nostalgia? The bird club, in our first year, managed to conduct 13 outings and field trips while recording 111 species! The club's very first outing was to Powell Marsh and we recorded 34 species. How do I know these things? It is because the club has maintained records that yield that kind of information! That was a great start and it also was the beginning of the bird club's structure for recording our successful birding endeavors. The Excel spreadsheet that was mentioned in 2004 still is in use and now contains 14 years' worth of data.

Not mentioned in the September 2004 column was the fact that the process of regularly recording birds on eBird during our regular outings had already begun. The eBird database was new to us that year! The club's first eBird record was recorded on May 22, 2004 and our eBird record has been continuous ever since. The questions that I posed in 2004 still are applicable to today.

I think it would be very interesting if a future Bird Songs author would recreate the WSO grouping table in my 2004 report updated to the club's current status of achievement. I am confident that the results would be impressive and that the data would show that, even after 14 years of club birding, there still are species available to our life list that we haven't observed yet! Some of those could be found in our own home area.

Knowing that I would have to relinquish the duty of recording all of the club's birding data via the spreadsheet and eBird, I contacted the members of the bird club board of directors to inform them that if the databases are to be maintained going forward the board would need to appoint a new person for this responsibility. I was so gratified to quickly learn that Sarah Besadny would take on the maintenance of

our spreadsheet and Mary Jenks would take on the responsibility of maintaining the club's eBird record.

Since then Mary and Sarah met with me at the Minocqua Library for a couple of hours during which time I transferred the club's eBird account to Mary's email address and I provided computer files to Sarah containing all of the club's spreadsheets of record. Included were files for the club's life list, Christmas Bird Count records, and Birding Festival records.

I am so grateful to Sarah and Mary for their willingness to carry on with recording the club's birding data. It would have been depressing if it had all come to end! Thank you Sarah and Mary, so much, for your willingness to tackle this task. Thank you, thank you, and thank you!!!!

Now on to my final Life List Quarterly report. I'll keep this short. The club's life list at the end of 2018 included 271 species of birds and this record still stands as of this writing. Comparing the club's eBird record with the spreadsheet, there is a slight discrepancy. The eBird record shows 271 species and that is the most official record. The spreadsheet has 2 additional records to yield 273 species. The reason for this is that the spreadsheet includes 2 hybrids that wouldn't be recorded as a distinct species in eBird. One of those exceptions include a Ross's Goose x Snow Goose hybrid that we encountered at Maslowski Beach in Ashland. The other exception was a Golden-winged Warbler x Blue-winged Warbler hybrid (Brewster's) that was encountered in Lake Tomahawk during a Dove Road outing. So far, the club has never had a year when we didn't get to add at least one new species to the Life List but that year is sure to come! Maybe this will be the year?

The club's annual list also is off to a healthy start with 118 species recorded so far. This has been accomplished via 11 outings! Yes, the club's ability to find birds and identifying the birds that have been found has wonderfully improved since 2004! We should be proud of that!

I suspect that the number of species that the club has encountered during 2019 actually is greater than 118. The reason I think that is because an entire day's worth of birding data recorded during the 2019 Northwoods Birding Festival have yet to be recorded in either the club's eBird record or on the spreadsheet record. I have been assured that this will be done eventually so, hopefully, the next Bird Songs will include the updated record. Birding Festival was held on the latest date ever this year so I suspect that some of the migrating species were missed this year anyway, but it seems likely that some species that were encountered that Saturday may have been species not to be observed by the club during the rest of the year.

Looking Forward

When Mary Jenks and Sarah Besadny met with me I provided an orientation regarding how I had been doing things with bird club data. They quickly grasped

their respective tasks. I am comforted knowing that they will carry on with recording the club's birding data and serve the club very well. Going forward they will make their own decisions and judgments regarding their best way of doing these things. The bird club birding records are in capable and dedicated hands. I hope that the bird club will support them as well as you did for me over the years. That's it, time to get back to sorting, packing and other moving preparation tasks. Maybe I'll see some of you on the trail in AZ sometime or maybe in Wisconsin birding hotspots should Bonnie and I wander back this way sometime. Good birding to you and may the club live on!

Editor's Note: On behalf of the entire Discovery Center Bird Club I would like to thank Guy for all that he did in forming the Club, providing leadership through his time as Club President, his continued leadership in "non-formal" ways, his participation in our weekly bird walks and for keeping detailed and informative records and translating the data into interesting articles. Thank you, Guy!