

# BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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## **Officers**

Mark Westphal, President  
Debby Wilson, Secretary  
David Foster, Treasurer  
Sarah Besadny, Membership Director  
Duanne Swift, Program Director

## **President's Message**

*by Mark Westphal*

Spring is just around the corner. Soon snow banks will disappear, and lake ice will melt away. Migrating birds, along with some of our club members, will start returning to the Northwoods. I am already looking forward to a new season of Bird Club activities\*. Our monthly programs have all been scheduled and we will also have a full lineup of Thursday morning outings to our favorite birding locations. Our outings offer a great opportunity to see some of our favorite birds along with the possibility of adding a new bird or two to our own personal or club life list. Participating in bird club outings is a great way to increase your

knowledge of birds and sharpen your observation skills. It is also a great way to meet people who share a common interest. I always enjoy seeing familiar faces at our activities, but I also hope to meet new people who are interested in learning more about birds.

In 2019 a study revealed that we have lost almost 30% of our birds over the last 50 years. It is believed that one in five Wisconsin bird species is at risk of extinction. Now more than ever, it is important that we not only learn about birds and enjoy their beauty, but also take steps to protect birds in their crucial habitats. As a birder and as a bird club member, I ask myself "What can I do to help address the critical issues facing our declining bird populations". While I don't yet have the complete answer to this question, I believe that by working together, we can have a positive impact on the future of our beloved birds.

I encourage you to check out [wisconsinbirds.org](http://wisconsinbirds.org) to learn the very latest information on steps being taken in Wisconsin to address the critical issues facing our very own state bird populations.

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\*The health and well-being of our members is of primary concern. Due to the rapidly evolving coronavirus situation, some of the Bird Club programs or activities may need to be postponed or cancelled. As the Bird Club season progresses, we will do our best to keep you informed of any changes to our program schedule and the status of our Thursday morning outings.

## **Bird Club Membership Renewal and Scheduled Events**

Normally we would be posting upcoming Bird Club events in this 1<sup>st</sup> quarter issue of the BIRD SONGS newsletter. However, because it is not possible to actually confirm any event for the near future, please know that we will be providing event information via the Bird Club's email distribution process. So, stay tuned, and stay healthy at home.

And speaking of the Club's email distribution list, please renew your membership dues to remain on that list. Its easy and only \$10 per

person. If you are paying your Bird Club dues at the same time you are renewing your NLDC membership, please write a separate check for your Bird Club dues and write "Bird Club Membership" in the memo line of your check. If you prefer to pay your Club dues online, please go to the NLDC website, navigate to the Bird Club section by clicking on "Clubs" and then select Bird Club. You will find two links on the screen, one for printing off a copy of the membership form that can be mailed to the NLDC along with your check, and the other for paying dues online. The online payment via the Club link will be easily identified as Bird Club dues once the transaction is processed by NLDC staff. Thank you!

## **Species Profile: Red-headed Woodpecker**

### **(*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)**

*Article and Photos by John G. Randolph*

This strikingly elegant bird has a distinctive red head, neck, and throat, bright white breast and belly, black back and wings with a large white rump patch and white secondaries. The contrasts are truly lovely. The red is a "blue" red -- the closest match I could find in Wikipedia's shades of red is "Fire Brick Red". Males and females are identical; juveniles have a brown head, and less bright color contrast. Red-headed are considered to be a medium sized woodpecker, and are the same size as Red-bellied Woodpeckers, which we see much more often in our northwoods (average length 9.25", wingspan 17" Red-headed, 16" Red-bellied). The Red-headed is actually .3 ounces heavier.



The Red-headed Woodpeckers' contact call (queeah) is higher-pitched and not as strong as the Red-bellied's (quirrr). I've heard both of them on the same day, though have no confidence in my ability to make a correct identification the next time I suspect hearing a Red-headed.

Preferred habitat includes open country, clearings in the woods, forest edges, and in the northern part of winter range, stands of deciduous forest. Sibley's range map shows year-round presence in southernmost Wisconsin. When migration occurs, it tends to be relatively short distance. For nesting, tall, dead trees are sought out, with the male typically choosing the site and doing most of the excavation. The gourd-shaped cavity is about 3-6" across, 8-16" deep, with an entrance hole about 2" in diameter. Red-headed often use a nest cavity several years in a row. Three to ten eggs are laid, and sometimes there is a second brood.

One of the most skillful flycatchers of the woodpeckers, the Red-headed is apparently sometimes hit by cars while chasing insects across roads. One-third of the diet consists of animal matter, mostly insects, though less commonly mice and eggs and chicks of other birds. The other two-thirds are made up of plant material, such as seeds, nuts, and many kinds of fruit. It is interesting to note that the likelihood of winter residency increases with the abundance of acorns. The Red-headed stores food, and is the only woodpecker known to cover stored food with wood or bark. Predators of this bird include snakes, foxes, raccoons, flying squirrels, and Cooper's Hawks.

Through their excellent All About Birds website, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology reported findings from a study analyzing observations by Project FeederWatch volunteers. From November 2016 to April 2017, data were gathered from 7,653 interactions between species. For instance, if one bird flares its wings at another, and that bird flies off in response, that would be recorded as a "successful displacement". The data were used to create "ability scores", allowing for feeder dominance ranking (raptors were not included). While weight matters (Wild Turkeys rule), it was noted that woodpeckers, warblers, and hummingbirds "punch above their weight". Of the thirteen most commonly reported birds at feeders in the study, Red-bellied

Woodpeckers have the highest ability score, though the less common Red-headed Woodpecker has a higher score. It is reported that feisty Red-headed Woodpeckers sometimes take on Pileated Woodpeckers. Nonetheless, despite feeder dominance/ability scores, in the critical competition for overall species success, Red-bellies increase in areas where Red-headed Woodpeckers decrease. Though they have lower feeder dominance ranking, European Starlings also compete for nesting cavities, though I don't know whether this is an issue in our area. This fascinating research is reported in the journal Behavioral Ecology (see below).

We live just about a mile south and a mile west of Minocqua, and have had Red-headed Woodpeckers on our deck feeders for various times in the summer since 2014, including a pair for two months in 2019. Fledglings were included three of those years, picture below. Friends in Harshaw had a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers through the winters of 2014/15 and 2015/16 (and sent a picture to confirm an eBird posting). Others in Oneida and Vilas have mentioned regular summer sightings, and we were delighted to have one on our sunflower chip feeder this past February 1, also pictured below. By hanging upside down on the "Squirrel Buster" feeder, Hairy, Red-bellied, and Red-headed Woodpeckers regularly manage to get chips from the partially, but not fully closed food apertures. Of course, suet is very popular.



The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Wisconsin, 2006, recorded one confirmed Red-headed Woodpecker breeding in Vilas County and two in Oneida. Surveys reported in the Atlas were done by dedicated, skilled birders, and I believe the number of sightings of adults and juveniles since then reflect a significant increase over the years. It will be great to see the results of the recently completed second Atlas survey. With continued climate change, Audubon projects year-round range gain for Red-headeds up to all of northern Wisconsin. As for Red-bellied Woodpeckers, this is our first time experience of completely year-round presence at our feeders.

Sources: Atlas of Breeding Birds of Wisconsin, 2006; Audubon Guide to North American Birds; Behavioral Ecology, Vol. 28, Issue 6, Nov.-Dec. 2017; Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds; Sibley Birds, 2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.; Wikipedia, Shades of red.

## **The Murmurations of Life**

*By Lisa Lundberg*

When I moved to the Minocqua area in the winter of 2019 because of a job change for my husband, I did not know a single soul in the area and I was no longer working. It was a time of isolation for me and I wanted to find a way to meet new people and at the same time take advantage and enjoy some of the outdoor activities that I loved. After scouring the paper's activities section and after talking to a few people, I stumbled upon the Discovery Center's website and saw that it had a bird club. I had some experience birding with friends and have always enjoyed feeding the birds, so I decided to give it a try; I eagerly awaited the group's first Thursday morning weekly bird outing. On that first cool drizzly Thursday April morning, I met Donna in the parking lot of the Trigs grocery store. She offered to drive me to the birding site and was willing to let me tag along with her. Her kind demeanor and welcoming spirit was a needed boost for me and the morning was filled with camaraderie and amazing observations.

In the months that followed I took part in many early morning bird walks. These walks introduced me to birding habitats and areas that I

never would have discovered on my own. I attended informative bird lectures, shared hospitality with members and participated in my first-ever birding festival. During all of these activities, club members were gracious, accepting and eager to share their knowledge. In essence - I had found my flock. I cannot describe the elation I had which might quite be like a bird that is able to fly with thousands of others that are like themselves. I recently came across this video of a starling murmuration titled bird ballet and it inspired me to write this piece. You can find the video by searching for: <https://vimeo.com/58291553>

Why do any group of animals come together in unison? Why do birds of a feather flock together? For birds it is often for survival reasons. They do it because a larger group has a much better chance of spotting a predator or other potential threat than a single bird. A group may also be able to confuse or overwhelm a predator. Some flock together to keep warm, to help care for each other's young, or to forage and share a food supply. Large flocks of geese fly in V formations, with each taking a turn at the lead and then falling to the back when they are tired in order to conserve energy during their long journeys. Birds come together because as a group they are stronger and because of the many benefits of being part of a close-knit group provide. In starling murmurations, thousands of individual birds appear to move as one. These formations and flights are very rare for people to see in person.

The reasons birds flock together may seem very different from the reasons people come together as a group, but are they? As I write this, I am now living in a new location. My husband's career has taken him in yet another new direction, which led us to have to leave the north woods. And as I close this chapter of my life, I will always be thankful for my time spent in Minocqua and for all the companionship, fellowship and friendship that the bird club members provided me, in my time of need. The essence of the birding club may be just as rare as seeing a murmuration, and I was lucky enough to have happened upon it. Thank you.



## **Everglades Day Trip**

*Article and Photos by Julie Hellwig*

Our month on the Gulf of Mexico in Destin Florida was rapidly coming to an end. We had enjoyed watching rafts of loons and Red-breasted Mergansers just beyond the breaking waves nearly every day while Sanderlings, Ring-billed gulls, and Sandpipers barely avoided us during our daily walks on the beach. When faced with returning to Wisconsin while weather reports still showed temperatures in the teens and snow likely in the northwoods, we couldn't pass up an invitation to spend a few days visiting friends in Fort Myers Florida before heading home. Making the trip down to Fort Myers meant we were only 40 minutes from Everglades National Park, so naturally I was looking forward to my first visit there.

We entered Everglades National park via the Gulf Coast Visitor Center. Since the original visitor center was destroyed by hurricane Irma in 2017, the current visitor center only consisted of a metal trailer baking in the hot sun, but the staff was friendly and helpful. We boarded a boat for a cruise across Chokoloskee Bay and into the coastal mangrove estuary of the Ten Thousand Islands. Large flocks of White Pelicans rested on the white sand beaches, the same species we now see during the summer on Lake Winnebago and Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin.

American White Pelicans





Brown Pelicans, Cormorants, and Royal Terns shared the islands with them. An American Oystercatcher with its bright orange bill was a first time sighting for me. As our boat navigated through the marked channels, most marker posts had Osprey nests on top of them with young birds peering over the edge.

Several long boardwalks through the exotic vegetation turned out to be a bonanza for wading birds. We had close-up views of Black-crowned Night-Herons, Snowy and Great Egrets, White Ibis, Greater Yellowlegs, and a Roseate Spoonbill which was a first for me. We saw many Great Blue Herons and two secretive Little Blue Herons, my favorite because of their rich purple head and neck and their soft slate blue body. Anhinga were drying their wings in the trees. With all the action on the ground it was hard to look up, but high among the huge cypress trees adorned with air plants and Resurrection ferns we saw Great Crested Flycatchers, Cardinals, Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers and many warblers. All in all the day was enjoyable and exciting, with truly easy birding!



Anhinga

## **“BIRDFUL” WAYS TO COPE WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING\***

*Submitted by Carne Andrews*

Two nights ago, I returned home from 5 weeks of chasing daylight and birding between here and south Texas. Due to the possibility of contracting Covid-19 traveling from coast to coast, Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes, I'm self-isolating following Centers for Disease Control and State of WI Guidelines.

Despite the pandemic, let me reassure you from personal observations along the way, spring migration is underway, however, as a club we may need to suspend our usual NLDC Bird Club (BC) activities in the weeks and months ahead. To combat the coronavirus blues, here are some great ways to cope with social distancing through the hobby we love.

#1 Clean optics, scopes and birding gear. Use a lens cloth and lens cleaner. Don't use Windex and paper towels or tissues.

#2 If you haven't already, start a backyard bird list. Use a separate calendar each year annually to record and plot "First of the Year" (FOY) arrivals, evidence of breeding, and departure dates to monitor trends.

#3 Clean and fill feeders for spring feeding. You will want to take the feeders in overnight to avoid predation by bears post hibernation. When cleaning, wear gloves and wash hands with soap and water after removing gloves. Clean feeders at least monthly with 9 parts water to 1 part bleach. Scrub feeders with a brush, let soak in the bleach solution for 10 minutes, rinse and let air dry. Remove or scatter bird droppings from under winter feeders to minimize salmonellosis, mycoplasmosis, trichomoniasis, and aspergillosis, and avian pox.

#4 Take a daily bird walk. Try to walk the same route at the same time each day and keep a journal of what you see. Use your favorite field guide for identification and to become more familiar with birdsongs.

Send interesting. Send interesting observations and findings to John Randolph to share with the BC.

#5 Choose one bird species per day you'd like to learn more about. Use the multiple resources available to you to study field markings, behaviors, habitat, and songs.

#6 Send a personal message or card to someone who has influenced your birding journey. Perhaps there's a birding mentor you'd like to thank or a favorite author, speaker, magazine or BC member.

#7 If you haven't yet, renew your NLDC Annual membership and include \$10 for BC dues to continue to receive weekly bird walk and monthly meeting announcements.

#8 Become an eBirder @ [eBird.org/home](http://eBird.org/home) and join the largest birding community and contribute to citizen science. It's a fabulous method of keeping track of your bird list.

#9 Take a weekly drive to a favorite birding site to monitor spring migration.

#10 Share some nature therapy by taking a family member, neighbor or child who would normally be in school on a birding walk. Practice social distancing (6 feet apart in our neck of the woods). You'll be glad you did!!! Happy Birding!!!

\*Note: This article is a condensed and revised version of a recent posting on BirdWire, a feature of Bird Watchers Digest, 3/21/2020, along with personal interjections.

## **Tracking Bird Migrations**

*By Mark Westphal*

For those interested in following the seasonal distribution of birds, the arrival and progression of birds through our state, as well as rare bird sightings, there are several handy sources to keep you up to date.

“eBird Alerts” found via the internet, provide not only a daily report of rare bird sightings, but also provide sightings of more common birds as they are found throughout the state.

The DNR provides an almost weekly summary of birding activity throughout the state of Wisconsin. This report is currently being put together by DNR employee, Ryan Brady, who is an expert birder and is well-known and respected in the Wisconsin birding community. This report tells the reader not only what birds are being seen throughout the state, but also lends insight into how the weather and the seasons effect what birders can expect to see in the coming days and weeks ahead. You can find this report by going to [dnr.wi.gov](http://dnr.wi.gov), and then search for “birding and bird conservation”. You can have this report sent to you on a regular basis by requesting it on the website.

An internet search of bird migration opens up a wealth of information and maps to help you track the progress of spring bird migrations not only in Wisconsin, but throughout the United State as well.

While the internet is a great source for birding information, don’t forget to grab your binoculars and check out the “live” migration activity in your own back yard.

## **Cabin Fever Ramblings**

*By Mark Westphal*

Is it spring yet? For me this question is more about a state of mind, rather than how the sun and earth are aligned or a specific date. For many of us birds are a significant component of our perception of spring. The return of our neotropical feathered friends in May and June is definitely a sign of spring. They are preceded by dark-eyed juncos and several species of sparrows that visit our backyard feeders, stocking up on sunflower seed energy as they make their way to nesting grounds far to our north. What about the arrival of red-winged blackbirds and sandhill cranes on marshes still sheltering snow at the base of last year’s cattails? In March bald eagles are already engaging in nesting activities in various parts of our state. Aren’t these also signs of spring? For me

one of the first “signs of spring” is when a friend calls to tell me trumpeter swans are arriving at a certain place on the Manitowish River. This year the call came early on February 16<sup>th</sup>. Despite the fact that when I was writing this there was still two feet of snow on the ground and the prior night’s temperature dipped to minus 23 degrees, I am still in my own optimistic (or delusional) mind making the leap that spring is here. Did I mention that great horned owls may already be nesting in late January? Now I am definitely getting carried away with this whole bird/spring analogy. While it may be true that I could be displaying the effects of “cabin fever”, it is also true that spring is indeed on the way. The days are getting longer, and the sun is climbing higher in the sky. Spring is determined not merely by the pages of a calendar, but by faith, hope, and the return of birds.

## **Life List Quarterly**

*By Sarah Besadny*

A new year brings a clean slate for the Club’s Annual Species List. How many birds will the Club see in 2020? Will the Club add any species to it’s Life List? Will the Club see a species that it hasn’t seen in a number of years? So much to look forward to!

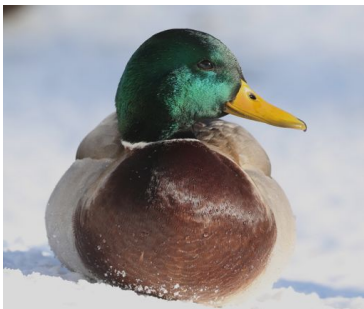
As a reminder, our Club’s Life List stands at 271 species plus two hybrids. On average, the Club records well over 100 species in a year. Here is the species count for the Club over the last 10 years:

Year	# of Species
2019	156
2018	163
2017	159
2016	171
2015	147
2014	175
2013	184
2012	191
2011	173
2010	186

I know that we all look forward to the time when we can gather again to enjoy watching birds, enjoy learning from each other and enjoy each other's company. Until then ....

## **Photo Journal**

*Photos on this page and the next by Mark Westphal*







*Photos on these next pages by Debby Wilson, from her trip to the Galapagos Islands*



Swallow-tailed Gull

Young Frigate Bird



Blue-footed Booby



Galapagos Dove

Male Great Frigate Bird with its throat pouch inflated to attract a mate



Nazca Booby