

BIRD SONGS

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Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

by Mark Westphal

It is an unfortunate fact that for the year 2020 almost all Bird Club activities, along with most other social gatherings, were cancelled due to Covid 19. As I write this message, it is mid-December and trucks are now carrying a new Covid 19 vaccine across the country. There is now more hope than ever that a return to normal activity is possible within the foreseeable future. Exactly when we can return to our regular meetings and outings is unclear. Will facilities reopen by spring or mid-summer of 2021? Only time will tell.

Your Bird Club board will continue to stay up to date with changes to health protocols and the availability of meeting facilities. Once restrictions are lifted and a greater sense of safety is felt, we plan to be ready to resume our monthly meetings

and Thursday morning outings. This all seems a bit like the proverbial “broken record”, but hopefully we will be singing a brighter tune next year. For now, we encourage you to maintain your Bird Club membership so that you can continue to be informed about any new developments regarding Club activities. You can also still share your sightings, information, photos, etc. through our quarterly newsletter or through the Club’s email distribution system via John Randolph. These are still great ways to stay in touch with Club members and share your interest and enthusiasm for birds.

As we all stay a little closer to home this winter, the birds in our own back yard bring an extra boost of joy and color into our lives. This year I waited until early December to put up my own back yard feeders. A loss of several feeders to a hungry bear this past spring left me extra cautious about getting my feeders up too early this fall, especially after having seen a pile of bear “sign” late into November. With December upon us, even with unusually mild temperatures, I am now hopeful that the bears are snug in their beds and that my feeders are safe.

Early visitors to my feeders include an enthusiastic group of chickadees, a pair of red-breasted nut hatches, and several boisterous blue jays. The three most common species of woodpecker (downy, hairy, and pileated) have also visited my suet feeder. After not having seen a turkey for weeks, a flock of 15 birds wandered past my feeding station, taking advantage of the spilled seeds. I have only seen them one other time since. I have yet to see any of the northern finch species such as grosbeaks or crossbills in my neighborhood. We are still early in the season, and I remain watchful and hopeful. I always have a sense of anticipation every time I look out my window. I never know who may be visiting my feeders or perching in a nearby tree.

Speaking of bird feeders, if you are in the neighborhood of the Lakeland Discovery Center, check out the improvements made to the bird feeding station located behind the main office building. During the past several years, weather, squirrels, and just plain old wear and tear have taken a toll on the feeding station. This fall, along with the much-appreciated assistance of Ryan and Annie of the Discovery Center, several Club members made significant improvements to the feeding station. A new cable was strung to support the feeders. New feeders were purchased and hung with extra effort being made to deter squirrels who previously seem to enjoy more seeds than the birds. Several small white pines were cut and placed in holders made from PVC piping to add more temporary cover for feeding birds. Some bird friendly shrubs were planted in the area to provide future food and cover. Although a number of people have participated in making these improvements, I would especially like to thank our Bird Club members, Donna Roche, Carne Andrews, Tim Schumann, Dick Jenks, and Bruce Bacon for their time and generosity. This Discovery Center feeding station brings enjoyable viewing for both staff and visitors alike. It also provides a viable area for bird banding sessions. Bruce Bacon has held numerous bird banding sessions around the feeder area, giving the public the

unique view into the process and science associated with tracking our feathered friends.

I hope you too have your feeders up and are ready to welcome your neighborhood birds. It is always interesting to hear who has which different species of birds at their feeder. The activity of birds also reminds us that even when the light of day is short and temperatures struggle to get above freezing, there is still life to be found outside our windows. If a 0.4-ounce chickadee can make it through a northern Wisconsin winter, I am optimistic that we can too.

Photos that Mark took while at the NLDC Bird Feeding Station



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Black-capped
Chickadee



White-breasted Nuthatch



New and improved
feeding station at
the NLDC

Species Profile: Wilson's Snipe (Gallinago delicata)

The Wonder of Wincwing

By Amy Sheldon



Many of us have a favorite spring spectacle. For my husband and I, at the top of our list, is the courtship display of Wilson's snipe. Visiting Powell Marsh as the earth awakens, scanning the purple misted sky, to find this magic bird plummeting to earth, tail feathers spread, emitting the unforgettable winnowing sound.

Wilson's snipe (*Gallinago delicata*) is one the most common and widespread North American shorebirds. *Gallinago* refers to woodcock or snipe resembling a hen. While *delicata* describes its "dainty" nature. It is named after the first North American Ornithologist Alexander Wilson. At least for now, many bird names are now being changed, with modernization of nomenclature.

This highly camouflaged 9-12 inch bird has pointed wingspan of 15-18 inches and a dainty weight of 2.8-5 oz. They sport a long straight bill and greenish gray legs. They have a prominent black eye stripe with lighter streaking below. The eyes are set well back in the head so they are better able to watch for predators. Dark, barred flanks with brown and black mottled upperparts make complex cryptic beauty. The only other bird you might confuse it with is the American Woodcock. The woodcock is distinguished by being a chubbier bird, with shorter bill and "no neck".

I mention Powell Marsh as our favorite haunt but snipe can be found throughout North America, primarily in freshwater marshes, bogs, wet meadows, ditches and tundra. Our population heads south in winters in the southern U.S.A.; the Caribbean and South America.

Snipe forage with bills beneath the surface, as the flexible tip allows them to extract and eat prey without lifting their heads. Their diet is a smorgasbord of crane and horse fly larvae, beetles, earthworms, leeches, crustaceans, mollusks, spiders, frogs, leaves and seeds. No doubt this varied diet leads to the species' success.

The dawn and dusk courtship display of this territorial species is what we enjoy the most. The male makes a speedy high zig zagging flight then dives up to 25 mph while spreading his rectrices to generate the sound named winnowing. It has been characterized as "hu-hu-hu" reminiscent of the Eastern Screech Owl. I say you need to hear it for yourself! They will also vocalize while sitting still atop a fencepost or stump.

The snipe nest is a shallow scrape lined with grass. The female incubates the 3-4 brown to olive buff eggs for 18-21 days. She gets a break when the couple split and rear the hatchlings 50:50. That's what I call a team effort. (Possibly why divorce rates are low in snipe?)

There are so many interesting facts about snipe. Their flight pattern and speed make them notoriously difficult to shoot. British soldiers in India around the 1700's coined the phrase "snipe" for ability to shoot Indian species of snipe. Our military term is derived from this, hence a good shooter became a "sniper". Snipe hunting is legal in Wisconsin and requires a small game License and Federal Duck stamp. The bag limit is 8 per day. But because of its elusive nature, few will reach this limit. I always take every chance I get to put a plug in for purchasing your Federal Duck stamp. Even if you do not hunt, this single purchase will give you the biggest bang for your conservation buck. Since 1934 sales of the stamp have raised 950 million dollars for conservation and preservation of nearly six million acres of habitat.

Have you ever been pranked by the summer camp "snipe hunt"? At Girl Scout camp in Madison Wisconsin, our counselor's gave us a paper bag and flashlight and sent us into the dark woods to find snipe, which they frightened us into believing was a gruesome mythical creature. Smart way to occupy energetic campers.

I invite everyone to go on their own "snipe hunt" next spring. I know we are already anticipating our next experience with this memorable shorebird.



Musings and Data for the Minocqua Christmas Bird Count

My Story - The Minocqua Christmas Bird Count

By Donna Roche

Each year for the years that I have been a part of organizing the Minocqua Christmas Bird Count for the Discovery Center Bird Club, I have worried. I've worried that 'they wouldn't come'. No, not the birds... but, that the bird club members wouldn't come forth, wouldn't volunteer and wouldn't show up for this wintry bird counting!

Oh ME of little faith! They have come each year. They have volunteered as field counters, backyard feeder counters, and folks who allow us to visit their yards to count birds.

Each year on the count day, the field counters set their clock alarms for early pre-dawn, put on extra warm clothes, get out their winter boots, travel in cars all over town, even hike through the woods and fields on cold, windy, snowing days for hours to look for tiny Brown Creepers, great big Bald Eagles and every sized bird in between! The back yard feeder counters look out their windows from time to time during the day and note the species of birds that have come to their feeders on their tally sheet hoping they have noted all, but not counting twice! The folks that we visit hope that we do show up after they worked hard to fill all their feeders and that the rare bird they saw yesterday, will come today. They do it with smiles on their faces!

In many ways this scenario played out for me as it has in similar ways this year, 2020. However, the year was different. There was concern about the COVID virus and how to set up the Minocqua CBC to keep all of the participants as safe as possible. But, with the good plan Sarah Besadny and I put in place and with the cooperation and also enthusiasm of the many volunteers, I think we're GOOD and SAFE!

Once again, especially this year, I had nothing to worry about... They/You DID come forth. You did volunteer and show up! You went on your own or with only a family member and searched for birds over hill and dale, through towns and woods, along rivers and lakes. You watched for birds at your feeders. Community folks supported our visits to their yards. Thanks to the warmer weather, you didn't have to bundle up as warmly as in some years. That was a nice plus!

HURRAH, we had our 2020 Minocqua Christmas Bird Count! I am very grateful for everyone's support. Although, my personal contribution to the number of birds and species during my solo field counting morning on December 17 was small, it will be a part of the count's total numbers and value. I was rewarded with many sightings and happy calls of my favorite winter bird, the Black-capped Chickadee. Others

from the SE Quad did much better and had great sightings. Kay Hoff found 55 Mallards in the open water near the fish hatchery! Jean Hanson found a number of Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls! Vanessa and Mark, the Haese/Lehman's, totaled 10 Pileated Woodpecker! Carne Andrews listed 12 species and a new birding partner, her new 'hubby' Tim Schumann! I am now hearing from others who participated with their interesting stories about the birds they saw and heard during the Minocqua CBC. I'm looking forward to hearing more and getting the tally totals for the day.

Now I can relax. I have nothing to worry about! You ALL came and counted many birds!! Thanks so much to the DC Bird Club.

Reflections on the Minocqua CBC

By Judy Cassady

The Minocqua CBC, Southwest Quadrant is always interesting. We know we'll see the "usual suspects": Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Red-breasted Nuthatches, but who will be the surprising survivors of our 21 - 28 degree F. chilly morning of Thurs. 12/17/20?

Since Covid - 19 forbade our Bird Club's usual gathering for lunch on CBC day, Jon and I decided to take more time in our own neighborhood. We had done some scouting a few days before, checking out Grouse Rd, Charlotte Lane, and Lake Dr., all of which run east of Hixon, our street. Jon spotted a Bald Eagle at the top of a tree on Charlotte. Unfortunately the eagle wasn't there the morning of the 17th. Besides our own front yard where our bird feeders are located, the best viewing was at the corner of Grouse and Hixon where we could see several bird feeders along a neighbor's deck. One of the 3 pileated woodpeckers on our count list we spotted in that location.

Two other Bird Club members joined our SW count in separate locations. John and Karin Randolph spent a little over 3 hours birding on Bolger Lake Road, the Dam Road in Minocqua, and various locations in Minocqua west of Hwy 51. John's surprising finds were the Fox Sparrow, the American Robin and the 8 American Goldfinches. He and Karin also counted 6 American Crows, 2 Bald Eagles, 10 Black-capped Chickadees, 1 Blue Jay, 1 Common Raven, 2 Downy Woodpeckers, 1 Pileated Woodpecker, 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches and 2 White-breasted Nuthatches.

Neil Kent lives within the SW quadrant of the Count Circle and counted the birds in his yard: 2 Downy Woodpeckers, 2 Hairy Woodpeckers, 1 Pileated Woodpecker, 4 Blue Jays, 18 Black-capped Chickadees, 5 Red-breasted Nuthatches and 2 White-breasted Nuthatches. He heard 2 Common Ravens.

After adding a few birds to our count from our neighborhood, Jon and I went west on Blue Lake Rd. to check out more of our quadrant. We found 9 Wild Turkeys crossing Camp Nine Road. Aerial sightings were 2 Blue Jays, 1 American Crow, and 4 Common Ravens. We also counted 2 more Pileated Woodpeckers, 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker, 7 Downy Woodpeckers and 7 Hairy Woodpeckers, 24 Black-capped Chickadees, 10 Red-breasted Nuthatches, and 7 White-breasted Nuthatches. When we stopped at the Marathon Station in Hazelhurst, we told the clerk what we were doing. She said she had seen two beautiful Bald Eagles on Cedar Falls Road the day before (12/16). O.K., so that counts as CW (Count Week).

As usual the Black-capped Chickadees won the prize for the most birds in their species. John Randolph counted 13 different species, Neil had 8, and we counted 11 with the store clerk's bald eagles. I'll be interested to see how our counts compare with the counts in the other three quadrants and in other years. Most of the morning was sunny, but cold.

Minocqua CBC Results for 2020

Summary by Sarah Besadny

Species	Total Count (includes feeder watchers)
Black-capped Chickadee	466
Red-breasted Nuthatch	91
American Crow	73
White-breasted Nuthatch	70
Mallard	55
Blue Jay	53
American Goldfinch	50
Common Raven	39
Downy Woodpecker	35
Pileated Woodpecker	33
Hairy Woodpecker	28
Pine Grosbeak	22
Common Redpoll	20
Bald Eagle	18
Wild Turkey	17
Red-bellied Woodpecker	12
European Starling	10
Northern Cardinal	8

Ruffed Grouse	7
Mourning Dove	7
Red Crossbill	6
Canada Goose	4
Dark-eyed Junco	4
Pine Siskin	3
Rock Pigeon	2
Golden-crowned Kinglet	2
Trumpeter Swan	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Northern Shrike	1
Fox Sparrow	1
Belted Kingfisher	1
American Robin	1
Total number of species = 32	
Total number of birds = 1,141	

This is the 15th year the Discovery Center Bird Club has supported the Minocqua Christmas Bird Count. The Christmas Bird Count, organized by Audubon, celebrated it's 121st year this year. For the Minocqua CBC, 19 people covered the 4 quadrants that make up the Count Circle and 8 others counted birds at their feeders. That's a tremendous amount of support!

Because of the social distancing restrictions in place due to the COVID 19 pandemic, individuals/family groups counted birds on their own rather than the usual carpooling effort. Because there were multiple people covering the same areas, some of the more common birds may be over counted. Audubon is fully aware that some numbers may be inflated this year and they will account for that in their analysis. However, it was easy to ensure that our rarer species counts are accurate.

Some interesting findings as the data were analyzed:

- We recorded a record number of species in our 15 years of participation (32 species). The next highest species count was 28 in 2014.
- We had record counts for several species: Pileated Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling and Northern Cardinal
- We had two species that had not been reported before in the Minocqua CBC: Fox Sparrow and Trumpeter Swan
- There were three species that had been reported only one other year in our 15 years of participation: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red Crossbill and Belted Kingfisher

Southeast Arizona eBirding Report

By Guy David

Bonnie and I remain hunkered down here in Green Valley, AZ due to COVID-19 and are awaiting the time when we can feel comfortable being out and about with other people. Almost everything that we planned to see and do during our first summer in AZ remains closed or shut down. I suspect the same is true for all who are reading this.

Even so, all of us birders should be counting our many blessings this Christmas season. By our nature, birders and hikers enjoy the outdoors and have continued with many of our outdoor pursuits. Basically, what COVID changed in this respect was our ability to go outdoors with groups such as the bird club. Having this newsletter, at least we remain connected in the meantime. This is one blessing we share.

We also can share our adventures to connect with others which is one reason for me to submit this article for the December 2020 issue of Bird Songs. Even though I'm not a Wisconsinite anymore, I treasure my memories of the Discovery Center Bird Club and I look forward to every communication that arrives via the club. All of this has value for each of us, it certainly does for me!

I occasionally check the eBird records for some of my favorite northern Wisconsin hotspots just to see what bird species have been showing up. Because of this, I have seen that some of our club members have been out birding on their own, which is wonderful to see! Thank you, eBirders, for your contributions to area birding records so that guys like me can wistfully imagine all the good findings for your efforts. Being able to vicariously visit great birding places where I have birded so many times is a treat that I couldn't have enjoyed as little as 20 years ago!

If I were to be granted a Christmas or New Year's wish, it would be that even more of the Discovery Center Bird Club members would become eBirders! It is a free (magic word) app and would be your best available resource to assist you in birding pursuits! The app is even better than any of your printed birding field guides! Maybe an experienced eBirding club member could offer a class on eBird use once the Discovery Center can host classes next summer. Using the app is simple, productive, and free (magic word again)!

Enabling birding memorabilia for others is but one reason for birders to utilize the great eBirding resource. This is another blessing for us eBirders. Being a recent year-long resident in SE Arizona, eBird has been an extremely useful tool for me. First, it makes it easy to find all the local birding hotspots and provides up-to-date information regarding what species of birds may be found at those locations. Second, one can sign up for daily emailed eBird Alerts for area counties. These alerts inform me what unusual species of bird were seen recently and where they

were seen. Even better, each alert includes two links to click on so that one can see a map that shows the exact location where the observation was made and see the eBirder's list to see a complete report of the observation.

Thankfully, there are many eBirders in the Green Valley and Tucson area, so the daily reports are numerous. Pima County and Santa Cruz County reports are my main sources of interest and we are so blessed in this area with a lot of great birding hotspots that can be safely visited, even in the COVID-19 era!

Since the virus started becoming an issue in the area, I have been a solitary birder. I have been able to get out and manage to remain alone (socially distant) while birding. I always carry my mask so that if I happen to encounter others along a narrow trail where I feel I cannot distance myself safely, I can easily slip the mask on until they pass. If I get to a birding area and it seems "busy" I will leave and go elsewhere. I'm very intent on being around to go birding next year. I hope all of you are too!

Now, about the birds. I'll focus on Pima County because it is home for us now. Checking all time Pima County eBird records I can report that there have been 472 species observed in Pima County. Compare that statistic to the Checklist of Birds of Wisconsin published by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology that features 441 species of birds statewide! The Pima County, AZ species were reported via 317,000 checklists by 14,300 eBirders. There are 380 eBird hotspots included in the data set! This data shows that opportunity abounds! In contrast, Vilas County eBird records show 914 eBirders yielding 12,400 checklists!

Top birding spots around Green Valley include Sweetwater Wetlands (309 species), Canoa Ranch Conservation Park (268 species), Avra Valley WTP (266 species), Arivaca Lake (253 species), Arivaca Cienega (252 species), Amado WTP (236 species), etc. A lesson to be learned from this list is that water sources in the area are the premium birding areas for sheer numbers of species and individual birds.

Another internationally known birding hotspot in the area is Madera Canyon so I thought I should mention this, even though it is not listed as a "top 100 hotspot" in Pima County eBird records. There are two reasons for this fact. First, the birding (hiking) trails in Madera Canyon span two counties. Second, eBirders are encouraged to break up their lists by birding hotspots in the canyon. Thus, the top birding locations in the canyon include Madera Picnic Area (177 species), Whitehouse Picnic Area (174 species), et.al.

Not that I am rubbing it in or anything, but Canoa Ranch Conservation Park with it's 268+ potential species is about 5 minutes from our house. I birded there yesterday morning (12/21/2020). It was sunny and calm, but I needed a light jacket until about 10:00 am when I reduced to shirtsleeves in the 70 degree weather! I nailed 32 species during my 2-hour, 9 minute walk while I covered 1.57 miles. Yes, all this information was automatically recorded within the eBird app. By way of contrast, eBirding records for the entire Vilas County region currently stands at 273 species.

Powell Marsh, arguably the bird club's favorite birding hotspot, has yielded 217 species of birds so far.

By using these online resources, it has been simple to find out what is going on in terms of visits by rare or uncommon species that I haven't included in my life list yet. After getting settled in August, 2019 I began to do some birding. Since then I have managed to add 18 species to my life list. There have been opportunities to add more species if I were a "chaser". I am not one to be out the door as soon as I learn of the presence of a new bird in the area. Most of my birding effort continues to be general birding outings rather than targeted outings in pursuit of the latest available rarity. I think most birders are of that nature.

Us general birders often observe birds when we are out and about for other reasons. For example, last week Bonnie and I golfed at a nearby golf course. Really! I am NOT trying to rub it in! While proceeding down the 6th fairway which goes past a nice pond, I saw a flock of about 20 Coots grazing in the fairway. When we got closer, one bird was noticeably larger and browner than the Coots. I usually carry binoculars while golfing to help me locate where my golf ball went (wink, wink) so I took a closer look at the bird which turned out to be a Greater White-fronted Goose! A new AZ species for me. I chose to golf at that course that day because I saw an eBird report of that bird the day before! Elated that it still was there, I whipped out the cell phone and quickly made an eBird report.

While I knew the species was new to me in AZ, I wasn't so sure that the bird was a "lifer". When I had a little time later at home, I checked my eBirding records and, sure enough, I had reported this species in Tribal Powell Marsh on April 12, 2006. Fourteen years between sightings of this species for me.

So, after all my railing about birding hotspots, I admit that good birding happens anytime and anywhere. As I observed at the beginning of this article, despite COVID-19, we birders can continue to have fun in pursuit of birds and birding. It reminds us to be grateful for our many blessings and to focus on the future and the good birding times when the future unfolds to our new normal. Having the bird club and having great leaders who undoubtedly are thinking about planning meetings, outings, projects, and related pursuits gives all club members hope for a bright birding future.

Following are three of the Arizona rarities that Guy photographed during 2020:



Arctic Tern

Northern Jacana,
juvenile



Green Kingfisher

When it comes to Birding...They're on the Fence

By Mark Westphal

Our house sits out in a field. The nearest group of trees is about 100 feet from our kitchen window. During the winter, the lack of trees and bushes close to our house, means many birds are only viewed at a distance as they are reluctant to leave the safety of natural cover. During the summer however, our viewing opportunities expand. We currently have three Australian shepherd dogs. When we built our house, we put up a large fenced in area that allows us to let our dogs out after dark without having to worry about them chasing the local deer or running into the less friendly critters of the night. While the fence does its job of keeping our dogs safe, it also provides the added benefit of being a great perching place for birds. The resident bluebirds, eastern phoebes, and chipping sparrows all made frequent use of the fence as they hunted for insects in the surrounding grass. Eastern kingbirds and goldfinches made several appearances, along with cedar waxwings that tugged at pieces of twine that were hung on the fence for free nesting material. Yellow-rumped and palm warblers perched on the fence during early fall migration. They had particular interest in the dozens of flies that collected on the side of our house warmed by the fall sunshine.

While our fence is not natural or even pretty, it has proven useful for a number of species of birds. In turn, they have provided us with numerous colorful and interesting observations. So, as you can see, when it comes to birding...they're definitely on the fence.

These are some of the birds that visited Mark's fence. Photos by Mark Westphal.



Eastern Bluebird



Pine Warbler



Cedar Waxwing



Eastern Kingbird



Eastern Phoebe



Palm Warbler