

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

March 2021; Volume 17,
Issue 1

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President's Message

by Mark Westphal

As I write this message, bare ground is becoming more common than snow, lake ice is deteriorating, and I have spotted my first robin of the year searching for food outside my living room window. Spring is officially here! As birders, this is the time of the year that we look forward to. Each day we eagerly watch to see what species the spring migration has brought northward. We take joy in hearing the call of a newly arrived red-winged blackbird or the sight of a sandhill crane.

Now the big question is, what does the start of this year's spring birding season hold for Bird Club members. As we all know, last year the surge of Covid 19 cases caused the cancellation of many of our normal activities. Bird Club gatherings were no exception. For all practical purposes, 2020 was a non-season for Bird Club outings and meetings. This year, with vaccination numbers on the rise and Covid cases declining, there is a greater sense of optimism. Along with that optimism, a fair amount of caution and uncertainty remains. No matter what plans I might suggest today, they could all change days, weeks, or months from now.

What can I tell you today? Most public meeting spaces remain closed to indoor gatherings, including the North Lakeland Discovery Center. Along with being closed due to Covid, the Center is also going through a substantial renovation. The Bird Club currently has no official programs scheduled for the 2021 season. Given what we currently know, July would be the earliest time that we *might* be able to consider holding a gathering. The Discovery Center follows the health and safety recommendations communicated by the Vilas County Health Department. These recommendations are reviewed on a regular basis and will hopefully trend in a positive direction. The Bird Club Board continues to stay in contact with the Discovery Center and is ready to reinstate meetings and programs as soon as circumstances allow.

One of the major benefits of being a Bird Club member is the opportunity to participate in our Thursday morning outings. I am happy to report that Donna Roche, our outing coordinator, is looking forward to leading our first Bird Club outing of 2021 on Thursday, April 29th. As an affiliate of the Discovery Center, we will be following the same precautions taken during Discovery Center outdoor activities. All outing participants will be required to wear masks and maintain a respectful social distance. Group sizes will be limited to 10 participants, including a group leader. If more than 10 people show up for a particular outing, participants will be divided into 2 or more groups. While this may or may not seem a little awkward, we now have the opportunity to bird together with our friends once again. If you choose to participate in the outings, we look forward to seeing you. All that we ask is that you follow the safety protocols, be respectful of your fellow birders, and be ready to "go with the flow".

I have also been asked about “Bird Fest”. There will be a “Bird Fest” scheduled for the first weekend in June. It will once again be a hybrid event. While there will be no in person programs, there will be a fantastic selection of online programs as well as the opportunity to sign up for several field trips that will be scheduled for both Friday and Saturday. Be sure to visit the NLDC website as more details become available.

Also, if you get the chance, considering visiting the Discovery Center’s wonderful birding trail. Our Club continues to maintain signs along the trail, highlighting several bird species that frequent the habitats surrounding the Discovery Center. The Discovery Center property continues to be a great place to go for a bird walk.

Last, but not least, if you haven’t renewed your Bird Club membership, please put us on your “to do list”. We look forward to staying in touch with you and keeping you up to date with our outing schedule and any potential future programs.

Species Profile: Yellow-rumped Warbler: Setophaga coronate (a.k.a Butter Butt)

By Denise Herzberg

Have you ever been birding and seen an eye catching, glorious looking, warbler? Beautiful bright yellows; stark whites; and deep blacks. For a minute you wonder what it is and then realize it is “just” a Yellow-rumped Warbler. I say “just” because, at the right time of year, we see them almost daily and can be blasé about them; however, I contend that the males, in their spring plumage, are one of the most striking, beautiful of all warblers.



Setophaga coronata auduboni Audubon's



Setophaga coronata coronata Myrtle

In field guides published before 2011, YRWA is listed under the genus *Dendroica*; but the American Ornithologist Union transferred the YRWA, and many other warblers, to *Setophaga* that year.

Until 1973, Myrtle's and Audubon's were considered two distinct species; in 2017 there was an attempt to split them again. Although the proposal failed, the debate continues. If you keep a list, a split would be nice. You gain a species without ever having to lift your binoculars. Of course, for those of you who haven't travelled very far west, you may have to make a trip to add the Audubon's.

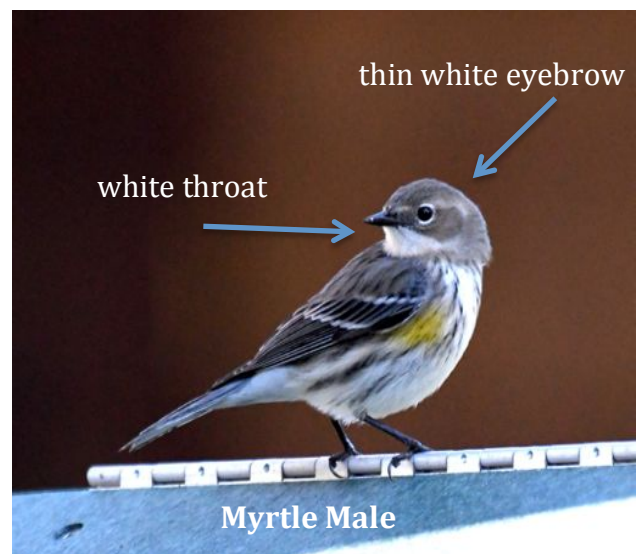


I happened to be on a field trip in California with Kenn Kaufman (not name dropping-just stating the facts, ma'am). I decided that he would very likely know something I had often pondered, but never bothered to research. Why do we occasionally see Myrtle YRWAs in California, but only rarely Audubon's in Wisconsin? If you look at the range maps you can guess his answer. The Myrtle's have a breeding range all across Canada, but Audubon's is restricted to the West. The intergrade zone on the map is where the two subspecies breed together. (Intergrades are the offspring of two subspecies and hybrids the offspring of two species). For more on the subject of splitting and lumping do an internet search for, "Kenn Kaufman Yellow-rumped Warbler split". Note that it was written before the proposal failed in 2017. If you want to take a deep dive into the subject of intergrades, along with a snarky comment on Kenn Kaufman's discussion, search "flocking around Yellow-rumped Warbler intergrade"

Both subspecies and sexes have these characteristics, year round: a butter butt; a yellow patch on the side in front of the wings; streaking on the breast and flanks; split eye ring and dark face; white under tail coverts; and, white outer corners of the tail visible in flight.

In the spring, both sexes and subspecies have a yellow patch on the crown, but the female's is not as prominent as the male's.

The photos below of the male yellow rumps were taken by my friend, Will German. The Myrtle was in his back yard.



Female Audubon's



Female Myrtle



Since we frequently see only the under side of warblers, I have included this screen shot from *The Warbler Guide*. The under tail is distinctive on the YRWA.



Yellow-rumps are very social birds. Unlike most warblers, they often migrate and hunt for food in large groups. One reason for their abundance is that they are very flexible feeders. They feed on the ground or in the high canopy. Like a flycatcher, they sally out to catch insects and also seek them out near tree trunks or skim over water like swallows. Like other warblers, they also glean insects off leaves. The name, "Myrtle", is in reference to one of the berries they eat. Very few other warblers eat berries. This adaptable diet makes them the most common winter warbler in the warmer-than-Wisconsin parts of the U.S. Of course, as the climate grows warmer you might find them in your northern Wisconsin backyard in January!

YRWAs breed in coniferous and mixed forests. They use a variety of tree species and forest types for nesting, but are usually on the edge, rather than in a dense forest. This ability to use a variety of breeding habitats is another reason for their abundance.

A few warblers found in Wisconsin might be confused with the YRWA. The Palm Warbler also has a yellow rump, but it is duller and more diffuse than the Yellow-rump and its under tail coverts are bright yellow. Also, they constantly pump their tail. The Magnolia Warbler has a bright yellow rump spot, but the under tail is quite different and when you see the bright yellow chest you can be sure it's not a YRWA.

Yellow-rumps can be quite vocal, especially when excited. According to my sources, the Myrtle's call is a "check" and the Audubon's is a "chent"; however, I recommend that you listen to the vocalizations online (ebird is a good source) or better yet, listen to them carefully when next you encounter them.

Although your chances of seeing an Audubon's Yellow-rump in Wisconsin are small, you should be looking out for them. With luck, I'll be looking with you next summer!



Photo by Will German

Resources:

The aforementioned web sites

Donald and Lillian Stokes *Field Guide to Warblers*

Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion

Tom Stephenson and Scott Whittle *The Warbler Guide* (available as an app or book)

Jon Dunn and Kimball Garrett *A Field Guide to Warblers of North America*

Photos not by Will German are from ebird and the internet

It's Spring! So What Might Be Coming Our Way?

By Sarah Besadny

As Mark noted in his President's Message above, birders live for Spring Migration! Songbirds in their finest, crisp plumage, song filling the early morning hours, spotting species you haven't seen in months – it's pure joy! I thought I'd pique your excitement with some data on early sightings for various migrants that travel to/through the Northwoods.

Have you already been out at dusk on a warmer evening to hear and see the American Woodcock peenting and doing their magical flight display? They're already here so consider heading to an open grassy area right at dusk to witness their mating rituals. The lakes are opening up and that brings the largest group of our early migrants -- waterfowl. There are already numerous species gracing our waters – Canada Geese, Trumpeter Swans, Hooded Mergansers, Common Mergansers, Wood Ducks, Mallards, Ring-necked Ducks, Buffleheads and more. Sandhill Cranes are already taking up residence in several marshy areas around the Northwoods. April brings the arrival of Osprey, Hermit Thrush, Phoebes, Chipping Sparrows, Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Bitterns. Some of the early warblers to arrive sometime during April are the Yellow-rumped Warbler, Pine Warbler and Palm Warbler. And then bam!, May hits and in come waves of warblers and other songbirds.

I reviewed some eBird data from the last several years to look for early arrival dates of some migrant species and thought I'd share, just in case you too find this stuff interesting. Where I could find a date for counties in this area, I have noted those. Often, the first sightings of migrants in the northern counties comes from Bayfield County or Florence County so I've noted those generically as "n.c." for "northern county".

Yellow-rumped Warbler – April 2 (n.c.), April 17 (Vilas)

Palm Warbler – April 15 – (Forest)

Pine Warbler – April 18 (n.c.), May 11 (Vilas)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – May 3 (Iron)

Cape May Warbler – May 4 (Vilas)

Black-and-White Warbler – May 4 (Vilas)

Black-throated Green Warbler – May 4 (n.c.), May 6 (Vilas)

Blackburnian Warbler – May 6 (Vilas)

Ovenbird – May 7 (Vilas)
Yellow Warbler – May 7 (n.c.)
Winter Wren – May 8 (Iron)
Nashville Warbler – May 9 (n.c.)
Blue-headed Vireo – May 9 (n.c.)
American Redstart – May 9 (n.c.)
Northern Parula -- May 9 (Forest)
Magnolia Warbler – May 10 (Vilas)
Common Yellowthroat – May 11 (Vilas)
Black-throated Blue Warbler – May 11 (Vilas)
Chestnut-sided Warbler – May 12 (Vilas)
Golden-winged Warbler – May 14 (Oneida)
Mourning Warbler – May 16 (n.c.)

Will this year have an early arrival of Spring migrants? Time will tell!

There is a wealth of data in eBird that can be used by anyone, but the data is only as rich as the information that people choose to enter. So, if you're out birding I encourage you to submit an eBird checklist – and share your joy and valuable information with other birding enthusiasts.

Sharing Your Enthusiasm

By Mark Westphal

A few weeks ago, I received what has become an annual phone call letting me know that trumpeter swans had arrived on the Manitowish River near Boulder Junction. Moments after the call I grabbed my camera and headed over to the riverbank for an hour or so of swan watching. Although I have seen trumpeter swans at this location several times before, I still get excited by their arrival. Not only do I enjoy observing these beautiful birds, but for me their arrival is a sign of spring.

This year I made a point to share my swan sighting with my two grandchildren. I emailed them several photos along with a few simple swan facts. My grandchildren are city dwellers. Their normal routine offers them little contact with birds or the natural world. Most of their exposure to the great outdoors comes from visits to their grandma and grandpa who live "up north". As a birder and as a grandparent, it is natural that I would want

to share my interests in birds and nature with my grandchildren. Distance, competition with electronics, and Covid have sometimes made that desire a challenge. I am also wise enough to know that just because I personally enjoy birds and nature, it does not necessarily follow that everyone else, including my grandchildren, will have the same interest and appreciation. Despite the various hurdles, I will continue to share my enthusiasm for birds and gently encourage my grandchildren to become more aware of the natural environment.

One bird that my grandchildren became more familiar with last summer is the Ruby-throated Hummingbird that visited the small back deck of their home. A couple of flowerpots and a hummingbird feeder kept the hummingbird returning for frequent visits. This spring I sent them a link, hummingbirdcentral.com, so they can follow the northward progress of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird migration. It is always fun to build a sense of anticipation!

While I might focus on sharing my interest in birds with my own grandchildren, I also see the importance of sharing that interest with people of all ages. Birding can be fun and educational whether you do it as a serious birder or as a casual observer. No matter how you choose to bird watch, it can stimulate your mind, encourage you to be more physically active, and possibly lead to an opportunity to make new friends that share a similar interest.

Encouraging an interest and appreciation of birds also serves a broader purpose. Birds need our help. With declining bird populations and habitat loss, it is important to share our love of birds and bring attention to issues affecting their survival. As many people have said, in similar ways, we tend to save what we love and understand. By sharing our interest in birds, we not only spread the joy of bird watching, but also grow support for protecting birds and amplify the importance of preserving their habitats.

Whether you point out a robin's nest to a child, share a rare sighting with a neighbor, or chat about the birds you may have seen along a local trail, I encourage you to share your love of birds. As people learn more about birds, not only do they expand their knowledge and enrich their own lives, but they also gain the motivation to actively help our birds survive and thrive for future generations to enjoy.





Liz Stone has provided the following information that may be of interest:

Spring Nest Box Offer for New Members

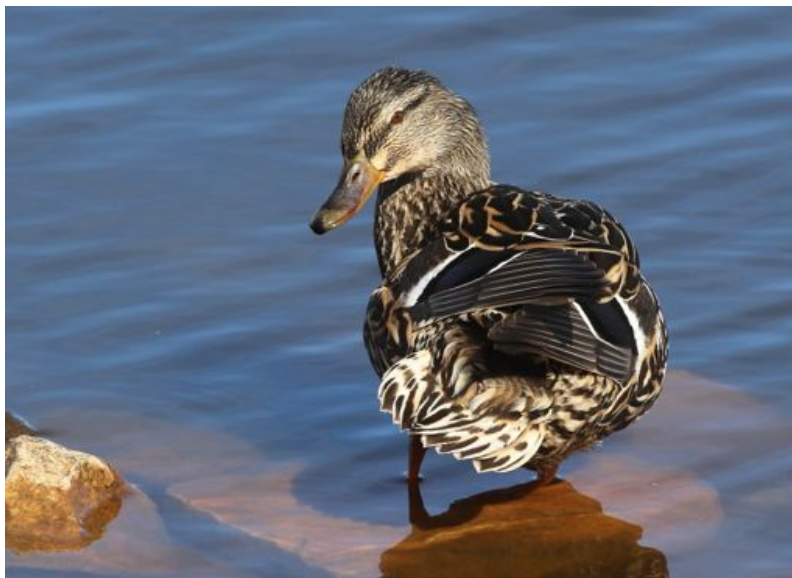
Now is a great time to put up nest boxes for returning bluebirds. Would your local park director, golf course superintendent, or cemetery manager be interested if you donated a Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW) membership for them which included 2 to 5 new nest boxes with predator guards? Perhaps a farmer friend or rural property owner you know would welcome a membership and the nest boxes from you. And just maybe one of your relatives or a neighbor would like to get started supporting bluebirds. Here's how BRAW can help.

Anyone in Wisconsin not currently a member who joins the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin before June 1st of this year at the \$25 annual level will get FREE:

- 2 to 5 new nest boxes with predator guards & clamps (number is their choice),
- An instructional booklet on how to locate and put up boxes,
- A mailed four-issue subscription to the *Wisconsin Bluebird* newsletter, and
- Advice from an experienced bluebird trailer as needed. BRAW will ship the nest boxes and predator guards at no cost to a Wisconsin address. However, a donation to help defray shipping charges would be greatly appreciated. Another option is to pick up the boxes and guards at two locations in Madison. New members getting this deal would have to agree to monitor the nest boxes and fill out the data reporting form at the end of the 2021 season. Reporting data is easy and critical to the success of BRAW's Trail Builder Program. Payment can be made directly via the www.braw.org website. A printable membership form is also available for folks who want to send a check in to BRAW, PO Box 628492, Middleton, WI 53562. Before submitting payment, please contact Val Van Winkle, Membership Coordinator, ripvws@gmail.com or phone 847-302-5684. She will confirm eligibility and make arrangements for receipt of the nest boxes.

Photo Journal

All Photos by Mark Westphal







be sure to look closely at this!