

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

June 2021; Volume 17,
Issue 2

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President's Message

by Mark Westphal

While our Club's activities are not quite fully back to "normal", we have certainly made some major strides in that direction. I am happy and grateful to report that our Club has once again resumed our Thursday morning bird walks. It is great to see our birding friends, both old and new. Donna Roche has been doing a wonderful job summarizing our recent excursions as well as providing detailed directions for upcoming walks. The weekly reports once again include a list of birds seen during the previous outing. Many thanks to the volunteers for helping to gather and record our bird count information. Our Club has a long history of maintaining birding

records. Not only do our records include our seasonal bird walks, but our Christmas bird counts as well. These records are not only fun and interesting, but they also add to the valuable history of our Club. Species recorded, or the lack of their presence, also serve as an indicator of bird population trends and environmental changes. Although I am sometimes statistically challenged, I still like to know what species of birds we are seeing compared to previous years. Have we spotted the same species? Are we missing others? Have we added any new birds to our Club's Life List of species? I am sure there are new areas for our Club to explore with new birds to be seen. Your ideas and suggestions for new birding adventure are always welcome.

Although we have resumed our bird walks, meetings are still on hold. To date public meeting spaces remain unavailable. The main lodge at the Discovery Center has been closed and under renovation since last winter. Even without construction activities, it was unavailable due to Covid restrictions. Construction is expected to be completed by the end of July. August may hold some promise for a possible meeting. We will keep you updated.

Speaking of the Discovery Center, naturalist and former Bird Club liaison, Annie McDonnell, has left the Discovery Center to pursue a position with the Wisconsin DNR Snapshot program. We wish her well. Efforts are currently underway to find her replacement.

I recently received an email from Annie McDonnell informing us that we are the recipients of a \$250.00 grant from Bird City Wisconsin. Annie had applied for the grant on behalf of the Discovery Center and our Bird Club. The grant is to be used for a bird habitat and education station at the NLDC campus. The Bird Club Board has also set aside an additional \$750.00 to be used towards this project. Donna Roche, Bruce Bacon, and I have already put some time and thought into this project. If you would like to help with the birding station project, please contact either me or Donna. We are looking for both ideas and labor assistance. The plans include the purchasing and planting of native bird friendly plants, the installation of a water feature, and the setup of critter proof bird feeders. Our goal is to make substantial progress on this project by mid-September.

Whether you have been able to join us for Thursday morning walks or not, I hope you are enjoying this warm summer weather and all the color, sound, and activity that our local birds bring to the Northwoods. Keep those binoculars handy!

The Ecological Niche

By Julie Hellwig

Identification of birds in the field can be easier by knowing what to look for when trying to determine what species you are observing. Color, size, shape, and flight patterns give us clues. Songs are unique to a species and since an individual is often heard before being seen, especially in our northern forest when trees have fully leafed out, this may be one of the easiest ways to locate and identify a bird. Another factor in bird identification is understanding what kind of habitat an individual species most often uses. Although birds are highly mobile, they ordinarily forage and breed in very specific habitats.

We expect to find specific species in habitats broken down into categories such as marshes, grasslands, deciduous woods, or coniferous forests, but habitat preferences can be much more complex than most people understand. A basic ecological principle says that two or more species can't occupy the same niche at the same time because the result is competition, and one species will always out compete the other. So how is it possible to observe many different warblers using the same habitat, sometimes even the same tree? Some observations from ecologist Robert Mac Arthur in the 1950's may reveal the answer.

Mac Arthur found that even when three different species of warblers (Cape May, Bay-breasted, and Yellow-rumped) were foraging in the same tree simultaneously, they spent time in different parts of the tree. They seemed to divide the tree into different sections. The Cape May fed in the highest, outermost branches while the Bay-breasted spent most of the time on the interior branches in the middle of the tree and the Yellow-rumped foraged in the lower branches near the ground. Evolution has genetically programmed habitat preferences, possibly to avoid habitat and foraging

conflicts with other bird species using the same territory. Another example of shared habitat involves the Nuthatch and Brown Creeper. While the Nuthatch works its way down the tree trunk, peering into crevices for insects, the Brown Creeper works its way up the trunk, thus peering into entirely different crevices for its meal. The birds may be dividing up limited resources such as food with less conflict, allowing more time and energy for reproduction of their own species.

One last example of the ecological niche involves grassland birds, which we often think of as using prairie habitat. As usual, our idea of habitat turns out to be a bit more complex. Although a diverse assemblage of plant species is most desirable, the bird species you attract is largely determined by differences in the prairie's structure, rather than specific plant species. The vegetation height and density, percent of woody vegetation, litter depth, exposed soil, and amount of standing residual dead vegetation determines which nesting species you will attract. Clay-colored and Field sparrows prefer some woody vegetation with scattered shrubs or saplings, the Henslow's sparrow prefers tall dense vegetation with a heavy litter layer and standing dead vegetation from the previous year while the Grasshopper Sparrow uses areas with much shorter grass and patches of bare soil. Grassland birds have adapted to occupy these varying physical niches within the overall prairie habitat to lessen competition between species. Thus, these grassland birds are breaking up the prairie habitat into more specific ecological niches just as the warblers in Mac Arthur's observations did.

References:

Mac Arthur R .H. 1958. Population ecology of some warblers of northeastern coniferous forests. *Ecology* (39): 599-619

Neall Smith, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2019. Viewing Grassland Birds

Bird Club Thursday Outings - Spring 2021

With Some Photos of Birders!

By Donna Roche

Hurrah! I started out the 2021 DC Bird Club Thursday Outings season with my first hurrah and I will continue to use that great word to show how thankful I am that we are able to have them. We started out carefully with masks and social distancing in accordance with NLDC policies on Thursday in **April 29 at Powell Marsh**. We've got the photo taken by Dick T. for proof! The turnout for that day was large and we had to divide into two sections of less than 10. It was great to see folks we hadn't been able to get together with in a long time.... we were eager to bird together again! Rain was forecasted, but didn't come until we were almost back to our cars. Twenty-two species were tallied including 4 species of ducks, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Common Loon, American Bittern, Sandhill Crane and Belted Kingfisher. Dick Thiele's photo below.



The month of May brought changes in COVID protocol and masks were no longer mandatory for outdoor activities. Our birding groups continued to social distance for the next Thursday outing, **May 6 at Little Turtle Flowage**. Bruce B. was a part of the group of 14 to bird and to share information about the DNR current management changes and tree removal in the grassland areas for LTF. We found 28 species around the pool area and in the woods.

Our group continued to be large, with 14 members, on **May 13 at Willow Flowage**. The main boat landing parking lot, the dam and lake overlook were terrific for seeing and hearing birds. Twenty-five species were identified. Camera work by Dick T. helped to ID the distant Broad-winged Hawk! John spotted a Wood Duck among a group of Mallards! Many good spotters found the kinglet, grosbeaks, and sparrows in the area. From here, we moved to the trailhead at Willow Flowage. Here we found some FOY (first of the year) warblers. Great fun and challenges to locate and identify these guys!

OK... We did not luck out with the weather for our day trip on **May 20 to Ashland**. But, it was NOT a washout. It was a perfect day to play in the light rain and to take cover when we got soaked. Nine DCBC'ers enthusiastically birded the Chequamegon shore areas in Ashland. The birds didn't care about a little rain; they flitted around and sang in the rain! The only complaint was the fogged up binoculars and scopes! However, 40 species for a great birding day! Photo below by Donna



Carne suggested that now would be a good time to visit **Van Vliet Hemlocks SNA**, so **May 27th** worked right into our schedule! Seven hardy birders dressed in winter duds plus early spring rainwear came out for this outing and none were sorry they came. It's an incredible place with distinct changes in the topography, magnificent trees, interesting vegetation and great birds. It was great to hear Scarlet Tanager and a couple of Hermit Thrushes. Highlights were two active bird nests that could be seen with the

parent/s attending and some nestlings. The nests were for American Robin and Blackburnian Warbler.

Our group visited the **Dove Road area in Lake Tomahawk on June 3**. Although the area is no longer a study site for the Golden-winged Warbler, it is still a great area for lots of birds and always a great walk. The morning started out very overcast and damp. Often the birds chip in the shrubs along the trail and maybe dash across the open area. We have to work at getting them out with 'pishing' sounds... it does work, sometimes. We did find American Restart, Veery, and Red-breasted Grosbeak along with Eastern Towhee for a species list totaling 20. The day warmed and cleared up making it a good day for birding!

There are so many terrific places to go birding year after year (but sadly, not last year) and the **Bearskin Trail, Hawshaw Trailhead is one**. **On May 10** a small group met on a morning that was forecasted to be very warm. We were able to keep our cool along the river and later in shady spots. We noted 7 species of warblers and really enjoyed the enchanting songs of the Hermit Thrush and Winter Wren for a total species list of 21!

The outing on **June 17 was Presque Isle Ponds and Pipke Park**. We started out at the pavilion and looked for the Common Loon family. We only saw one adult and one young of the previously seen family of four. Later all the family was accounted for! We headed up the wooded trail for a while, but the mosquitos kept our stay there short. However, we heard Least Flycatcher, Veery, Northern Parula, and Scarlet Tanager. We continued around the ponds and were witnesses to the sad tale of the Bald Eagle who caught a fish that was too large to hold and it fell back into the water! The total species for the day was 30. Photo below taken by Donna



Our last 'Spring' outing was on June 24 to Thunder Lake SWA and Rice Lake SNA. One thing I've learned about DC birders is that like the postal service motto of delivering the mail, bad weather is not going to stop some birders from birding an interesting place! Although I thought that no one would 'show up' for this outing, they did! So four club members kept close to their cars and made stops along the gravel road for short walks with just a little rain and found several different sparrows and Sedge Wrens. We enjoyed great views of Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler and Eastern Kingbird. We had an American Bittern leisurely fly over us and identified a Great-crested Flycatcher among species of flycatcher. We spent 2 1/2 hours birding with just a few sprinkles of rain for a total of 22 species.

There is no question that if the thunder and lightning had continued, we would have wasted our travel time... so anyone who chose not to come had every reason to make that choice.

Next week, we move on into our 'summer' outings. Hurrah! I hope many of you will be able to come to the outings. There are more great places to bird and many new species to find. Please feel free to let me know about any suggestions you have for destinations or improvements in procedures. I

would also appreciate help in putting together and leading the outings. Let me know!



Up North Hammerheads, Birding for a Cause

By Sarah Besadny

On May 24th, 11 people formed the Up North Hammerheads, our team that participates in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon. The good news this year was that we were able to bird together as a group. The bad news was that in order to keep the group to a small number in keeping with COVID guidelines, we didn't get to extend the invitation to the whole bird club.

for a number of years now so we have the process down pat. What we don't have down pat is predicting the weather. It wasn't supposed to rain until 4:00 p.m. or so and that seemed like no issue since we met at 6:00 a.m. at Powell Marsh. Well, before the clock hit 7:00 a.m. we were all DRENCHED! Luckily most people live close by so a quick trip home to change brought this intrepid team back together after about an hour and a half. Darn if we didn't miss some prime birding time, but we carried on. Our day took us

from Powell Marsh over to Cathedral Point in Boulder Junction where we had a picnic lunch while looking/listening for birds, of course. Since we lost some time in the morning we decided to head right over to Dove Road in Lake Tomahawk and from there we headed into Minocqua where we usually end our day in search of Chimney Swifts (got them!) and House Sparrow (had to call it a day before anyone spotted the sparrow). Our rules for the day are that anyone who participates on the team can count any birds they hear/see at their feeders or while in transit. Dick T. heard an Eastern Screech Owl while walking the dog at the crack of dawn. Katie F. heard the Eastern Whip-poor-will before leaving for Powell Marsh. Donna R. came with a sizeable list of birds she had before even getting to Powell and I had to stop the car twice on our road as I headed out of Eagle River so that I didn't run over two American Woodcock. By the time we ended the day around 6:00 p.m. we tallied 89 species! Not too shabby. Some species highlights while the group was together were the Wilson's Warbler (appropriately spotted by Debby Wilson!!), Blackpoll Warbler, Black-bellied Plover and Dunlin in breeding plumage, Golden-winged Warbler and Orange-crowned Warbler.

So what keeps this group birding for almost 12 hours, no matter the weather? It's knowing that we're raising funds for a really good cause (birds), and specifically for several bird protection initiatives such as Kirtland's Warbler Conservation, Piping Plover Recovery, supporting Wisconsin's Important Bird Areas, just to name a few. Additionally, half of the funds raised by our team come back to the Bird Club to be used for charitable, educational or scientific purposes. This year we raised \$2,300!! As of the time I was writing this recap that put our team in tenth place for fundraising in a field of 65 teams! Way to go Up North Hammerheads and all who supposed the team! Species list for May 24th:

Canada Goose	American Crow
Trumpeter Swan	Common Raven
Wood Duck	Tree Swallow
Mallard	Barn Swallow
Blue-winged Teal	Black-capped Chickadee
Green-winged Teal	Red-breasted Nuthatch
Ring-necked Duck	White-breasted Nuthatch
Hooded Merganser	Winter Wren

Common Merganser	Sedge Wren
Ruffed Grouse	Marsh Wren
Wild Turkey	Veery
Common Loon	Hermit Thrush
Pied-billed Grebe	American Robin
American Bittern	Gray Catbird
Turkey Vulture	European Starling
Osprey	Golden-winged Warbler
Bald Eagle	Orange-crowned Warbler
Northern Harrier	Northern Parula
Broad-winged Hawk	Yellow Warbler
Virginia Rail	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Sora	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Sandhill Crane	Black-throated Green Warbler
Black-bellied Plover	Pine Warbler
Killdeer	Blackpoll Warbler
Dunlin	Black-and-white Warbler
Wilson's Snipe	American Redstart
American Woodcock	Ovenbird
Ring-billed Gull	Mourning Warbler
Black Tern	Common Yellowthroat
Mourning Dove	Wilson's Warbler
Eastern Screech Owl	Scarlet Tanager
Whip-poor-will	Eastern Towhee
Chimney Swift	Chipping Sparrow
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Savannah Sparrow
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Song Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	Lincoln's Sparrow
Northern Flicker	Swamp Sparrow
Pileated Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Northern Cardinal
Alder Flycatcher	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Eastern Phoebe	Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Kingbird	Common Grackle
Blue-headed Vireo	Purple Finch
Red-eyed Vireo	American Goldfinch
Blue Jay	

Drama At Powell Marsh

Article and Photos By Mark Westphal

On June 1st two birding friends and I witnessed a dramatic encounter at Powell Marsh between two waterfowl species. A pair of trumpeter swans with four recently hatched offspring, called cygnets, had just traveled from Vista Pond to the main flowage. The swans had now entered a territory occupied by a goose family. I could not tell if it was the swans' primary intention to drive the goose family away, or if the swans were merely reacting to the geese trying to defend their territory. Either way, a battle was about to ensue. As one of the geese boldly called out in defense of its territory, the male swan began to attack the goose family. The goose valiantly tried to protect its family. Despite its smaller size, the goose repeatedly went on the offensive, charging the much larger swan. Unfortunately, its efforts were in vain. The swan could be seen killing the goslings. Even though the goose could not save its family, it continued to remain at the scene. Repeated calls of distress soon caused the adult goose to become the primary target of the swan. After several attempts to run the goose down, the swan finally drove the goose into the brush of the nearby shoreline. Although the scene was partially obscured by vegetation, I could see the swan repeatedly striking at the goose with its bill and beating it with its powerful wings. The swan emerged from the vegetation; the goose did not. The repeated calls of the remaining goose, having lost its mate, now began to draw the attention of the swan. After several brief skirmishes, the goose was able to slip away. I watched as it swam out of sight.





Its territory now secured, the male trumpeter swan returned to its mate and four cygnets. The two adult swans called out to one another and fluttered their wings in a ritual display of unity. Parental bonds were reaffirmed. The four seemingly oblivious down covered cygnets continued to eagerly chase water bugs and nibble at emerging vegetation. The late afternoon sun was warm. The breeze was gentle. Peace returned to the marsh.



Some Information on Bird Names

A contribution from Liz Stone based on information she obtained from her birding guide, Carlos Sanchez, on trips to Belize and Spain

Many of our North American Birds are named in honor of a person, or are adapted from the names of European birds. However, the Tupi-Guarani languages spoken by indigenous Brazilians have left a large imprint on ornithological names of today. Anhinga, jacana, aracari, ani, caracara, toucan, and tanager are all names that Brazilians adapted from the Tupi language. So, if you see a Scarlet Tanager in northern Wisconsin, that bird is named from a word derived from the Tupi language!

Spring Migrants – were they early?

By Sarah Besadny

In the March issue of BIRD SONGS I analyzed several years of eBird data to see when some of the warblers start to appear in the northwoods. I was thinking that maybe we'd witness an early migration because the weather was warm in March and ice out was early this year. Well, ice out was early but that seemed to be the only hint of a possible early spring. In fact, it seemed exceptionally cool for spring. Below I copied the arrival times of some Spring migrants from data over the last few years and added the dates when the particular species arrived in Vilas and Oneida counties. You will note that some birds were early but others were a bit later so I guess all in all this was a pretty typical spring in terms of timing of migrants. Note, "n.c." stands for "northern county" and includes counties between Bayfield and Florence.

Yellow-rumped Warbler –April 17 Vilas | April 6 2021 Oneida; April 7 2021 Vilas

Palm Warbler – April 15 – Forest | April 29 2021 Vilas; May 1 2021 Oneida

Pine Warbler –May 11 Vilas | April 24 2021 Oneida; April 27 2021 Vilas

Ruby-throated Hummingbird – May 3 Iron | May 1 2021 Oneida; May 2 2021 Vilas

Cape May Warbler – May 4 Vilas | May 7 2021 Vilas; May 11 Oneida

Black-and-White Warbler – May 4 Vilas | May 2 2021 Vilas; May 5 2021 Oneida

Black-throated Green Warbler – May 6 Vilas | May 2 2021 Oneida; May 5 2021 Vilas

Blackburnian Warbler – May 6 Vilas | May 9 2021 Vilas; May 12 2021 Oneida

Ovenbird – May 7 Vilas | May 5 2021 Oneida; May 8 2021 Vilas

Yellow Warbler – May 7 (n.c.) | May 9 2021 Vilas and Oneida

Nashville Warbler – May 9 (n.c.) | May 1 2021 Oneida; May 7 2021 Vilas

American Redstart – May 9 (n.c.) | May 13 2021 Oneida; May 15 2021 Vilas

Northern Parula -- May 9 Forest | May 2 2021 Oneida; May 7 2021 Vilas

Magnolia Warbler – May 10 Vilas | May 13 2021 Oneida; May 15 2021 Vilas

Common Yellowthroat – May 11 Vilas | May 7 2021 Oneida; May 13 2021 Vilas

Black-throated Blue Warbler – May 11 Vilas | May 16 2021 Vilas; May 19 2021 Oneida

Chestnut-sided Warbler – May 12 Vilas / May 9 2021 Oneida; May 10 2021 Vilas

Golden-winged Warbler – May 14 Oneida / May 9 2021 Vilas and Oneida

Mourning Warbler – May 16 (n.c.) / May 14 2021 Oneida; May 16 2021 Vilas

Life List Quarterly: First Quarter 2021

By Sarah Besadny

As Donna noted in her article about the Thursday bird outings resuming this year, the Club's Life List resumes as well. The Bird Club has records going back to 2004, for most of those years, handled by Guy David. The records are a wealth of information including species seen each week, where the outing was, how many people joined the outing, the first date in the year or since 2004 that a species was seen, etc., etc. In addition to interesting information for our Club, each week someone keeps a checklist and submits it to eBird, an application from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology supporting a world-wide database of bird sightings. These weekly eBird checklists provide valuable information for researchers who use the eBird data. So many thanks to those who are eBirding.

There have been 9 outings so far this year and the species count is currently at 87. The Club's species list since 2004 stands at 271 plus two hybrids. 2019 was the first year since 2004 that the Club did not add at least one new species to the Life List. Obviously, none were added in 2020 either due to the fact that there were no outings due to the pandemic. Will the Club add a new species to the Life List this year? Stay tuned to future Life List Quarterly columns to find out!

Here is the Club's current species list for the year including the first date the species was reported.

Canada Goose	4/29/21
Trumpeter Swan	4/29/21
Wood Duck	5/6/21
Blue-winged Teal	4/29/21
Mallard	4/29/21
Ring-necked Duck	4/29/21
Lesser Scaup	4/29/21
Bufflehead	5/20/21
Hooded Merganser	5/6/21
Ruffed Grouse	5/6/21
Pied-billed Grebe	5/6/21

Mourning Dove	5/6/21
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	6/17/21
American Coot	4/29/21
Sandhill Crane	4/29/21
Killdeer	5/6/21
Wilson's Snipe	4/29/21
Greater Yellowlegs	4/29/21
Ring-billed Gull	5/20/21
Common Tern	5/20/21
Forster's Tern	5/20/21
Common Loon	4/29/21
American Bittern	4/29/21
Great Blue Heron	5/20/21
Turkey Vulture	4/29/21
Osprey	5/6/21
Northern Harrier	4/29/21
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5/6/21
Bald Eagle	4/29/21
Red-tailed Hawk	6/10/21
Belted Kingfisher	4/29/21
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	5/6/21
Hairy Woodpecker	5/13/21
Pileated Woodpecker	5/27/21
Northern Flicker	4/29/21
Alder Flycatcher	6/3/21
Least Flycatcher	5/27/21
Great Crested Flycatcher	5/20/21
Eastern Kingbird	6/24/21
Red-eyed Vireo	5/27/21
Blue Jay	5/6/21
American Crow	5/20/21
Common Raven	4/29/21
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	5/20/21
Tree Swallow	5/6/21
Black-capped Chickadee	5/6/21
Red-breasted Nuthatch	5/6/21
White-breasted Nuthatch	5/6/21
Winter Wren	5/20/21
Sedge Wren	6/24/21
Marsh Wren	5/20/21
Veery	5/20/21
Hermit Thrush	5/27/21
American Robin	5/6/21
Gray Catbird	5/20/21

European Starling	5/20/21
Cedar Waxwing	6/17/21
Purple Finch	5/6/21
American Goldfinch	5/20/21
Chipping Sparrow	5/6/21
Clay-colored Sparrow	6/24/21
White-throated Sparrow	5/6/21
Song Sparrow	4/29/21
Lincoln's Sparrow	6/24/21
Swamp Sparrow	4/29/21
Eastern Towhee	6/3/21
Baltimore Oriole	5/20/21
Red-winged Blackbird	4/29/21
Common Grackle	5/6/21
Ovenbird	5/13/21
Black-and-white Warbler	5/13/21
Nashville Warbler	5/13/21
Common Yellowthroat	4/29/21
American Redstart	5/20/21
Northern Parula	6/17/21
Blackburnian Warbler	5/27/21
Yellow Warbler	5/20/21
Chestnut-sided Warbler	5/13/21
Black-throated Blue Warbler	5/27/21
Palm Warbler	5/20/21
Pine Warbler	5/6/21
Yellow-rumped Warbler	5/13/21
Black-throated Green Warbler	5/27/21
Scarlet Tanager	5/27/21
Northern Cardinal	5/20/21
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	5/13/21
Indigo Bunting	5/20/21

Photo Journal

All Photos by Mark Westphal



Cedar Waxwing

Common Yellowthroat, Male



Common Yellowthroat, Female

Wilson's Snipe



Osprey



Sandhill Crane with a colt
(aka baby)





Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Male



Scarlet Tanager, Male



Black-bellied Plover (left) and
Dunlin (all in breeding plumage)



Blue-winged Teal,
Male and Female



Chestnut-sided Warbler, Male



Eastern Towhee, Male