

# BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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December 2021; Volume 17,  
Issue 4

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## **Officers**

Mark Westphal, President  
Debby Wilson, Secretary  
Carne Andrews, Treasurer  
Sarah Besadny, Membership Director  
Amy Sheldon, Program Director

## **President's Message**

*by Mark Westphal*

As we say goodbye to December and welcome in a new year, it is a natural time for reflection. 2021 was a year that continued to be impacted by the effects of Covid-19. Friends, families, businesses, and schools all had to adjust to how we gathered and interacted. The North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Club also had to adjust. For a second year in a row, we had to cancel our in person monthly meetings. On the positive side, we were once again able to conduct our regular Thursday morning bird walks. Dedicated club members were able to visit our favorite birding spots and continue to record the number and species of birds seen in a variety of habitats.

Perhaps even more important, it gave the participants a chance to enjoy the company of friends, fresh air, and the fun of birding. For me, those Thursday morning outings were welcomed as a few hours of “normalcy”. Our second to last outing of the year was birding at the Discovery Center trails followed by a social hour and a tasty lunch in the newly remodeled lodge. This was the first time our members were able to gather indoors as a club in almost two years. There was a great turnout and there were smiles all around.

What will the next year bring? I doubt my crystal ball works any better than yours. For now, I choose to be optimistic. I will look forward to receiving an email from Donna Roche announcing the first spring outing. I am looking forward to improvements being made to the Discovery Center birding station. The shrubs planted this past fall will be eager to greet the sunlight of spring. The bare soil around the newly constructed water feature will be ready to be planted with more bird and pollinator friendly plants and shrubs. Our enthusiastic program coordinator, Amy Sheldon, has already lined up a great group of speakers in anticipation of us once again holding our regular monthly meetings. Will all our plans come to fruition? Time will tell. Regardless of what the future brings, our Club is poised to move forward if the opportunities are available.

Thanks to those who helped plan our outings and kept our communications flowing. Thanks to those who helped gather and maintain our birding records for the 2021 season. Thank you to my fellow board members who continue to keep our records, watch over our finances, publish this quarterly newsletter, and help plan our future programs. Most of all, thank you to our members for continuing to support our Club and share their love of birds. Our Club activities not only bring joy and knowledge to our members, but also help to maintain the invaluable connection between one another and the natural world.

Seasons Greetings and Happy New Year!

## **Species Profile: American Goldfinch (AMGO)**

*By Carne Andrews*

If you've lived in the northwoods year round and especially if you keep your feeders filled (and cleaned) during the colder months, you've observed feeder bird species fluctuate from year to year. This year the American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*), Latin for "sorrowful thistle eater", and sometimes called North America's "Wild Canary " (because it sings like one) is being reported as quite prevalent at feeders. This has without question been our yard observation this year in Mercer, WI. Some mornings several birds resort to feeding on the ground when all feeder perches are occupied. During the summer months, their diet consists of grass and weed seeds, birch catkins, and thistle seeds. However, in winter, they become heavy consumers of black oil sunflower and niger (thistle) seed at feeders. FUN FACT: AMGO's are strictly vegetarian by choice, however, may occasionally ingest an unfortunate insect!

The AMGO is common and widespread in open fields where weeds thrive and in open deciduous second growth woodlands. Movements vary from year to year with the food supply availability being the greatest influence. Some short-distance migration in small flocks may occur during autumn daytimes but are not dependent on insect availability. Their song when perched is a series of long fast rambling sweet twitters. A "per-chic-o-ree" or "chip-dip-potato-chip" during the undulating flight pattern is far more distinctive. FUN FACT: Look for them in mixed flocks with Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins, and Chickadees!

Of the four species of goldfinches in North America, the American is the largest yet still a small plump bird 5" in length with a 9" wingspan, and weighing about 1/2 ounce. AMGO's are distinctive with their black wings with bold wing bars, forked tail, triangular conical bill for crushing seed coatings (bill pinker during breeding), white-tipped secondary coverts, and the male with a glossy black mask and cap in breeding plumage. AMGO's molt twice a year. During the spring molt, both females and males change from drab olive brown non-breeding plumage of the fall molt to brighter yellow for the female and brilliant lemon yellow for the male to attract a mate during a long courtship. Both display a plain non-stripped breast, a white vent, and pink legs. FUN FACT: Always a welcomed sure sign of spring in March!



Breeding Male



Non-breeding Male

*Photos by Cornell Labs*

These finches are among our latest to breed. Breeding from late June to late August is thought to be because AMGO's wait for down-producing plants to go to seed providing fluffy soft nest linings and more food for nestlings. Most American Goldfinch breed in their first year. Typically, only one clutch is raised, however, a pair will re-nest if the first nest is predated. FUN FACT: Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism is rare due to late nesting and cowbird nestlings quickly die on a diet lacking insect protein.

Females make the final selection of the nest site 3-10 feet above the ground close to tree or shrub trunks. Nest cups 3" in diameter are neatly constructed of plant fibers, bark strips, spider webs, caterpillar silk, and lined with fluffy thistle, cattail or dandelion down. The female continually incubates 4-6 unmarked light blue eggs for 12-14 days. The male forages and feeds his mate regurgitated seeds every 1-2 hours. Like all passerines, chicks are altricial; they hatch naked, with reddish bodies, pale gray down, and closed eyes for 3 days. Both parents remove the fecal sacs; then excrement accumulates in and around the rim of the nest (see the impressive picture in the Atlas of Breeding Birds in Wisconsin, page 500). Both parents continually feed the quickly developing nestlings for about 10 days until they begin to fledge, and then for up to for 30 days outside the nest. FUN FACT: Nests are so tightly woven they can hold water making it possible for nestlings to drown in a rainstorm if parents don't cover the nest.

FINAL NOTE: Indications reported in the Atlas of Breeding Birds in WI (2006) are for AMGO's to continue to be commonly and evenly distributed breeders in WI with populations remaining steady. However, an interesting question is raised whether gradual climate warming might cause earlier plant flowering leading to earlier nesting thus increased parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. Look for answers to these questions in the 2nd edition of this Atlas to be published in 2022.

Resources:

Crossley, Richard. The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds. Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey, 2011.

Haney, Alan. Jewels of Nature: Delightful Birds I Have Known. R. Schneider Publishers, Stevens Point, WI, 2014.

Harrison, Hal H. A Field Guide to Bird's Nests of 285 species found breeding in the United States east of the Mississippi River. Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1975.

Stensaas, Sparky. Winter Finches and Friends of North America: a naturalist's handbook. Stone Ridge Press, Duluth, MN., 2015.

Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Inc. Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Wisconsin. Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, Inc., Waukesha, WI, 2006.

## **Crex Meadows' Travels**

*Article and Photos by Mark Westphal*

Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area is a 30,000-acre property located just outside of Grantsburg, Wisconsin in western Burnett County. Intensively managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Wildlife Management, Crex Meadows contains thousands of acres of brush prairie and restored wetlands. Originally part of the Wisconsin Pine Barrens, Crex is now this state's largest remaining portion of this globally endangered ecosystem. Crex is home to over 280 species of birds.

My wife, Tina, and I have been visiting Crex Meadows for over 20 years. Many of our visits have been in early April just as the ice begins to retreat. With its abundance of ponds and flowages, Crex is a great place to watch returning waterfowl with their brilliant spring plumage. Dozens of Trumpeter Swans are easily viewed along with returning Sandhill Cranes. If you are lucky, you may even catch a glimpse of a Sharp-tailed Grouse doing its ritual mating dance. As spring progresses, many of the ducks will head north or find cover to nest and the passerines will begin to arrive. I must admit that Tina and I have not spent much time at Crex during late spring or summer. While bird and plant life flourish during the summer season, so do the bugs. We prefer to plan our visits for cooler and relatively bug free times.



Our other favorite time to visit Crex is during the fall migration. Peak numbers of migrating Sandhill Cranes are found late October through early November. We try to plan our fall visits for about mid-October. While the migrating crane population may not be at its peak, there are plenty of cranes to view and temperatures are still reasonably comfortable for holding cameras and binoculars. Approximately 15 to 20 percent of the world-wide population of Greater Sandhill Cranes may be present at Crex and the surrounding area during late October. That can be anywhere

between 15,000 and 20,000 birds. When the marshes freeze over at Crex, the Sandhill Cranes travel down through Illinois and Indiana to refuel before heading to their wintering grounds along the gulf coasts of Mississippi, Alabama, and the Florida panhandle.

During the day, the migrating population of Sandhill Cranes at Crex forage for food in nearby farm fields. As the sun begins to set, cranes stream back to the refuge at Crex to roost for the night. The sight and sound of hundreds or even thousands of cranes flying over-head as the sun sets is spectacular. During peak viewing times, Main Dike Road, which forms the southern boundary of the refuge is often lined with vehicles. Especially on weekends, dozens of people with binoculars, scopes, and cameras, all at the ready, come to take in the amazing sight. Some of the visitors are new to Crex while others, like Tina and I, have been there many times through the years. Once the sun is down, we head back to Grantsburg for our evening meal. The next morning, we are up early enough to see stars so that we can be back at the marsh before sunrise. As the sun breaks over the horizon, the cranes that have been roosting all night gradually grow restless. As the morning light grows, soon the cranes stretch their wings and head back to the farm fields to feed.



Crex Meadows has approximately 7,000 acres of prairie that has been restored by clearing and prescribed burns and 30 flowages flooding approximately 8000 acres. A 24-mile self-guided tour provides ample opportunities for great wildlife viewing right from your vehicle. The visitor's center is a great place to visit before you begin your tour at Crex. There you can view wildlife displays, watch an introductory video, or get information on the latest bird and wildlife sightings.

Although Crex Meadows is only about a 2 ½ hour drive west of Minocqua, a day trip doesn't allow adequate time to fully appreciate the sites of Crex. Tina and I often stay at least two nights at the Grantsburg Town Campground. A small motel is also available.

If you enjoy birding, especially the sites and sounds of Sandhill Cranes, I encourage you to check out Crex Meadows. You can learn more about Crex Meadows at [Crexmeadows.org](http://Crexmeadows.org).



## **The (Cancelled) 2021 Minocqua Christmas Bird Count**

*By Sarah Besadny*

For the first time since the Discovery Center Bird Club has organized the Minocqua Christmas Bird Count (CBC), we needed to cancel our plans for December 16, 2021. Fourteen people had volunteered to head out on December 16th to cover a 15 mile diameter zone with the center spot at the



intersection of Hwys 51 and 70. In addition, 8 people had volunteered to count birds at their homes that are located within the Count Circle.

We all heard about the looming storm but you know how tough it is to accurately forecast weather, especially days in advance. Even the morning of December 15<sup>th</sup> I read a weather forecast calling for a windy night but by later in the afternoon on the 15<sup>th</sup> the word “unprecedented” was starting to work its way into the forecast. The only logical (and safe) thing we could do was to cancel the CBC for the following day. (In hindsight, Donna and I will ensure we have a back-up date for next year’s CBC but since we didn’t have one planned already for this year it wasn’t feasible to figure out another date that would work for everyone.)

The weather forecasters unfortunately got the prediction correct. It was a horrendous storm impacting people in states from Colorado to Michigan. The Northwoods didn’t escape the brunt of the winds and by early morning on December 16<sup>th</sup> over 50,000 customers were without power in the northern part of Wisconsin. Pictures don’t really capture the destruction from the winds, but I took this picture at a favorite little pond near where I live. It seemed that with almost every tree that went down, at least one more came down with it.



Well, we know that birders are an intrepid group, and even though the Minocqua CBC was cancelled, several people who volunteered to participate live within the Count Circle and they walked their neighborhoods and recorded their bird sightings that will be submitted to Audubon, the sponsor of the CBC. In addition, the 8 people who had volunteered to count birds at their feeders also submitted data for inclusion in the Minocqua results. As a note, I can't tell you enough how thankful I am that people didn't risk their safety in traveling over to the Count area to record birds for the CBC. Audubon has 121 years of CBC data and therefore missing full data from one Count Circle will not jeopardize their data quality or trends.

Here are the species and numbers of birds we will be submitting to Audubon for the 2021 Minocqua CBC (with notes to Audubon about incomplete data).

<b>Species</b>	<b>Total # Reported</b>
Pileated Woodpecker	4
Hairy Woodpecker	10
Downy Woodpecker	20
Red-bellied Woodpecker	10
Bald Eagle	6
White-breasted Nuthatch	32
Red-breasted Nuthatch	23
Black-capped Chickadee	94
Blue Jay	41
Pine Siskin	17
American Goldfinch	80
Common Raven	9
American Crow	4
Rock Pigeon	4
Evening Grosbeak	5
Mourning Dove	5
Ruffed Grouse	1
Common Redpoll	1
Northern Cardinal	2
European Starling	13
Black-bird sp.	2

Total # of Species = 21

Total # of Birds = 383

## Life List Quarterly – Fourth Quarter 2021

*By Sarah Besadny*

Well, we've wrapped up another year of birding stats for the Discovery Center Bird Club. Another year in which we didn't add a new species to our Club's Life List, but a great year of birding regardless. **We ended the year with 121 species** and 11 of those were added within the last 30 days of the "bird walk" season. Donna does a great job of getting the Club out to the right places (i.e., habitats) at the right time of year. In four of the last 5 outings at least one new species was spotted to add to our annual list. On September 30<sup>th</sup> the Club went to the Willow Flowage and picked up 4 new species for our annual list: Wild Turkey, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Pipit and Rusty Blackbird. The next week the Club made it's annual trip down to Wausau for the Birds In Art exhibit as well as some birding at Bluegill Bay Park where the first Red-bellied Woodpecker was spotted this year on a Club outing. Then on October 21<sup>st</sup> the Club birded the trails at the North Lakeland Discovery Center and picked up Dark-eyed Junco. Finally, a whopping 5 species were added at our last outing of the year! We went to Powell Marsh on a rather cold and gray day but there were no complaints as we spotted a Rough-legged Hawk hawking for prey out over the prairie, a Northern Shrike sitting at the top of a large bush allowing for great looks at this handsome bird, some large flocks of Common Redpolls, several Snow Buntings flitting about the dike edge and also some American Tree Sparrows on the path seemingly unconcerned about our approaching group. **On behalf of the entire Bird Club I want to thank Donna Roche for all that she does to organize our weekly outings.** The opportunity to get out birding, learn from each other, laugh with each other, go to places we may not have been before, go to places at the right time of the season for optimal bird watching – it's the heart and soul of this Bird Club so many thanks to Donna for her leadership and many thanks to all of you who participate.

I thought it would be fun to see if we could guess what species were spotted the most often during our outings. Our outings started April 29 and wrapped up October 28<sup>th</sup>. We birded in Vilas, Oneida and Iron counties. We traveled to Tomahawk, Wausau, the Ashland area and several other spots along the Lake Superior shoreline. Given those clues to time of year and areas covered, what species would you guess were spotted on at least half of the 28 outings this season? Maybe your first guess was Black-capped

Chickadee? If so, you were correct! Black-capped Chickadees were spotted on 23 of the 28 outings. A very close second was Blue Jay, spotted on 22 of the outings. The American Crow came in third with sightings on 19 outings, then American Robin at 18, Bald Eagle and Song Sparrow on 17 outings and finally American Goldfinch on 16 outings.

Here are the species for the Club's 2021 Annual List:

SPECIES	DATE FIRST SPOTTED
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
Common Merganser	9/2/21
Ruffed Grouse	5/6/21
Wild Turkey	9/30/21
Pied-billed Grebe	5/6/21
Rock Pigeon	7/8/21
Mourning Dove	5/6/21
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	6/17/21
American Coot	4/29/21
Sandhill Crane	4/29/21
Semipalmated Plover	8/12/21
Killdeer	5/6/21
Semipalmated Sandpiper	8/12/21
Wilson's Snipe	4/29/21
Solitary Sandpiper	8/19/21
Greater Yellowlegs	4/29/21
Lesser Yellowlegs	8/12/21
Ring-billed Gull	5/20/21
Herring Gull	8/12/21
Common Tern	5/20/21

Forster's Tern	5/20/21
Common Loon	4/29/21
Double-crested Cormorant	8/12/21
American Bittern	4/29/21
Great Blue Heron	5/20/21
Green Heron	8/12/21
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
Rough-legged Hawk	10/28/21
Belted Kingfisher	4/29/21
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	5/6/21
Red-bellied Woodpecker	10/7/21
Downy Woodpecker	7/15/21
Hairy Woodpecker	5/13/21
Pileated Woodpecker	5/27/21
Northern Flicker	4/29/21
Merlin	9/23/21
Eastern Wood-Pewee	7/29/21
Alder Flycatcher	6/3/21
Least Flycatcher	5/27/21
Eastern Phoebe	7/8/21
Great Crested Flycatcher	5/20/21
Eastern Kingbird	6/24/21
Northern Shrike	10/28/21
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
Bank Swallow	7/8/21
Barn Swallow	7/8/21
Cliff Swallow	7/8/21
Black-capped Chickadee	5/6/21

Red-breasted Nuthatch	5/6/21
White-breasted Nuthatch	5/6/21
House Wren	7/8/21
Winter Wren	5/20/21
Sedge Wren	6/24/21
Marsh Wren	5/20/21
Golden-crowned Kinglet	9/30/21
Eastern Bluebird	7/15/21
Veery	5/20/21
Hermit Thrush	5/27/21
American Robin	5/6/21
Gray Catbird	5/20/21
Brown Thrasher	7/8/21
European Starling	5/20/21
American Pipit	9/30/21
Cedar Waxwing	6/17/21
Purple Finch	5/6/21
Common Redpoll	10/28/21
American Goldfinch	5/20/21
Snow Bunting	10/28/21
Chipping Sparrow	5/6/21
Clay-colored Sparrow	6/24/21
American Tree Sparrow	10/28/21
Dark-eyed Junco	10/21/21
White-throated Sparrow	5/6/21
Vesper Sparrow	7/8/21
Savannah Sparrow	7/8/21
Song Sparrow	4/29/21
Lincoln's Sparrow	6/24/21
Swamp Sparrow	4/29/21
Eastern Towhee	6/3/21
Bobolink	7/8/21
Baltimore Oriole	5/20/21
Red-winged Blackbird	4/29/21
Rusty Blackbird	9/30/21
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
Dickcissel	7/8/21

**Photo Journal**  
*Photos by Mark Westphal*



A Red-tailed Hawk enjoys a successful hunt



A homegrown sunflower provides a tasty snack for a Blue Jay