

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

by Mark Westphal

As you read this message, the leaves of summer will have begun to shed their cloak of green, revealing multi-hues of reds, oranges, yellows, and browns. October, while gifting us with a few warmer days, signals a transition to a quieter time of year. Most of our birds, along with many of our bird club members, will have headed south. While bird sightings may be less numerous, our club will remain active through the month of October. Our October monthly meeting will be held on Monday, October 3rd at the Boulder Junction Community building. Long time club member and skilled birder, Carne Andrews will present a program entitled "Birds and Other

Creatures of the Galapagos Islands". Thursday morning outings will continue throughout the month, including a trip to the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum to enjoy their annual "Birds in Art" exhibit.

Although the bird counts of October may not rival the numbers of spring and summer, October outings still offer the opportunity to enjoy the company of other club members and perhaps catch a glimpse of some less common, late season migrants. You will never know what surprises you may find along the edges of a wetland, a waterway, or forest trail. Personal trips to notable birding destinations such as Hawk Ridge, Crex Meadows, or Horicon Marsh are also great ways to enjoy some late season birding.

While there is nothing currently scheduled for the month of November, December offers an opportunity for club members to reconnect once again by participating in the annual Christmas Bird Count. You can mark your calendars now! The Minocqua Christmas Bird Count, organized by Donna Roche and Sarah Besadny, is scheduled for Thursday, December 15th. The Manitowish Waters Christmas Bird Count, coordinated by John Bates, is set for Saturday, December 17th. You can participate in the Christmas Bird Counts by recording observations you make by traveling specific routes that are within a 7.5-mile radius of the specified count area or in your own backyard feeder if it falls within that same radius. Be sure to watch for further details as the Christmas Bird Counts draw near. Feel free to contact any of the organizers for more information.

Isn't it great that birding is a year long activity? We can enjoy bird watching from our cozy homes no matter what the temperature or weather may be outside. For those who choose to venture outside in a more proactive pursuit of birds, you only need don an extra layer or two (maybe three) of clothes to keep you toasty warm as you travel along a plowed road or snow-covered trail. Whether you are taking in the sunshine of Arizona, Texas, or Florida or remain in our beautiful north woods for the winter, enjoy the birds that brighten your day and keep sharing your enthusiasm.

Species Profile: Blue Jay (Cyanocitta cristata)

By Judy Cassady, Photos from the Internet



The Blue Jay, measuring 11 to 12 inches in length with a wingspan of 16 inches and weight of 3 oz. is common and widespread, traveling through wooded areas in flocks or pairs. A variety of calls may be heard as this beautiful bird glides into your yard including "Jay!, Jay!" as he announces his arrival and establishes who is now "in charge". His "b-link, b-link" or "ti-wee,ti-wee" has been interpreted as his car alarm call. You might hear "thief! thief" as he joins his species "cousins", the crows, to mob a sleepy owl. Check the sky if you think you heard a red-tailed hawk. (Che-e-e-r-r-r) Or was it a talented Blue Jay?

His plumage -- bright blue wings and tail with white wing patches, blue crest, white belly and black "necklace" make him easy to spot as he cruises in, gracefully landing on the ground and the bird feeders. The little birds, black-capped chickadees and nuthatches, would scatter as the Blue Jays announced their arrival. Once the little birds determined that the rude visitors weren't hawks, they returned to the suet and the sunflower seeds. Jon puts corn in a square open feeder that also hangs from the 15 ft. high bird feeder cable. Surprisingly the hairy and downy woodpeckers enjoy the corn. They wait until the Jays have departed.

Jon and I have been hiking segments of the Ice Age Trail. In the deepest, shady parts of the forest, few if any birds are seen or heard. As soon as we approach "the edge" near farmland or roads, the familiar "Jay! Jay!" will be heard alerting woodland wildlife of intruders.

Blue Jays keep their nesting site secret and "talk" quietly to their mate and hatchlings. They are omnivores, eating anything from insects, to fruits, nuts and seeds, carrion, as well as, disappointingly, the eggs and hatchlings of other birds. However, assigning a human conscience to our wild birds is not within our power or interest here. Suffice it to say that as with all wildlife, surviving and thriving is the basis for their natural behavior.

Blue Jays prefer "hard mast" such as acorns, hazelnuts and even hickory nuts. Like squirrels, Blue Jays often bury acorns and other nuts. The stately oak in your yard, or in a field, disconnected from forest oaks, may have been "planted" by a Blue Jay.



Migration? According to naturalist and author, John Bates, about 20% of "our" Blue Jays head south, scattering through much of the southern and eastern states, while some choose to stay in our upper Northwoods.

Whatever the season, we're always happy to see that bright flash of blue in our yard with the loud announcement of "Jay! Jay!".

References:

- The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America by David Allen Sibley 2003
- Kitchen Table Bird Book by John Ham, illustrations by David Mohrhard
- Jewels of Nature by Alan Haney 2014
- Birds of Wisconsin Field Guide by Stan Tekiela 2004
- Graced by the Seasons, Fall and Winter in the Northwoods by John Bates 2008

Bluebirds At My Window: Epilogue

Article and Photo by Mark Westphal

This is a follow-up to my article “Bluebirds At My Window” written for the June edition of “Bird Songs”. My story concluded with two bluebird parents attending to four newly hatched chicks. About a week after submitting the article, I realized that the female bluebird was no longer coming to the nest box. Some unknown fate had befallen her. The male was on his own. Amazingly, the male bluebird was able to bring enough food to the nest box to allow all four chicks to survive. One day there was no activity at the nest. I checked the box, not knowing for certain what I would find. Fortunately, when I opened the box, I found it was empty. The young bluebirds had fledged. I did not see the young bluebirds for the remainder of the summer.



To my surprise, when September rolled around, I began to see four immature bluebirds hanging around my field. Their mottled feathers indicated their youth. They frequently perched on the nesting box that had fledged the four chicks earlier this summer. Were they the same bluebirds? They certainly acted like they were familiar with the neighborhood. The photo in this article is one of those four bluebirds.

The bluebirds have now headed south for the winter. Who will return next spring to continue the story?

Discovery Center Bird Club Thursday Outings - Summer & Early Fall 2022

Recap of Outings with Some Photos of the Birders!

By Donna Roche

From the earlier Bird Song Spring Review of outings, Bird Club Thursday outings continued during the summer of 2022 without a hitch! Every week there was an outing and every week there were birders who participated. Every week the announcement that I wrote was faithfully sent out to the membership by John Randolph. Thank you so much, John, for keeping us connected! Another connection thank you goes to Sarah B. who collects the eBird information from our outings and keeps the records for our club's annual and life species lists!

My request for members to suggest and to lead outings was accepted by two. Thank you so much to Sarah B. and Carne A. for creating and leading outings!

And as for our great members, whether or not I was there, participants took it upon themselves to lead, to get around, keep species lists, and sometimes take photos! For each and every outing there were volunteers who kept the ebird species lists, brought their scopes and cameras, reminded me to take a group photo, helped carry scopes, helped with the route and participated actively in BIRDING. All of you are appreciated and here you are:



*Recap of **June 30** outing at the **Minocqua Winter Park**: It was a dark and stormy morning and although I knew that there wouldn't be a crowd of birders this day, 6 DC Birders braved the heavy sprinkles to walk the Winter Park trails for about an hour and a half. There was a half-hearted effort on the bird species part to come out and join us so we do have a list of **12 species** to show for our efforts. The trails are really nice and interesting and it is great to see all that the park does to make the trails interesting to a variety of summer visitors in addition to their main winter season folks. One of those is a **BIRDING TRAIL**. Barb and Dennis Blow have developed a series of 'stations' along trails where folks are encouraged to stop, listen and look for birds, and document their findings. The two stations we visited are nicely done and equipped. They have asked for our club's input and help. Now with having visited, perhaps we can assist!*



*Recap of the **July 7th** bike and hike written by **Carne Andrews**: Nine bikers left the NLDC to bird by ear along a 3.5 mile stretch of the bike trail to Rivers*

*Edge Lodge and Outfitters. There we were joined by 9 hikers, including 4 guests, to walk the historical Camp Mercer Trail. Unfortunately, several in the group were bothered by mosquitoes, however, it was decided to stay together as a group to the end of the trail and returned on the bike trail back to Rivers Edge. Thanks to you for “sticking it out”! For our efforts, we were rewarded with 23 species including a Winter Wren and very good looks at a Broad-winged Hawk (perhaps a pair) that made quite a ruckus as we located the their nest. Back at Rivers Edge, we relaxed on the deck and enjoyed a cool beverage and snacks before the hikers returned home. Bikers returned to the NLDC via the Manitowish Waters Town Loop with an unsuccessful short ride to the end of Benson Road in search of Trumpeter Swans, recording a **species total of 25** for both rides. Without question the predominant song was the Red-eyed Vireo. Everyone is encouraged to return to the Camp Mercer site after mosquito season to leisurely learn more about this historical site from the impressive signage and the importance of the Civil Conservation Corps to American families during the Great Depression and our enjoyment of the Northwoods as we know it today.*



*Recap of the **July 14, Deerview Road:** I am so grateful for the help I have received this year with the Thursday outings... keep it up! I think that we all benefit from a different point of view with the selection, organization and leadership of more than one person. I know that everyone enjoys Sarah Besadny outings. This day she led us along Deerview Road, from the farmstead with barns, along the tree and shrub lined road all the way through the woods to the end of the road. It was a perfect up-north cool morning with*

*full sunshine to warm the day and our spirits. Sarah had scouted out the area beforehand, so we weren't too disappointed not to find bobolink and Dickcissel. However, we did get to find a number of Clay-colored and Vesper Sparrows. The Barn and Cliff Swallows worked the skies for insects and seemed able to get into openings in the metal barns to their nests! You will note the large number of crows which we were surprised to see flying relatively low in straight lines, along the far tree line on the east side of the farmed fields. I guess they were just on the move somewhere else! The highlight views for the morning were good looks at a Brown Thrasher with food in its mouth and an Indigo Bunting which posed on the top of a tall dead tree for all-the-world to see and hear! We returned to our cars and drove a short distance to look for another species of swallow. Within a fenced area near the airport, there are large dirt and debris piles where a group of Bank Swallows have taken residence. So, we ended our birding day with a total of 3 species of swallows and **32 species**.*

A big thank you to Sarah B for this outing!



*Recap of the **July 21, Bearskin Trail Nokomis Lake**: We lucked out with the only day this week that wasn't forecasted with threatening storms and it was great! Nine birders enjoyed this annual hike. It always starts out with some traffic noise from the busy highway, but by the time we came to the first intersection, we were hearing and finding birds... redstarts and buntings. We thought them mostly to be fledglings until a fully colored Indigo Bunting poised for views. There were no red-heads this year (or last), but a hairy, downy and flicker in the woodpecker category were in the area! Overlooking*

*the narrow trail over the open waters, we found several duck species with young and several kingfishers. It wasn't until we got to, what was determined as, our turn-around point that the raptors started to come out. We were also kept busy with good views of kingbirds and warblers which brought our total to **29 species**. So we didn't get back too early for the 11 a.m. opening of the Windmill Ice Cream Shoppe. Everyone had a different flavor and we recommend them ALL!*



*Recap of the **July 28, Day Lake Paddle and hikes**: The morning was overcast and quite cool, but there was only enthusiasm and eagerness to get out on the water among the group of 12 kayakers! We traveled the shoreline all around the two lobes of Day Lake to search of birds. The breeze when it came up would not have been enough to block the sounds of birds, but we heard only a few. The birds were very quiet. We did find a family of mallards to expand our list from just 'one of this and one of that'. An unlisted 'one of this' was a solitary loon egg which we found in the loon nest on a floating platform. We don't know the circumstances of why there is a heavy egg in the nest at this time of year.... it seemed real?? A loon was seen on the water and later flying. Anyway, we completed our water journey and were glad that we could tally 1 species per paddler! Even though it takes some special effort to do this kind of outing, the group really supports and enjoys our annual bird outing paddles! **14 species** were found by the paddlers. We did also have walkers on this*

outing day. Judy C. walked the campsite trail and along the entrance roads. Ed M. stopped by the landing for a greeting and hopes to have a watercraft for another time. Mary J. reported 13 species for her walk at Fallison Lake. Thanks to Linda D. who waited at the Day Lake Landing Road to make sure folks found their way since the road sign was recently missing!



Recap of the August 4th outing to Thunder Lake SWA and Rice Lake SNA: Our outing started with views of a hazy rainbow that was seen in the fog bank over the marshland just beyond the trailhead parking area. Apparently, the brilliant sunshine at the 7:30 a.m. angle on this day caused this beautiful phenomenon! Soon, the rainbow faded away, the fog 'burned off', but the beauty of day and the area continued to impress us. We walked the nature trail and found a few birds, but it was pretty quiet. We 'scared up' a few ducks, heard cranes and were able to ID a few fledgling birds. After getting back to parking area, we drove the gravel road with stops to check out birds. There were waxwings and kingbirds in the large trees and small birds flitting around the shrubs and water filled culverts. At one of these stops, we heard a different call and saw movement in the water hyacinths. Someone suggested it was a rail and Merlin showed Virginia Rail. Sure enough, that's what we found. Thanks to sharp eyes and Dick T. with his camera, we enjoyed then and have photos of this day's highlight occurrence! We continued to road's end at Rice Lake. Mergansers were spotted on the lake, wrens in the field and fledgling Yellow Warblers in the shrubs. Later at Thunder Lake's edge, we found loon, eagle and gulls. We spent almost a full morning here and it was well worth the effort! We found **31 species**.



*Recap of the **August 11th outing at Presque Isle Ponds**: The question has lingered this summer about having an outing here because of the low water levels caused by damage and partial repair of the dam. Perhaps other days might not have been good, but August 11th was pretty terrific! Eighteen DC birders proved that with **31 species**. We enjoyed a sunny day with temperature in the 70's and calm winds. The wind picked up later and maybe brought out the 2 broad-wings and a vulture, but earlier, the stars of our birding show were the small birds especially warblers. There were recently fledged birds along with the brilliantly colored adults to spy and watch as they foraged for food in the trees and shrubs. We did not find our usual loon family here, but we did hear loons and saw geese, ducks and herons out in the water.*



*Recap of the **August 18th outing in Ashland**: It's always a good idea to pack clothing for different weather conditions when birding in Ashland. That proved true on this day. However, our Bird Club group first enjoyed great blue skies and sunshine for the full morning of birding with Tim Oksiuta. What a generous birder he is to share his knowledge of Prentice Park and walk us around to find many birds! I extended our thanks again to him in an email and he replied that we should contact him mid-winter if interested in Snowy Owl locations and he suggests we come to Ashland for next outing late April/partial ice-out for best spring species! If you're interested before I get back, Tim's email is(timocky@hotmail.com). Back to recap... we found about **46 species at Prentice** including Green Heron in flight, Virginia Rails, a sleeping female Canvasback, a 'kettle' of Broad-wings and numerous warblers and small birds! John R. was the only one to spot a brief flight of a Least Bittern....good for him!!, but too bad no confirmation by another birder. While we had lunch at a smaller pavilion, we saw storm clouds and heard thunder. So we quickly moved on to Maslowski beach for a brief scan of water and beach before the rains came. We took shelter at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center for the duration of the half-hour storm. Several of us continued to the power plant and were very pleased to observe one of the Peregrines perched along one of the stacks! One last stop at Bayview Park for a quick look from the pier showed that the Common Terns were done nesting and not to be seen. It was another great birding visit to Ashland and no one got soaked!!*



*Recap of the **August 25th outing, evening in Minocqua**: Perhaps it was the anticipation of some great birding that brought out 16 members and 2 guests to the downtown park or maybe it was the thought of a social gathering with pizza. Regardless, that was the turnout to start our outing. Big thanks to Linda Dunn who suggested and brought the good pizza from Alexander's so that the group could enjoy 'pizza in the park'!! We were quite the group traipsing over the Bearskin trestle and stopping to view the family of 4 loons, gulls and a few ducks. We also found some chickadees and a yellow-rump before heading out along downtown streets and neighborhoods on both sides of Hwy 51. We took advantage of the pedestrian crosswalks and had traffic stopped two times. We found several clusters of sparrows that were hard to ID since they were first-year birds. It was exciting to find our first-of-the-year Brown Thrasher on a walk in Minocqua. I didn't get to see the Green Heron, but others did when it flew right over me! A few folks left the group along the walk. However, I think the ending group of about 10 is more than a historic total turnout is. Perhaps it was too late for Chimney Swifts and too early for Common Nighthawks because we didn't see them. We had a very good total of **24 species!***



*Recap of the **September 1, 2022 outing, Rainbow Flowage**: How will I ever live down confusing the start time and arriving a half hour late? All I can say is that the group started birding and counting species! I'm proud of you guys!! The water level on the Wisconsin River and on the Flowage in this area is way down. However, it did not produce shorebirds on our list. Bird species of many groups were low, but we found 4 species of woodpeckers and 3 raptors. We had confirmations on 3 species of warblers, but couldn't count the blackpoll with only one spotter....darn. This is the result of having a large group and moving along by auto... we aren't all birding together. We could never walk the 8 miles we covered! It was a beautiful day and a great way to enjoy the first day of September with a total of **24 species!***



*Recap of the **September 8, 2022 outing, Private Nature Education Center in Fifiield, WI:** Eleven DC Bird Club members took advantage and enjoyed a pretty rare opportunity last Thursday to bird with Tom Nicholls at his and his wife, Mary Lou's property in Fifiield. Tom kept us busy watching mist nets, going through the banding process in his lab and birding in the various habitat niches on the property. We did take a break to sit and enjoy the muffins and coffee that Mary Lou served us while Tom, assistant Sue and Mary Lou relayed birding information, history and stories to us. Then we toured their newest renovation in the large, 1920's hay barn. During COVID they had cleared out the barn and turned it into classroom, bird feeder and nest box exhibit and old farm tool displays. It was a great, full morning and we left with hopes of coming back again! We found **14 species**.*



*Recap of the **September 15, 2022 outing, Beaver Creek Hemlocks:** As the saying goes, it's not what you know... it's WHO you know! Thanks to our fellow bird club member and professional at the Northwoods Land Trust, Frank S., we got to tour the BCH Conservation Area with his guidance, knowledge of the site and his great birding skills. The site is a treasure for sure with interesting topography... the glaciers were here! The trees are pretty spectacular with some old growth specimens. Our group of 14 took a walk along most of the well-marked trail and enjoyed the experience. The wind was persistent, so we didn't see many birds, but heard a number of species mainly higher up in the tall trees. We found a total of **15 species**.*



*Recap of the **September 22, 2022** outing at Powell Marsh Vista: We do get a crowd of birders when we go to Powell Marsh Vista. This day we were 19 folks on a quite cool, early fall morning. We set the tone of the outing by gathering together for a 'goofy photo' where birders are looking in different directions.... I am also enclosing a couple of shots that Meg took to give you an idea of what a beautiful 'vista' we enjoyed at the Vista Pool. From the parking area we watched a number of Blue Jay flying around. As we started our walk on the dike, there were a number of species in the water and on the east shore - ducks, grebes, swans and an eagle. Along the pathway we found several sparrows, a flicker, a wren and a sora! It was a nice exercise in identification of the sparrows. As we got to the intersection of dikes, we found a couple of pipits which were fun to see. Here we also got relatively close to a family of 4 cranes and then several others. We were kept busy and happy with harriers and a bittern. It was a great day of camaraderie for our club and enjoyment of a birding day. Ed M. liked it so much that he stayed for the whole walk! Thanks to Debbie S. and Denise H. for keeping the ebird lists of **22 species**.*



That's it for now, but our 2022 Thursday birding outings will continue through the end of October.

The next outings will be:

September 29 - Bearskin Trail at County 'K' trailhead

October 6 - Wausau day trip - hike, visit 'Birds in Art' and lunch

October 13 - TBA

October 20 - TBA

October 27 - Powell Marsh

December 15 - Minocqua Christmas Bird Club



This shadow proves that Donna is in some photos focusing her cell phone camera on a group of birders.

She will be looking for YOU at the next DC Bird Club Thursday outings!!

Close Encounters of the Bird Kind

Article and Photo by Mark Westphal

Every once in a great while a birder may have a special encounter with a bird or a chance to witness a unique behavior. This could be an opportunity to see a new species on a trip to a tropical island or view a gathering of bald eagles on a nearly frozen river. It could even be a chance to observe a family of nesting birds outside your bedroom window. While in nature's grand scheme of things these birds or occurrences may not be unusual, for you these special sightings can form lasting memories. These unique

sightings are often the stories you share with other birders or even people who are not necessarily as enthusiastic about birding as you are.



While I have numerous bird sightings that stand out in my own birding memories, one of my most memorable sightings occurred this spring. On April 6, 2022, I took a short walk through some dense woods to a marshy area along the Manitowish River. There I sat watching the river carve its way through melting ice as it flowed to Island Lake. Canada Geese and a half dozen trumpeter swans provided enjoyable viewing on this cloudy, early spring day. After several hours of sitting nearly motionless on the little foam pad that insulated my body from the snow, various parts of my anatomy told me it was time to head home. As I headed back along my narrow forest trail, I heard the alarm call of a blue jay. Several chickadees that were scattered among the branches of a nearby balsam fir were making fierce, raspy calls that I had never heard before. My long casual strides slowed to small deliberate steps as I scanned the branches for the source of the chickadees distress. Then I spotted it! Twenty-five feet away on the lower branches of a spindly young balsam sat a saw-whet owl. I froze. Other than in photographs, it was the only saw-whet owl I had ever seen. This tiny little predator was both fierce and cute at the same time. Its piercing yellow eyes were staring directly at me. Moving as slowly as possible, I pulled my camera from the bag hanging from my left shoulder and raised it to my eye. As I looked through the telephoto lens, I noticed what appeared to be the remains of a vole clutched in its feather-covered

talons. A cloudy day and the dim light of the forest provided a photographic challenge. I took numerous photos at a variety of settings in hopes that at least one or two would result in an acceptable image. As I continued to take photos, the owl grew restless and flew to another nearby branch. Finally, it had enough of being photographed and stared at. With the vole still in its grasp, the little saw-whet owl flew off and disappeared into the forest. The entire encounter lasted approximately five minutes.

Often these types of sightings are the result of several things. Good fortune played a big part in coming upon this owl. I had to be in the right place at the right time. Experience and knowledge also played a part in this successful encounter. I paid attention to what the other birds were saying. Their alarm calls let me know that there was a reason for concern...a predator was nearby. This also told me to slow down and be extra vigilant. Although I had never seen a saw-whet owl before, the knowledge I had from reading about them told me I was in the type of habitat that the owl often uses for hunting. I made a point of scanning the lower branches for any unusual shapes or outlines. Finally, I had also read that saw-whet owls, unlike larger birds of prey, are often more tolerant of people providing the observer remains quiet and respectful.

Was I “lucky” to spot this little owl? Of course, I was. There is also a saying, “The more knowledge you have, the luckier you become”. Perhaps you too have experienced some special sightings. I hope you enjoy your memories as much as I do mine.

Life List Quarterly – Third Quarter 2022

By Sarah Besadny

The Discovery Center Bird Clubs annual list is now up to 141 species. Not too shabby!! (At this same time last year our annual list was at 110 species.) As expected, being in different habitats allows for greater opportunity to see a wider variety of species. Additionally, being in the same habitat but at different times of the season also provides an opportunity to possibly see some “new” species. This is evident in looking

more closely at the species we've added to our annual list since the beginning of July. Since the July 7th outing, we added 14 species:

Canvasback	8/18/22	Ashland Area
Virginia Rail	8/4/22	Thunder Lake
Green Heron	8/18/22	Ashland Area
Sharp-shinned Hawk	8/18/22	Ashland Area
Cooper's Hawk	8/4/22	Thunder Lake
American Kestrel	8/18/22	Ashland Area
Olive-sided Flycatcher	8/18/22	Ashland Area
Bank Swallow	7/14/22	Eagle River Airport Area
Cliff Swallow	7/14/22	Deerview Road
Brown Thrasher	7/14/22	Deerview Road
American Pipit	9/22/22	Powell Marsh
Clay-colored Sparrow	7/14/22	Deerview Road
White-crowned Sparrow	9/22/22	Powell Marsh
Vesper Sparrow	7/14/22	Deerview Road

Our Clubs Life List remains at 271 plus two hybrids. Is there a species you think we can add to our annual or life list? If you have suggestions on places to bird within driving distance of our collective "home", please let Donna Roche or any of the board members know and we can see if we can plan an outing.

There's still another month of Club Outings and the Christmas Bird Count ... plenty of opportunity for new species to be added to the list!!