

BIRD SONGS

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Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

by Mark Westphal

Thanks to the talents and dedication of our members, 2023 was another great year for our North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Club. Not only did we have our regular well-organized Thursday morning bird walks, but we were also able to once again resume a full slate of monthly summer programs. These meetings gave us opportunities to expand our knowledge of birds as well as a chance to socialize with birder friends, old and new.

A sizable donation from our Club helped to purchase window treatments to reduce bird strikes at the new addition to the Discovery Center's main lodge. Progress was made at our bird feeding destination with the addition of fencing to

keep deer from nibbling away at our bird-friendly plants. Additional improvements will continue to be made next spring. A new shed was also constructed to house our bird feeding supplies.

In addition to our regular Thursday morning bird walks, a special trip was made to Washington Island, providing new sites and birding opportunities. Club members also once again participated in the annual Birdathon fundraiser and assisted in several area Christmas bird counts.

The BIRD SONGS quarterly newsletter continues to share articles and photos by our members and statistical summaries of our bird sightings. Thanks to all who help us gather and record our official Bird Club sightings. As the years go by, these records will provide valuable information about the status of our area's bird populations.

I am personally grateful for the part our Club has played in helping me become a better birder. I truly appreciate our club members' enthusiasm and willingness to share their birding knowledge and experiences. Following their example, I hope that I, too, can pass along some of the knowledge I have gained and encourage others to learn about and care for the birds that add so much color and joy to our lives.

Happy New Year!

Species Profile: Peregrine Falcon **(*Falco peregrinus*)**

Article by Frank Schroyer

In October during our Bird Club outing to Thunder Lake State Wildlife Area we saw a Peregrine Falcon. The bird's authoritative presence, coupled with the excellent looks, left me feeling inspired. I did what many birders do after such a riveting sighting, and dove into any and all information available about the species. Learning more about Peregrine Falcons has completely added to my admiration for the bird, whose first name means wanderer.

The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is a member of the *Falconidae* family, which covers about 65 species including falcons, falconets, caracaras, and kestrels. Peregrines can be found everywhere on earth except Antarctica and the islands of New Zealand. There are 19 accepted subspecies across the world. North America encompasses the range of 3 subspecies, and the one we expect to find most often here in the eastern United States is *Falco peregrinus anatum*.



Photo by Frank Schroyer of the Peregrine Falcon seen at Thunder Marsh

As with many birds of prey, female Peregrines tend to be larger than males, causing great variation in size statistics (Body Length: 14.2-19.3 inches, Weight: 18.7-56.4 ounces, Wingspan: 39.4-43.3 inches). Despite a large female Merlin approaching the stature of a small male Peregrine, size is usually a reliable characteristic for distinguishing Peregrines from their smaller cousins in our neck of the woods. The Peregrine Falcon possesses that distinctive falcon-shaped body with long pointed wings and longish tail. Adults are blue-gray above (often so dark it appears black), with white bellies covered in black bars. The feature that sticks out the most though is the jet-black head and cheek, creating an effect that makes the birds look as though they're wearing a helmet. The helmeted look is a good way to distinguish adults from Prairie Falcons in the west, and Gyrfalcons to our north. Occasionally you may hear the alarm calls of a Peregrine, a series of harsh "kaak, kaak, kaak," calls.



Photo by Mark Westphal of a Peregrine Falcon at the Wildwood Zoo in Marshfield

Peregrines are often touted as the fastest animals on planet earth. When hunting, the birds will enter a stoop, or drop, from high elevations as they race toward their prey. With wings tucked in tight, the birds resemble a bullet in the sky, and have been observed reaching speeds near 240 miles per hour. When they reach their target, the prey is either stunned and quickly dispatched, or killed on impact. Peregrine Falcons have been observed preying on nearly 2,000 different species of birds worldwide, ranging in size from Sandhill Cranes, to hummingbirds. More typically, Peregrine Falcons feed on ducks, shorebirds, pigeons, and other small to medium sized birds. They also eat a substantial number of bats where they are available. When we observed this species at Thunder Lake, it was hard not to shudder with anxiety for the hundreds of ducks on Rice Lake, who were no doubt the apple of that Falcon's eye.

Peregrine Falcons prefer tall cliff faces as nest sites, but have also been documented using tall old-growth trees without tops, and the old nests of other raptors. After reaching sexual maturity in 1 to 3 years, males and females form a pair bond for life, and usually return to the same nest site each year. Eggs are laid from February to March in clutches ranging from 1 to 5 eggs, with an average number of hatched young per nest being 2.5. After about a month and a half the chicks fledge (at an average rate of 1.5 per nest), but remain dependent on their parents for a few more months. Interestingly, Peregrines have taken to artificial nest boxes on top of skyscrapers and other tall, man-made structures, presumably because of their similarity to cliff faces in the wild. This adaptability has greatly aided in their recovery from a world-wide population crash in the mid-twentieth century.

DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) is an organochloride chemical first developed as an insecticide in the late 1800s. Biomagnification of the chemical in the environment caused massive declines in Peregrine Falcons (and other raptors) because when it built up in the fat tissues of adult birds, it reduced the amount of calcium in their eggshells, causing many eggs to fail before hatching. Other factors contributed to this decline, such as persecution and nest raiding for falconry, though to a lesser extent. Peregrines were listed as endangered in the U.S. in 1970, and were actually extirpated from the eastern U.S. Thankfully, with the global banning of DDT and intensive conservation efforts, Peregrines and other raptors have rebounded excellently. The birds were delisted in 1999, and the population is stable across their North American range.

The Peregrine Falcon is a powerful, adaptable, charismatic bird. The fact they were ever under threat from human disturbance is mind-boggling today, and while it's frustrating to think about the mistakes that caused their decline, I am very thankful for the collective conservation efforts to bring them back from the brink. I can't imagine reading about the Peregrine Falcon in history books like I do the Passenger Pigeon (and others) that humans so poorly mistreated, and I'm

thankful I don't have to. Its incredible story of recovery and the aura of fearsomeness that surrounds them are what make Peregrine Falcons special to me.

References

All About Birds (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Wikipedia

National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America

Merlin App (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

eBird (Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Minocqua Christmas Bird Count

The Minocqua Christmas Bird Count was December 28, 2023. Many thanks to all who counted in the field as well as those who counted birds coming to feeders in their yards. Since the CBC was just yesterday, we don't have all the results yet but here is a photo of most of the field counters enjoying a lunch afterwards at the Boathouse in Minocqua. Results will be included in the March 2024 newsletter. Photo courtesy of Donna Roche.



Life List Quarterly: 4th Quarter 2023

By Sarah Besadny

Those of you who bird often with the Discovery Center Bird Club know that it was a pretty spectacular year for seeing a wide variety of species. In fact, the Bird Club birders saw 172 species this year and **added a new species to the Club's Life List!** The last time a species was added to the List Life was 2018 when both a Black Scoter and a Willet were spotted. This year's addition was a **Tropical Kingbird**. Yes, a Tropical Kingbird in a not-so-tropical location – Ashland, Wisconsin. Donna Roche, our Thursday Bird Outing Coordinator and Leader-extraordinaire decided to head back one more time to the Ashland area for some fall birding before the Club's birding season ended. What a terrific plan that was! When the Thursday birding group arrived in Ashland they learned that a Tropical Kingbird had been reported the day before along the Lake Superior Shoreline. The group made a beeline to the spot and YES, the bird was still there ... and even singing (a song Donna recognized as she got out of the car). How remarkable was it to see a Tropical Kingbird in Ashland? Extremely!! The normal range for the Tropical Kingbird is Central and South America with some birds spotted in the very southern areas of Texas and Arizona. There have only been two other reports of a Tropical Kingbird in Wisconsin: the state record bird was spotted on May 19, 2016 in Washburn and another was spotted on June 11, 2017 in Bayfield. Congrats to the DC birders who were able to see this bird!



Tropical Kingbird, photo by Dave Wittrock

Ok, let's put our 172 species for our annual list into perspective too. From 2018 through this year, the Club's annual list totaled: 164, 156, 0, 121, 148, 172. The zero in 2020 was due to Covid restrictions on gatherings and those restrictions

lingered into 2021 resulting in an annual number that was well below the norm. Many thanks to Guy David who established our record keeping system and kept the Club's records for many years. Guy's system makes it very easy to analyze and compare data.

Here is the Discovery Center Bird Club's Annual List for 2023 with the earliest date the bird was spotted:

*Species in **bold** were added to the Annual List in the 4th Quarter of 2023*

Canada Goose	4/14/23
Trumpeter Swan	4/27/23
Wood Duck	4/14/23
Blue-winged Teal	5/4/23
Northern Shoveler	5/4/23
Gadwall	4/27/23
American Wigeon	4/27/23
Mallard	4/14/23
American Black Duck	8/3/23
Green-winged Teal	5/4/23
Redhead	5/4/23
Ring-necked Duck	4/27/23
Greater Scaup	4/27/23
Lesser Scaup	4/27/23
Black Scoter	10/19/23
Bufflehead	5/4/23
Common Goldeneye	4/27/23
Hooded Merganser	4/14/23
Common Merganser	4/27/23
Red-breasted Merganser	4/27/23
Ruddy Duck	9/17/23
Ruffed Grouse	5/18/23
Sharp-tailed Grouse	4/14/23
Wild Turkey	9/17/23
Pied-billed Grebe	4/27/23
Horned Grebe	4/27/23
Rock Pigeon	5/22/23
Mourning Dove	5/18/23
Black-billed Cuckoo	5/25/23
Common Nighthawk	8/31/23
Chimney Swift	5/22/23
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	5/22/23
Virginia Rail	5/18/23
Sora	5/18/23

American Coot	5/4/23
Sandhill Crane	4/14/23
Semipalmated Plover	6/1/23
Killdeer	5/4/23
Dunlin	6/1/23
Baird's Sandpiper	9/7/23
Least Sandpiper	8/17/23
Pectoral Sandpiper	8/24/23
Semipalmated Sandpiper	6/1/23
American Woodcock	4/14/23
Wilson's Snipe	4/14/23
Spotted Sandpiper	5/22/23
Solitary Sandpiper	8/17/23
Greater Yellowlegs	5/4/23
Lesser Yellowlegs	8/17/23
Bonaparte's Gull	10/19/23
Ring-billed Gull	5/22/23
Herring Gull	6/1/23
Black Tern	5/22/23
Common Tern	6/1/23
Forster's Tern	6/1/23
Common Loon	4/27/23
Double-crested Cormorant	5/4/23
American White Pelican	8/17/23
American Bittern	5/4/23
Great Blue Heron	6/1/23
Great Egret	8/17/23
Green Heron	5/22/23
Turkey Vulture	4/27/23
Osprey	5/22/23
Northern Harrier	4/14/23
Sharp-shinned Hawk	9/17/23
Cooper's Hawk	9/17/23
Bald Eagle	4/27/23
Broad-winged Hawk	5/4/23
Red-tailed Hawk	9/28/23
Rough-legged Hawk	5/4/23
Belted Kingfisher	4/27/23
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	5/22/23
Red-headed Woodpecker	7/13/23
Red-bellied Woodpecker	4/27/23
Downy Woodpecker	1/21/23
Hairy Woodpecker	1/21/23
Pileated Woodpecker	1/21/23

Northern Flicker	4/14/23
American Kestrel	4/14/23
Merlin	5/22/23
Peregrine Falcon	8/3/23
Olive-sided Flycatcher	8/3/23
Eastern Wood-Pewee	5/22/23
Alder Flycatcher	5/22/23
Least Flycatcher	5/11/23
Eastern Phoebe	5/4/23
Great Crested Flycatcher	6/1/23
Eastern Kingbird	5/22/23
Tropical Kingbird	10/19/23
Yellow-throated Vireo	6/1/23
Blue-headed Vireo	5/18/23
Warbling Vireo	5/22/23
Red-eyed Vireo	5/18/23
Blue Jay	1/21/23
American Crow	4/14/23
Common Raven	4/14/23
Horned Lark	5/4/23
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	6/8/23
Tree Swallow	4/14/23
Barn Swallow	5/4/23
Cliff Swallow	7/20/23
Black-capped Chickadee	1/21/23
Tufted Titmouse	1/21/23
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1/21/23
White-breasted Nuthatch	5/11/23
Winter Wren	5/11/23
Sedge Wren	5/22/23
Marsh Wren	6/1/23
Golden-crowned Kinglet	9/17/23
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4/27/23
Eastern Bluebird	5/18/23
Veery	5/22/23
Swainson's Thrush	5/25/23
Hermit Thrush	5/11/23
American Robin	4/14/23
Gray Catbird	5/22/23
Brown Thrasher	4/14/23
European Starling	4/14/23
American Pipit	9/17/23
Bohemian Waxwing	12/28/23
Cedar Waxwing	6/1/23

Evening Grosbeak	4/27/23
House Finch	5/22/23
Purple Finch	5/11/23
Pine Siskin	9/14/23
American Goldfinch	1/21/23
Snow Bunting	10/19/23
Chipping Sparrow	5/4/23
Clay-colored Sparrow	7/20/23
Field Sparrow	4/14/23
American Tree Sparrow	5/4/23
Dark-eyed Junco	4/27/23
White-crowned Sparrow	9/17/23
White-throated Sparrow	4/27/23
Vesper Sparrow	4/14/23
Savannah Sparrow	5/4/23
Song Sparrow	4/14/23
Lincoln's Sparrow	5/22/23
Swamp Sparrow	5/4/23
Eastern Towhee	5/22/23
Yellow-headed Blackbird	6/1/23
Eastern Meadowlark	4/14/23
Baltimore Oriole	5/11/23
Red-winged Blackbird	4/14/23
Brown-headed Cowbird	6/1/23
Rusty Blackbird	4/27/23
Brewer's Blackbird	9/17/23
Common Grackle	4/14/23
Ovenbird	5/11/23
Golden-winged Warbler	5/22/23
Black-and-white Warbler	5/11/23
Tennessee Warbler	9/14/23
Nashville Warbler	5/11/23
Mourning Warbler	6/8/23
Common Yellowthroat	5/18/23
American Redstart	5/11/23
Northern Parula	5/18/23
Magnolia Warbler	5/25/23
Blackburnian Warbler	5/18/23
Yellow Warbler	5/18/23
Chestnut-sided Warbler	5/11/23
Blackpoll Warbler	5/22/23
Palm Warbler	5/11/23
Pine Warbler	5/11/23
Yellow-rumped Warbler	5/4/23

Black-throated Green Warbler	5/11/23
Scarlet Tanager	5/11/23
Northern Cardinal	6/1/23
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	5/11/23
Indigo Bunting	7/20/23
House Sparrow	9/28/23

On a final note, I think it's always interesting to see what species were seen the most often during the Club's birding season. For the record, the Club had 33* events this year including 28 weekly outings, Liz and Dick's Open House to see the Tufted Titmouse, Dave's bird blind reservation to see the Sharp-tailed Grouse, the Great Wisconsin Birdathon, the Washington Island Trip coordinated by the Cassadys. *The Minocqua Christmas Bird Count (our 33rd event) numbers are not all yet reported so are not included in the analysis below.

	<u># of outings the species was reported</u>
Red-winged Blackbird:	27
Song Sparrow and Blue Jay:	25
Black-capped Chickadee:	24
American Robin and Canada Goose:	22
Red-eyed Vireo, Bald Eagle, Mallard and Common Raven:	20

Photo Journal:
The Beauty and Power of Wings
Photos by Mark Westphal



Ring-billed Gull



Canada Goose



Sandhill Crane



Wild Turkey



Trumpeter Swan