

BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland
Discovery Center Bird Club

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President's Message

by Mark Westphal

Fall is a time of transition for birders. We say goodbye to our last remaining summer residents, enjoy the hurried flow of migrants from the far north and adjust our feeders from sugar water cafes to sunflower seeds and suet. It is also a time to reflect on the sightings and birding experiences of the past summer. Although I was not able to attend as many activities as I would have liked to this year, I am very grateful for the outings I did attend and the programs our Club is able to sponsor.

A big thank you to all those members who organize and lead our outings and maintain our species lists. Additionally, thanks to our program director for scheduling our programs and attending to our guest speakers; thanks to those

who helped to organize our special birding trip to La Crosse; thanks to members who contribute food and help organize our special social activities; thanks to those who contribute to and publish the “Bird Songs” newsletter; thanks to the dedicated crew who have been maintaining and improving our bird habitat enclosure; thanks to board members who help keep things running on a business and financial level. Thank you to the Discovery Center for allowing us to use their beautiful facility, and for the help of our Bird Club liaison and all the other staff members. As you can see, it takes a whole “flock” to make the North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Club the wonderful organization that it has grown to be. As a Club, we can do so much more than any one individual can accomplish. With the support and participation of our members, our Club can continue to provide a multitude of ways to learn about birds. We can also help birds by contributing to bird-related Citizen Science projects and sharing our interests and knowledge with the community. Perhaps one of the most important benefits that our Club provides is the ability to enjoy the company and enthusiasm of other birders.

Although many birds, along with some of our club members have headed south, our Club continues to offer opportunities for fall birding and beyond. Here are some dates to remember:

Thursday, October 3rd: Birding at Thunder Marsh with Frank Schroyer. Check your email for future October outings.

Monday, October 7th, 7 P.M.: Program at the Discovery Center—“Bird Nest Mystery...A Real Who Done It”. Join Discovery Center naturalist, Aidan Witthoff as we explore the weird and wonderful variety of nests created by the resident birds of the Northwoods. Mysteries are revealed when we learn about locations, styles, materials and more.

Saturday, December 14th: Manitowish Waters Christmas Bird Count, coordinated by John Bates. Details to follow.

Thursday, December 19th: Minocqua Christmas Bird Count, coordinated by Donna Roche and Sarah Besadny. Details to follow.

Even if there are no formal meetings our outings planned, you are always welcome to share special sightings or contact other club members to seek out rare or colorful winter visitors.

Enjoy the fall and keep those binoculars handy.

Species Profile: The Red-necked Grebe **A Western Species Breeding in Wisconsin**

Article and Photos by Dick Theile

Do you ever get a “Rare Bird Alert” on eBird? For me, it is a thrill but I am also filled with a bit of trepidation about the accuracy of my sighting. Did I really see this bird and why is it considered “rare”? Of course, eBird asks for all sorts of verification - a detailed description and better yet, photographs of a rare sighting.

On Trout Lake, my wife Liz and I recently obtained a “Rare Bird Alert” after sighting six Red-necked Grebes in one day at the end of August and then another two in early September. Just what makes the Red-necked Grebes “rare” and what do we know about them?



Red-necked Grebes are a predominantly western bird species but in researching them, I was surprised to discover that there are small pockets that actually breed in Wisconsin! The largest breeding area is Rush Lake in southwestern Winnebago County. Rush Lake is what is known as a prairie pothole marsh and is the largest such water body east of the Mississippi. The lake’s name comes from the hard stem bullrushes and cattails that dominate its vegetation. Unfortunately, this large breeding area is tenuous due to a major carp population. The carp cause turbidity that reduces the visibility for the underwater feeding grebes.

Based on the most recent Wisconsin Breeding Bird survey mapping results (the complete Atlas with the narrative is still in publication), there are also confirmed pockets of Red-necked Grebes breeding on the Schoenberg Marsh north of Madison, and the Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area and Grettum Flowage, both located in the northwestern part of the state.

Red-necked Grebes’ small presence in Wisconsin is definitely an outlier since the species predominantly breeds from Minnesota up to Manitoba, further north and westward to Alaska and down to Oregon. The species winters along the

coastlines of both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and also the Great Lakes provided they have not frozen over.

Mostly people wrongly believe the Red-necked Grebe is related to the loon due to observed similarities in behavior, however, recent DNA analysis shows grebes (Podicipedidae) are surprisingly more closely related to flamingoes and pigeons, while loons (Gaviidae) are more closely related to cormorants and herons.

Red-necked grebes are characterized by their namesake brick-red necks, seen best during the breeding season, a yellow bill, and a pale, almost whitish, ear patch. The top of their head has what has been described as a toreador black hat. Their wings are relatively small and they fly much less often and less strongly than loons. Red-necked Grebes are much larger than the Eared and Horned Grebes, weighing over twice as much at an average of 2.2 pounds and measuring a third longer in length and have an even longer neck.



The birds are mostly silent except on their breeding grounds. David Sibley has described their calls as “nasal gull-like...then braying chatter with a quavering end.” Red-necked Grebes are monogamous for the season and have an elaborate courtship characterized by a penguin type dance in which both the male and female rise up out of the water and swim rapidly side by side with much head shaking.

Their nests are generally floating and are built by both sexes. They are anchored by emerging plants with much of the nests lying underwater. Grebes produce up to nine light blue eggs, and the hatchlings, called “grebets”, are covered in down and heavily striped. Both parents incubate the eggs and are active in raising their young. Like loons, the grebets ride on their parents’ backs and are fed for about four weeks after which they become completely independent.

Fish are the grebes' main food source with smaller fish swallowed whole under water and larger ones speared by their bills before being eaten. Grebes can stay below the surface for three minutes. Lesser food sources include crustaceans, frogs, salamanders, and even aquatic beetles and flies. Red-necked Grebes like other grebes ingest their own feathers. Although the reason for this behavior is not completely understood, their stomachs contain two balls of feathers that are thought to assist in digestion of bones and other material. Interestingly, feathers are also "fed" to their young.



The Red-necked Grebe lifespan is typically six to nine years. The oldest recorded bird was found in Minnesota, an eleven year old that was originally banded in that state.

The Red-necked Grebe is a fun and beautiful "rare" western bird that we are blessed to have breeding in Wisconsin. Please keep a lookout for these fantastic creatures, especially during fall migration!

A "Best Day" Encounter

By Kathy Bentley

A Ruby-throated Hummingbird flew into the garage rafters at my brother's lake house. It was confused and couldn't find a way out. Eventually it landed on the garage floor, exhausted. His granddaughter, Finley, quickly soaked her fingers in the sugar water stored in the refrigerator. When she picked up the exhausted hummingbird, it immediately started to drink the sugar water from her finger. Soon it had recovered enough to fly away. Finley said it was the best day of her life!



DC Bird Club Thursday Outings - July 11, 2024 - September 26, 2024

Recap of Outings with Some Photos of the Birders!

By Donna Roche

My request for members to suggest and to lead outings was taken up for almost the entire season!! Thank you so much to ALL for creating and leading outings! In ALL cases, the outings were interesting, new, different, educational, BIRDY and FUN!

And as for our great participants... at 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. There was extra help with taking photos and writing Recaps when I was absent. Otherwise, the blame for the photos is mine!!

Once again, I wish to thank John Randolph for being willing and available to send out the weekly announcements and all the other messages that are sent through him to the BC membership. Couldn't do it without you!!!

Lastly, thank you Sarah Besadny for taking on all it takes to publish each issue of the Bird Songs ... Cheers to you!!!

I hope you enjoy reviewing what we accomplished this summer. All of you are appreciated and here you are:



Recap of July 11, 2024 outing: Thanks to Debbie Wilson for leading this great walk! It was a foggy view over the ponds of Pipke Park when our group of birders arrived. We were able to make out a couple of female mergansers near the stage of the outdoor music setup. However, in just a few minutes as we started our walk towards the north pond, the fog started to lift. It really was quite nice to get to watch this unique scene become visible. We started to hear bird sounds coming from the shrub and tree line. We spent quite a bit of time at the same spot which has repeatedly been very active with birds for several years. It was a lot easier to hear them than see them, but we totaled a number of warblers here. There wasn't much going on the water, but we finally found a group of young ducks without an adult that were identified as being Wood Ducks. We were very surprised that there weren't mosquitos and flies bothering us. It was pleasant. I do wonder about a connection between this and the fact that we did find the flycatcher species that are usually found here ??? We made our way around the north pool and partway down the trail of the south before calling it a day. Thanks to Debbie S. for keeping our ebird lists. **27 species**



Recap of July 18, 2024 outing to Deerview Lane north of Eagle River: Eleven members of the DC Bird Club enjoyed a sunny, good temperature walk along Deerview Lane. It is such an enjoyable walk, one could enjoy it for just the scenery. However, it is a great birding area! So much so, that Frank S. requested that eBird designate it as a birding 'Hot Spot'. If one looks on eBird, you will find that others have 'discovered' this dependable spot for field, open area with light agriculture, often interesting, hard to find and rare birds! We often find some of the same good birds here each year, such as Clay-colored Sparrows, Cliff Swallows, Eastern Bluebird and Indigo Bunting. This year we were treated to several Brown Thrashers, a Kestrel and Baltimore Oriole that were different to the mix!!

*Thank you so much, Sarah, for leading and keeping the eBird list! **38 Species***



Recap of Paddle on July 25th - There is a beautiful view of Lake Katherine along Hwy 51, particularly as you drive north into Hazelhurst that I have always enjoyed. It's a view that says 'you have arrived up-north!' Last Thursday, I and seven other Bird Club members paddled ON this lake and the lake was all that I

imagined it to be... surrounded by tall trees, clear water and little development. Frank S. led our group on a perfect day across the lake and through a narrow, wild and beautiful channel to the dam with Lake Tomahawk. He told us about the logging history of the channel that still looks completely undisturbed and about the acquisition of the Yawkey properties to the Northwoods Land Trust. He also found some good birds for us! Thanks to him, we were all able to connect the call we heard with the Merlin. We found 20 species of birds, including kingfishers, flycatchers, a warbler species and a close-up loon who wanted to keep us away from its mate and chick. We saw them all.

*Thanks Frank for a great paddle and for keeping the species list! **20 species***



Recap of Ashland trip on Aug 1, 2024: What a terrific Ashland birding day with super leader, Colleen M. and her 'guests' and Tim. O. showing us around Prentice as only he can! Yes, it did sprinkle during our time, but it did not dampen our spirits. Colleen's 'guests' this day were her friend, Tom (good birder) and 2 students from Northland College (exceptional birders!). Here we found 31 species including Green Heron, 5 warblers and Osprey. Later, Colleen arranged for the manager of the Whittlesey Creek NWR to meet with us and tell us about this remarkable restoration effort and what it means to (Coaster) Brook trout fisheries. We found 18 species of birds along the road to the refuge, as we walked the short 'old field' trail, and at the bridge across the creek including Red-tailed Hawk, Clay-colored Sparrow and Indigo Bunting! We ate lunch on the deck of NGLVC and walked the trail to find 6 species including a Merlin. Thanks to Colleen and Tim!!

*Thank you Denise H. for keeping all 3 lists and combining them. **43 Species***



Recap of August 8, 2024 - Goodnow Trailhead, Bearskin Trail - It was not a promising start to John Randolph's leading of the hike along the Bearskin Trail. As we waited for a few others to arrive, there wasn't a bird to be heard or seen. It was sprinkling. John related a story about an outing here a number of years ago when the weather was equally rainy and only Karin and he were left to do the walk. He said they only tallied 7 species of birds and he hoped not to repeat that lowly number on this day.... He had nothing to fear. We were a group of 15 dressed for the weather and eager to get out! At the first trestle the birds started to show up, flitting across the open water and visible in the trees. That continued to be repeated at each trestle and open water area along the way, plus we did find some in the thick shrubs and bare snags. On the very top of one of those snags a Green Heron landed and stayed for quite some time. Unusual, but it was very enjoyable to watch! We did feel that a number of birds we found were family groups, robins and grosbeaks. With difficulty, we were able to get views of several warblers, chestnut-sided, redstart and Tennessee! It never really stopped drizzling, but it was a great walk along the Bearskin Trail. Thank you so much John for suggesting and leading the group here.

Thank you Debbie S. for keeping the eBird list. 25 species



Recap of August 15, 2024 - Saxon, Iron County, area - Thanks to Carne A. and Amy S. who planned and led a car caravan group of 9 DC birders around small roads in an area near Saxon Harbor on an overcast morning with the almost certainty that it was going to rain during our outing. It did rain, it did pour, but not before we had a great time finding bird species of merit!! We started out meeting up in Mercer and took our group photo in front of the gorgeous display of hydrangea species... apologies to birding purists. Our birding start was along Cty 'B' going north of Hwy 2 in Iron Cty. For the next 2 hours we birded along 'B' and side roads looking for birds in fruit trees, willow wetlands and farming homesteads with hay fields. It was rewarding to find and watch an American Kestrel hunt from power lines, a Northern Harrier glide along just above the grass fields and 2 Eastern Meadowlarks flitting around the wild plant areas. Yes, Eastern... they still sang at this time of year 'spring-of-the-year'. The kingbird, waxwings, grosbeaks and warblers were all for the fruit trees. The birding was good!. We did a walk-around the power plant 'waterfall?' and found a Spotted Sandpiper and 3 other species before the rain started. We drove to the Harbor, had our lunch under a shelter, met up with Colleen M, had a little 'bd' celebration, but the rain did not stop! We were able to find 4 species including a Sharp-shinned Hawk flying over the water towards the shore.... where it came from I wonder! I look forward to doing this 'newish' outing destination again.... maybe next spring!

Thank you Carne A. for keeping all 3 eBird lists and to Denise H. for combining the list. **37 species**



Recap of August 22, 2024 - Winchester area. Thanks to Denise H. for planning and leading this new destination outing. WOW, WOW! There were 20 participants including a very enthusiastic, first-time DC Birder, 10 year old Ben. Denise's friend, Ben was an asset to the group's efforts to find birds as he spotted birds before others noticed and 'actively' birded at all times! We hope he can join the group often in the future. Denise's route started in the Winchester community park which is charming and well maintained with fruiting shrubs, a bridge over the creek and a couple of piers. We walked around those shrubs which were active with birds - redstarts and chestnut-sided warblers were 2 species. After so many gray, cloudy, rainy Thursdays, this day was sunny and delightful for us and the birds to enjoy the fruits of later summer. We walked along Bruette Rd which is a gravel road running along the creek for a while with fruited shrubs, then through a wooded area and passed some recently logged sections. The road meandered as the creek spread out to a picturesque open area. In each area we found birds including a Broad-winged Hawk, several woodpecker species, wood-pewee and phoebe plus 5 species of warblers. After returning to our starting place, we drove over to the Winchester Library to look for more birds in the garden and around the neighborhood. Here we found Purple Finch, hummingbirds, robins, chippers and a mystery bird. All and all, we enjoyed this outing very much and look forward to returning next year!

Thank you Carne A. for keeping all 2 eBird list and to Denise H. for combining the list. **28 species**



Recap of August 29, 2024 outing Powell Marsh LDF Tribal Area: Another WOW! For participation. Our birding group numbered 19 on this late August morning. Debbie Wilson deserves thanks for suggesting this outing, but was surprised that it wasn't exactly the spot where she thought. However, she was a good sport about it and about the fact that I was 'taking over' her role of leader at the start with an introduction of Andre Vinton from the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Natural Resources. Andre is Habitat Manager and was terrific to join us for the morning's walk, answering MANY questions about this area of Powell Marsh and showing us his extensive knowledge. Birding was slow at first maybe due to the brisk wind, but picked up especially with warblers as we walked to the Chewelah Lake bridge. Once again, we filled the time enjoying an especially beautiful display of grasses, sedges and fall wildflowers on the open extensive wetlands. Denise's friend, Ben, joined us again for his last bird walk before school start soon. We hope he continues to enjoy birding!!

Thank you, Denise H., for keeping the eBird list. **16 species**



Photo by Sarah Besadny

Recap of September 12, 2024 outing Star Lake written by Sarah Besadny:
Even though the radar reports showed a large migration of birds overnight, it seems many kept on going. However we enjoyed the birds that decided the Star Lake area was a good place to hang out for a while. Many Yellow-rumped Warblers were spotted by all with a Tennessee Warbler in the mix. Vocal Belted Kingfishers filled the rather quiet air now that the breeding birds have mostly stopped singing. There were several American Black Ducks swimming near some Mallards — always a nice opportunity to really study the differences between the two species. Highlights of the morning were a first year Baltimore Oriole at the edge of the inlet taking its time getting food and therefore allowing us to get scopes on it for some great looks. Another highlight was watching an adult Bald Eagle “swimming” in the lake. The eagle kept making progress but seemed to be tiring. We watched to see that it finally took flight.

Many thanks to Sarah for leading and Carne for keeping the eBird checklist. 25 species



Photo by Dave Wittrock

Recap of September 19, 2024 outing George W. Mead Wildlife Area written by David Wittrock: 8 birders made the trek to the Mead Wildlife Area, a premiere birding area in Central Wisconsin. It was a glorious late summer day at Mead, an area covering over 33,000 acres marshes, hardwood forests, and grasslands where 267 species have been observed. The group met at the Visitor Center on County Highway S and took a short walk through the grassland surrounding the Center. We observed Trumpeter Swans, Sandhill Cranes, and were entertained by a couple of Eastern Phoebe hunting and a Palm Warbler skittering across the roof of the Center. From there we took a short drive to the Pump House Parking Area located at the entryway to the road that traverses the Honey Island Flowage. We were greeted by a large flock of Blue Jays, enjoyed a flyover by a Wilson's Snipe, and observed several duck species (including a large flock of Green-winged Teal), Trumpeter Swans, an American Bittern, Great Egrets, and Great Blue Herons on the flowage. The grasses along the road produced several Song and Savannah Sparrows and some American Goldfinches. Next, we moved on to Engel Road where we took a short walk through a hardwood forest and emerged on the North Townline Flowage. Here we were quite excited by a flock of several dozen shorebirds flying along a narrow pond on the southern shore of the Little Eau Pleine River. Unfortunately, the dikes obscured our view somewhat, but were able to identify Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, and Killdeer. We also saw several Double-crested Cormorants and a Bald Eagle at this location. After enjoying lunch at the Visitor Center, we drove to South Rice Lake. The water levels of the lake are quite high this year so the typical shorebird habitats around the edges of the lake were underwater. However, we were able to see several Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, and Trumpeter Swans, among other birds. Thanks to Debbie Simek for the eBird checklists.

*Thanks to Dave W. for leading, for recap and day total of **34 species***



Recap for Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024 to the Rainbow Flowage area: Twelve DC Bird Club members met up at the Cty "O" snowmobile bridge to look and listen for birds along the drawn-down Wisconsin River. We found a number of birds including a Belted Kingfisher, 2 Wood Ducks, and "butterbutts". We moved on to another spot along Plantings Road to overlook the river again. We found more birds along the short trail to the river than along the banks. Here we ID'd a kinglet, woodpeckers and more yellow-rumps. There was major crow caw cries/mobbing... maybe an owl, but we couldn't see the source of the commotion. We continued our drive to the end of Oxbow and started out along the low shore. We could see a number of birds and groups of others on the point where the river bends. We saw 2 mature Bald Eagles on the shore and large groups of gulls and coots in the water. As we walked along, we found that there were immature eagle and a Blue Heron. Later American Pipits were identified. From the shrubs some small birds were found, including, you guessed it, more Yellow-rumped Warblers. Don't you just love those birds?!

We weren't as successful as we might have liked with shorebirds, but it was great to get out and look!! **24 species**

There are still FIVE more Thursday outings to finish the 2024 birding season...

- October 3 - Thunder Lake
- October 10 - Ashland area
- October 17 - Wausau
- October 24 - Little Turtle Flowage
- October 31 - Powell Marsh

Life List Quarterly: 3rd Quarter 2024

By Sarah Besadny

As the data coordinator for the Bird Club, I look forward to recording the weekly outing checklists into our master list. It's always interesting to see trends, oddities, especially exciting to see new "lifers", etc. There's always something to highlight each quarter in this column, but if you have any questions you'd like some research done on, please let me know.

I was just reading an article in eBird about upcoming taxonomy changes. These changes are scheduled for October 22nd. Most of the changes being made will be made automatically to everyone's eBird checklists so overall species counts may change without having to do any personal updating in eBird. There is a change that will impact our Club's list and that is for Redpolls. Currently there are three different Redpoll species, two of which we have recorded in our Club's records – the Common Redpoll and Hoary Redpoll. The third species is the Lesser Redpoll, a species we haven't recorded on our Club list. After the taxonomy changes take place, these three species will be lumped together into one called Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*). The decision to lump these three species together is based on genetic evidence that shows the differences in appearance of these three species is controlled by a single shared "supergene".

Other taxonomy changes of note will look primarily like just naming changes to us. The House Wren is being broken up to form seven different species. The House Wren that we see here in the Northwoods will be called Northern House Wren. Another change that you may notice while creating eBird checklists is that there will no longer be an option to report *Accipiter* sp. You know, those times when you just can't tell if the bird you saw was a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk or American Goshawk so you default to reporting *Accipiter* sp.? After the taxonomy changes you will still be able to select Cooper's Hawk/American Goshawk or Sharp-shinned Hawk/Cooper's Hawk however. Did you notice that Northern Goshawk is now called American Goshawk? I'm not sure when that change happened but I just wanted to point it out. Finally, the Herring Gull is being split into four different species reflecting the geographically separate populations that don't seem to interbreed as extensively as once thought. The Herring Gulls that we see will now be called American Herring Gull.

Ok, now for some info specific to our recent outings. Since the last BIRD SONGS newsletter was published we have had 11 outings. During those eleven outings we added 11 species to our Annual List and no additions to our Life List. Those eleven species and the date they were added to our annual list are:

Wild Turkey	7/18/24
Black-bellied Plover	9/19/24
Herring Gull	8/15/24
Double-crested Cormorant	9/19/24
American Kestrel	7/18/24
Brown Creeper	8/22/24
House Wren	8/1/24
American Pipit	9/26/24
Clay-colored Sparrow	7/18/24
Eastern Meadowlark	8/15/24
Tennessee Warbler	8/1/24

I always find it interesting to see what species are spotted on the majority of our outings, no matter if the Club has travelled up to the Lake Superior Area, down to the George W. Mead SWA or areas closer to home. When I was entering the weekly data it struck me how often a Ruby-throated Hummingbird was spotted. That had me looking at what species were spotted on at least half of those 11 outings. Those species are:

	# of times spotted out of last 11 outings
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	8
Belted Kingfisher	7
Hairy Woodpecker	7
Northern Flicker	9
Eastern Phoebe	8
Red-eyed Vireo	8
Blue Jay	10
American Crow	9
Black-capped Chickadee	9
Red-breasted Nuthatch	7
American Crow	8
Cedar Waxwing	7
American Goldfinch	9
Song Sparrow	6

Photo Journal

Photos and Captions by Mark Westphal



While these Trumpeter Swan cygnets are seen here enjoying a quiet moment, they have been recently seen taking "test" flights around the Vista Pond at Powell Marsh as they strengthen their wings for Fall flights.

The beautiful white feathers of a Great Egret glow in the sunlight at Ken Euers Nature Area.



This Green Heron takes a "stretch" at Prentice Park during a Bird Club outing to Ashland.

An Osprey fledgling stares at the photographer from its utility pole perch. The orange eyes will turn to yellow as this bird matures.



This cute little Turkey poult took a break on a perch outside my living room window.

Often heard but seldom seen, this Sedge Wren peaks out from the cover of willows at Powell Marsh.





The beautiful dapple pattern appears on this Sandhill Crane at Powell Marsh as old soil stained plumage gives way to new Fall feathers.