

Chequamegon Chirps



April 15, 2019 Volume 38 Number 4

The April 15th Chequamegon Bird Club meeting will **not** be at the library. Their annual book sale will occupy our usual meeting room. So, our April meeting will be at the Abby Bank which is at 215 south 8th Street. This is on the west side of Highway 13 near the middle stoplight and where we had our banquet last October. Come in the back entrance and the meeting room will be downstairs. If there should be any odd bags of money laying around, they will be given out as door prizes—but you have to be present to win.

April is election meeting and these candidates have been nominated. Joe Scott—president; Ron Draeger—vice president; Judy Rau—secretary; Cam Scott—treasurer. Any additional nominations will be welcome before voting takes place.

Part of the business meeting will include final details of World Migratory Bird Day community presentation scheduled May 4 by the woods next to the Ag Building on Donald Street. There will also be a report on the Wood Duck and Bluebird nest box building done recently. And finally, a report of final plans of the club's part of the Youth Expo at the Taylor County Fairgrounds. Last year more than 400 5th graders attended this event.

Last month there was some discussion about Snowy Owls being a legal game bird in Alaska. Some information about this topic has been dug up to further clarify the situation.

Migration Time!

Now is the time of year that migration is most obvious for us. Migration is a year round event. But now is the time that we are in a strong migration area as birds come to and through Taylor, Price, Marathon and Clark Counties. Seeing a new species of bird for the first time each spring is a thrill and often discussed with other birders that sometimes is part of friendly competition. Just about any definitive statement about migration should not have the words never or always. That is just a personal opinion on my part. Consider the source so you don't have to take that comment too seriously.

Now to talk out of the other side of my mouth. There are also amazing consistencies involving migration. Cliff Swallows get credit for arriving on the same day in Capistrano, California. Sometimes that arrival does get fudged a bit, but it is close to the same date. Even

more predictable are Turkey Vultures arriving at Hinckley, Ohio. Weather influences migration but birds getting to where they want to when they want to get there in spite of whacky weather. Today was in the mid-60's and up to a foot is predicted within a few days. In spite of this weather, birds will arrive close to their expected dates.

Even among our club members, it is interesting how people, who come to our meetings, are nearly 80 miles apart from our extreme southern and northern members, record different arrival dates among similar species. Sometimes they are the same time and others, due to many factors, can have a difference of many days.

Migration is an enormously complex happening. Birds have some abilities for navigating that boggle the mind of us mere humans. How can hatchlings sometimes only weeks out of the nest go on a trip of thousands of miles without any adult direction or supervision? No maps, no GPS. Impossible. But true.

How do birds who travel epic distances prepare for their journey? Marathon runners "carbo-load" to prepare for a race. Birds do this in extreme fashion to the point of even doubling their weight. The term for this binge eating is hyperphagia. How about doing 24 marathons consecutively without stopping—or you die. That's the equivalent of what Ruby-throated Hummingbirds do when they cross the Gulf of Mexico. If they run out of gas over water—they die. That is a good incentive to have a large gas tank or energy reserve. Other birds travel the Gulf Coast as they come north rather cutting across the 600 plus miles of open water. What works for some doesn't for others. "The Blackpoll Warbler, which overflies a substantial chunk of the Atlantic Ocean on its fall migration from Canada to South America, burns fat at a rate of 750,000 miles per gallon. Running out of gas is not an option." That quote was from *How to Know the Birds* by Ted Floyd which is available at the Medford Library. This book packs a lot of information into entertaining reading.

Birds traveling long distances need to have their feathers in the best of shape. Timely molting is essential for long distance travelers. Some birds molt once a year, others twice. This can't happen if it is traveling time.

How do they get to where they want to go? This knowledge continues to grow as newer research methods are developed. One newer method to follow bird migration is through NEXRAD, next-generation radar. The US National Weather Service network of Doppler radar stations. Clemson University ornithologist Sidney Gauthreaux discovered that certain radars can detect birds and other flying animals. Now it is possible to get that information on your phones. Google your location +BASE REFLECTIVELY. Just think what you can become aware of if you wake up during the night—if you are handy with your phone and APPS applications.

Why do some species migrate at night and others during daylight? There is a saying that goes, "Flappy fliers fly at night." That isn't true for all birds. Hawks and Falcons migrate during daylight hours. Air rises as it warms, forming bubbles that provide lift for daylight flyers as they glide from one thermal to another, especially when they have helping tail wind. Flappy fliers flying at night at night avoid these predators. Night air tends to be less disturbed after dark. Also these birds often feed on insects during the day when they are resting.

But how do they know where they are going? Some of this knowledge is innate, but this is kind of a mushy area as more ways are being discovered through remarkable experiments. It is believed Indigo Buntings learn a star chart within weeks of hatching. That is accomplished by their recognizing the rotation of the night sky around the North Star. How crazy is that?

Pigeons fly only by day and can return to an exact location with remarkable accuracy. Originally it was thought they just knew landmarks and had really good recall. Then some were blindfolded and taken hundreds of miles to locations they had never been to before. They returned directly home with unerring accuracy. How is that possible? It is believed they perceive polarized light, ultraviolet light and even the Earth's magnetic field. They can sense infra sound far too low for humans to hear and may follow olfactory signals. Any one of these senses by itself wouldn't be enough, but by integrating these super senses, it returns home. It is believed many other species possess similar navigational capabilities. This information also came from How to Know the Birds.

The more we know about many subjects, the more we discover what we don't know. That is called progress. Enjoy the many birds arriving and passing through. Enjoy the colors, songs and acrobatics. Enjoy the wonderful wonder of what is known and how much more there is to be learned in the future.



"HOW DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO THE SAME HOUSE EVERY YEAR?"

Do you eat like a bird? Maybe you shouldn't. A 190 pound man eats about 3% of his weight per day. Daily intake for birds is: Barn Owl 11%; Mute Swan 39%; Costa's Hummingbird 300%

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April and May events

Full moons April 19 and May 18

Swallows and Purple Martins arrive

Wildflowers bloom before forest canopy develops

Toads and tree frogs begin calling

Spring finally defeats winter

May 17-Taylor County Youth Expo

May 18-World Migration Bird Day celebration

BEGINNING BIRD WATCHING

