

Chequamegon Chirps



Medford, Wisconsin

August 15, 2016

Volume 35 Number 8

The August Chequamegon Bird Club meeting will be hosted by Scott and Peggy Stalheim at N2207 Cardinal Drive. **There will be a combination bird and prairie walk at 6PM and the meeting will follow at 7PM.** Cardinal Drive is a dead end road to the south off of Highway O. It is located about 3 ½ miles west of Highway 13, or if you are coming from the west, take O east off of Highway 64 for about 4 ½ miles. When you get to their driveway, you still have nearly a quarter mile to go to the west on a winding road to their house. The walk will be interactive as the Salheims will welcome ID help with local birds—especially juveniles—and some native plants on their two acres of prairie that borders woods near the Black River. Another interesting facet of this visit will be to see their prairie grass roofed shed. If the meeting is over soon enough, Scott and Peggy will share some tales from their recent trip to Norway where they visited their daughter and her family who live there. It promises to be an interesting evening.

THE BEAUTY AND MYSTERY OF WAXWINGS

Waxwings, both Cedar and Bohemian, are soft, sleek birds with prominent crests and velvety smooth plumage, mostly fawn to soft gray highlighted by black eye masks and bright yellow tipped tails. The name waxwing is for the bright red, drop shaped, waxlike material that forms on tips of adult's secondary wing feathers. The function of these waxy droplets, which are a prolongation of feather shafts is unknown. Bohemians can be distinguished from Cedars by their larger size, possible white spots on their wings and especially their reddish-brown undertail coverts.

Waxwings can be considered Gypsies who like to wander. They aren't very territorial. They feed almost exclusively on fruit, but will feed insects to very young nestlings. Their diet also includes tree sap, flower petals and insects. Where they will be is kind of a guessing game and this gregarious bird can be found in almost any state at various times of the year and wherever their feeding habits take them. Personally, they are one of my favorite birds to see. It is a treat to them feeding in a large flock or when a group is on a branch or wire as they pass a small fruit from one to another. Why do they do that? Beats me, but it is interesting to speculate their reasons. Bonding? Possibly. For fun. Maybe.

WAXWING WONDER

I had already chosen to highlight waxwings for this issue when a most remarkable thing happened to me and another person earlier this month that concerned this specie. We were at the home of Marcia, a dear cousin of mine in Bozeman, Montana who had recently passed away unexpectedly. She was known far and wide for her dynamic personality who had helped untold people in many ways. She was a neighborhood icon. Jean, her daughter-in-law, and I were sitting at a table on Marcia's deck. Suddenly there was a flash of color between us and a cedar waxwing landed on the table less than six inches from our hands. It sat there for several seconds before it proceeded on its way. Jean and I just looked at one another in quiet amazement before we simultaneously said, "Thank-you Marcia." The wonder of birds can console us in various ways and when we need it the most. (I would be interested in hearing of other such experiences that I could include in future issues.)

COOL HUMMINGBIRD FACTS

- **In a normal day of feeding, hummingbirds consume more than their body weight in nectar and insects.
- **Small insects make up a large proportion of a hummingbird's diet. Insects are an especially important source of protein of developing nestlings.
- **It has been estimated that hummingbirds visit 1,000 flowers a day to collect nectar.
- **In cross-section, hummingbird tongues are shaped like a W with twin canals. The tip is forked, with featherlike edges.
- **Hummingbirds require more energy to live than any other warm-blooded animal.
- **Among birds, they have the highest normal body temperature, proportionally the largest brain and heart, the highest heart rate and the fastest wingbeats.

These are just a few random facts about this insect sized dynamo. It seems to me that when individual facets of different species are examined and scientifically proven, the awe inspiring results are jaw-dropping. It is something to keep our own human accomplishments in perspective. Yes, people have invented and developed wonderful things over our known time, but there are so many other living things that co-habit this earth that are so different and way beyond any accomplishments mankind has accomplished or attempted. Just an odd thought to keep things in perspective—especially in an election year.

THE MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

This law, signed into law in 1918 states, "It is unlawful to pursue, hunt, take captive, kill, possess, sell, purchase barter, import, export or transport any migratory bird, or any part, nest or egg of any such bird." Usually I don't consider myself much of a lawbreaker, but I'll admit I haven't followed this law religiously. One feather? That is breaking the law? It does seem extreme, but there was a logical reason for such precise detail.

In 1886, ornithologist Frank Chapman went birding on the streets of New York City. He identified 64 species of birds in 15 different genera on the hats of well to do ladies. Among the favorite feathers were the plumes from Snowy egrets. In the height of the craze, those plumes were valued at \$32 an ounce—the same as gold. Plumes from four birds weigh 1 ounce. The major problem in this reckless collection was plumes are present during the breeding and nesting season. Therefore when a bird was killed for its plumes, the entire nest died. The nests were often in large colonies and ten feet or less above the ground which made them easy prey for plume hunters. This specie was decimated to near extinction in the late 1800s before the Audubon Plumage Act was passed in 1910, banning the sale of plumes. Between 1886 and 1900, more than five million birds per year were killed in the name of fashion.

In 1813 Audubon observed a flock of Passenger pigeons that flew overhead for three days. "The light of the noonday sun was obscured as by an eclipse." At that time it was estimated there were three to five billion Passenger pigeons or $\frac{1}{4}$ of all birds on the continent. Red-winged blackbirds today number about 160 million total in the United States. That means the Passenger pigeon population was 20 to 30 times greater than this most common bird.

In 1857, a group of bird preservationists in Ohio grew concerned over the 300 ton reaps of Passenger pigeons frequently taken and proposed a bill to protect the bird, but the state senate denied it, declaring, "That the Passenger pigeon needed no protecting, being wonderfully prolific." Yet the last documented colony was encountered in 1878 and by 1895, sightings of even one of the birds was rare. In 1914, it was officially declared extinct.

I quoted extensively from the July-August issue of The Bird Watcher's Digest for this article and Hummingbird facts. It would be interesting for me to receive information from members as to which are your favorite magazines or books that have been most helpful for expanding your knowledge about birds, their habitat, feeding habits and whatever else has been helpful for you and how these resources have expanded your knowledge and enjoyment.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps

3221 Town Hall Road

Abbotsford, WI 54405

CLUB CONTACTS

Website: Chequamegonbirdclub.org

Information: info@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Newsletter: newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Birdsightings: connie1@charter.net

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER OUTDOORS

Full moon August 18

Perseid Meteor Showers until August 28

Best viewing August 12

Hawk Ridge migration peaks in mid-September



Cedar waxwing