

Chequamegon Chirps



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The August meeting will continue with the current practice of meeting outdoors.

This session will be at the McMillan Marsh which is a few miles north of Marshfield. To get there from the north, take Highway C east of Spencer for just a bit more than six miles until you come to Highway E. Go south for about two miles and then turn right on Marsh Road. This granite road will dead end in around a half mile at the edge of the marsh. There is a small parking lot there and we'll start out the **5:00 P.M.** session with a short meeting/(picnic if you wish). One point of business will concern the banquet. You will need to bring your own chairs. Then we will go for a stroll on comfortable paths where hopefully we will hear or spot interesting residents and migrating shorebirds, too. If weather is an issue, call Joe at 715-965-3498

Southbound Shorbs

First of all, what the heck is a shorb? I had never heard the word before, but I've since read that it is a contraction word used by some birders instead of shorebirds. So, if you prefer shorebirds or shorbs, this is a very good time to observe them as it is now prime viewing time as they are heading south. Many of them from this large family nest far to the north and once the eggs hatch, parents start heading south and later on when the fledglings are able to fly sufficiently, they go south, too. (Isn't that amazing how first time migrators know where to go with no supervision!) That is why earliest passers through are showing up in this area by July 4th or even earlier.

The killdeer is the most common species of this family in our area and while they do feed in marshy areas, they feed generally on dryer surfaces. These shorebirds are graceful and even elegant in flight and appearance. The migratory birds passing through Wisconsin include some 40 species of plovers, sandpipers, phalaropes and relatives who require specialized and sparsely distributed wetland habitats such as mudflats, shallow water and exposed sandbars.

"While a handful of them nest in Wisconsin, the majority only make pit stops here as they travel thousands of miles from nesting grounds on the arctic tundra and in boreal forests to wintering areas from the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the

U.S. to as far south as Argentina. Having appropriate stopover habitat for these birds to rest and refuel—sometimes doubling their body weight in just days—is critical to survival of individual birds and overall health of populations. Natural occurrence of these habitats is scarce and unpredictable. As a result, DNR and other conservation partners create additional habitat at select public properties each year through water-level management.”

“Beginning in spring, wildlife biologists open water control structures to slowly reduce water levels in impoundments. The goal is to expose new mudflats every week based on recent weather conditions and precipitation amounts. This timing coincides with migrations to present favorable feeding conditions in both spring and summer.”

“By the end of summer, the reduction in water levels results in large, extensive mudflats in a flush of new annual plant growth. After most shorebirds have migrated south in the late summer, biologists will often raise water levels on impoundments, depending on management goals of the site. An important benefit of this management is the large volume of seeds produced by these annual plants. These seeds are consumed en masse by waterfowl, wetland birds and sparrows during fall migration after many of the shorebirds are long gone.”

Funding for this habitat work is usually provided by hunter license dollars, excise taxes on hunting and shooting equipment, through state waterfowl stamp sales, and private funds.

Here is a list of shorebirds that have been verified in Wisconsin that I gleaned from the Sibley Guide to Birds: killdeer, black-bellied plover, American golden-plover, piping plover, semipalmated sandpiper, avocet, black-necked stilt, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, solitary sandpiper, willet, spotted sandpiper, upland sandpiper, whimbrel, Hudsonian godwit, marbled godwit, ruddy turnstone, dunlin, pectoral sandpiper, white-rumped sandpiper, Baird’s sandpiper, western sandpiper, least sandpiper, snowy plover, Wilson’s plover, long-billed curlew, purple sandpiper, sanderling, red knot, curlew sandpiper, ruff, stilt sandpiper, long-billed dowicher, short billed dowicher, buff-breasted sandpiper, American woodcock, common snipe, Wilson’s phalarope, red phalarope, and red-necked phalarope. There may be new verifications or name changes within this group, so if you are looking for exactness, I’d suggest you go to different sources. To sum it up, that is a heck of a lot of different species that are a challenge to identify in the

best of circumstances. Fall plumage tends to be less flashy than spring migrators and there are juveniles who still haven't developed adult plumage.

How do you even begin to identify individual species in such a large group? Slowly and carefully is a good start. Guide books, apps on your phone, individual time out at area wetlands, and perhaps best of all, go with a group of birders. Together we can jointly see, hear and identify more bird sights and sounds while we learn in the process.

Here are some resources that can be helpful to learn more about shorebird ID. David Sibley has published an article called Keys to identifying shorebirds. This article has been described as short, sweet and informative. He breaks down shorebirds into four different groups and gives tips to identify that don't purely rely on plumage (which is the last thing one tends to look at when it comes to shorebird ID). Graphics on this article show unique foraging patterns of different species. If I can find it, I'll bring copies to the meeting.

Be a Better Birder: Shorebird identification (online course)

This is a six-part course that you can complete at your own pace. This is part of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Bird Academy series, which offers a number of online courses to improve your birding skills. This one costs \$29.99.

Information for this writing drew extensively from material written by Ryan Bradley, a Department of Natural Resources research scientist who coordinates bird monitoring activities round the state and Jason Fleener, Department of Natural Resources wetland habitat biologist. Also, there are quotes from an article in the Madison Audubon by Alisha White. I pulled material from the Sibley Guide to Birds and the Encyclopedia of North American Birds and called one innocent bystander—who may not be totally innocent-- who prefers to remain anonymous. What I'm saying is I hope the material is reasonably accurate, but consider the source.

We are fortunate to have nearby public wetlands where there are opportunities to stop and see what's there. Mc Millan—where we're going is just on the north edge of Marshfield—and Mead isn't that far from Wausau, so you can combine some shopping and a chance to see that next lifetime bird! And there is Horicon Marsh. This is one of the premier wetlands in the U.S. Highway 49 offers the best access to the north end, but there are roads that go into and around the whole marsh. A three mile loop on the northwest corner off of Highway 49 offers great viewing and there are information centers on both the north and east sides, too.

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August and September Events

Full moons August 22 and September 21

Fledglings are finding their way in the world.

Shore birds heading south.

Fall color is not far off.

Bountiful garden production continues.

Farm crops look great.



Pictured here is a greater yellowlegs and a lesser yellowlegs.