



Chequamegon Chirps

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHEQUAMEGON BIRD CLUB

MEDFORD, WISCONSIN

DECEMBER 2013

VOLUME 32 NUMBER 12



NEXT MEETING:

Date: Monday, December 16, 2013

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Medford Public Library

Program: Winter Holidays Celebration

Winter Holiday Celebration

- * Bring cookies or other snacks to share. Club officers will furnish punch.
- * Enjoy bird-related activities, games, and conversation.
- * Silent Auction: Donate new or like-new items that may be of interest to other club members. Proceeds of the auction will go to fund club projects. Items donated so far include birder mystery books, framed prints.
- * Please bring a donation for the food pantry. They are always in need of food.
- * Bring any frozen deer hearts you may have. They will be taken to REGI.



Winter Finch Forecast

Ron Pittaway's Winter Finch Forecast 2013-2014 is out and the word is that this will not be an irruption year for winter finches. Ontario's cone crops and deciduous seed/berry crops are generally above average to excellent. Very good to bumper spruce cone crops extend across Canada's boreal forest from Yukon east to Atlantic Canada. Cone crops are good to excellent in central Ontario and southern Quebec with heavy crops extending east through the Adirondack Mountains of New York and northern New England States.

Most Pine Grosbeaks will remain in the north this winter because Mountain Ash berry crops are very good to bumper across the boreal forest from Alaska to Newfoundland. European Mountain Ash, Crabapple and Buckthorn have heavy berry crops in southern Ontario so if grosbeaks wander south they will have plenty of food.

Red Crossbills in small numbers are being reported in northern Ontario, usually in pine stands where Red Pine cone crops are fair to good. White-winged Crossbills should be widely dispersed this winter given the enormity of the cone crops. Spruce cone crops are generally good to excellent from the Yukon east across the boreal forest to Newfoundland and south into the northern states.

Most Common Redpolls should stay in the north this winter because birch, alder and conifer seed crops are generally good across the boreal forest. Hoary Redpolls are not expected in the south this winter as this is not an irruption year and they are usually found in flocks of Common Redpolls.

Pine Siskins will winter across the north because conifer crops are excellent. Evening Grosbeaks should visit sunflower feeders in Ontario and the Northeast this winter. Numbers are reportedly increasing due to expanding spruce budworm outbreaks in northern forests.

So, because of the abundant food available to the north of us, it does not appear that we will have many winter finches moving to our area. That is good news for the birds, though we will miss seeing them at our feeders and on our Christmas counts.

Snowy Owl Invasion

Long before it caught the attention of Harry Potter fans, the snowy owl already represented its own kind of magic for fans of the outdoors. This powerful white owl is emblematic of the far north, spending summer from the treeline north to the northernmost land of Canada, Scandinavia and Siberia. Even in winter, most snowy owls in North America stay near the Arctic Circle, with only a few drifting to southern Canada and the northern United States.

At least, that's what happens in an average year. About one winter in every four, the numbers of snowy owls moving south in early winter are noticeably increased. Then the ghostly birds are spotted in dozens of locations south of the Canadian border, creating much excitement among birders.

We had seen a big flight just two years ago, in winter 2011-2012, with owls from coast to coast and many in the interior south to Kansas and Missouri. The following winter, 2012-2013, had seen a smaller "echo" flight develop. So it was assumed that numbers would be much lower this year, in a return to "normal".

This assumption was wrong. During the last week of November and first days of December 2013, it's become apparent that something is going on with snowy owls. Even people who pay close attention to bird records were taken by surprise because it developed so rapidly.

By the 30th of November, at least 12 snowies were on or near the New Hampshire coast, with up to five visible from one spot. On December 3, observers counted at least 8 in the Boston area, 5 visible from one spot in Salisbury, 13 visible from one spot in Rowley and in Maine compilers struggled to keep up with all the sightings along the coast. They have been spotted as far south as Virginia and North Carolina, with two or perhaps three even reaching Bermuda. This year's invasion, so far, is focused in the east.

However, closer to home, Wisconsin is on the western edge of the flight and has had over 40 sightings reported so far. There have been reports from Clark Co. and west of Medford, so keep your eyes open for one of these beauties!

Christmas Bird Counts

There are several Christmas Bird Counts coming up in the next few weeks and they could all use some volunteers. What better way to shake off the "cabin fever" that sets in when the days are short and dreary than to spend a day driving around looking for birds. It may also be your best chance to spot one of those vagrant Snowy Owls. You don't have to be an expert at identifying or counting birds, you'll be paired with someone who is and have a unique opportunity to learn from them. Here are the count dates and contact information:

Owen, December 14th
Contact Gayle Davis @ 715-229-2022

Spencer, December 15th
Contact Connie Decker @ 715-654-5819 or
Ken Luepke @ 715-659-3910 or
Cell 715-613-0262



Willard, December 22nd
Contact Connie Decker @ 715-654-5819 or
Ken Luepke @ 715-659-3910 /
Cell 715-613-0262

Medford, December 28th
Contact Joe Scott @ 715-965-3498

Gilman, January 1st
Contact Connie Decker @ 715-654-5819 or
Ken Luepke @ 715-659-3910 or
Cell 715-613-0262



Bird Reports (October 21 - November 18, 2013)

Checklist observers: *Connie Decker, Hildegard and Loretta Kuse, Ken Luepke, Claire Romanak, Cam Scott, and Joe Scott*

Total Number of Species Observed this month is: 81

(Only names of observers for rare or unusual sightings are included in the list below.)

- Snow Goose, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan (Luepke), Tundra Swan, American Wigeon, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck
- Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, Greater Prairie-Chicken (Luepke), Wild Turkey
- Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron
- Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel
- American Coot
- Sandhill Crane, American Golden Plover (Decker/Luepke), Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Sanderling (Decker/Luepke), Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe
- Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove
- Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker (Romanak), Pileated Woodpecker
- Eastern Phoebe
- Northern Shrike
- Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark
- Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper (C. Scott), Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, European Starling
- American Pipit, American Tree Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting
- Northern Cardinal
- Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird
- Purple Finch, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

Invader Alert

Forget the House Sparrow. The fastest spreading exotic bird in U.S. history is the Eurasian Collared-dove, plumper than the Mourning Dove and with a black stripe on its neck. Since the 1990's it has expanded from Florida to Alaska. Native to the Indian subcontinent, a few dozen escaped in the Bahamas after a 1974 pet store robbery. Some of the escapees or their offspring presumably flew to Florida, where, in 1982, researchers first recorded them breeding. The doves, which prefer suburban and agricultural landscapes, now cover most of the Lower 48 – except the Northeast – and a swath of western Canada to southern Alaska. “It’s almost unfathomable how successful they’ve been and how quickly they’ve spread,” says David N. Bonter, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s assistant director of citizen science. “I don’t think anyone saw it coming.” They’ve likewise colonized Europe from southeast to northwest, leading scientists to surmise that juveniles are genetically wired to disperse in that

direction. While little is known about whether the doves displace native species, the potential is certainly there, says Bonter, particularly in the food-scarce North.

I first saw these doves in southern Wisconsin in 2004 and have seen them in Montana, Washington, Texas, Arizona and Florida. So take a good look at those doves you see under your feeders, you just might spot a Eurasian Collared-dove mixed in with the Mourning Doves.



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Club Officers

President – Claire Romanak
Vice-president – Connie Decker
Secretary – Gayle Davis
Treasurer – Cam Scott

Other Club Contacts

Web site: www.chequamegonbirdclub.org

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Newsletter Email: newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

(Cathy Mauer, editor)

Bird sightings: Connie Decker

December – January Outdoors

- December 17 – Full Moon
- December 21 – Winter Solstice
- Continue feeding our winter visitors and watching for winter finches
- Keep your feeders clean
- Watch for mink and otter slides in snow
- On warmer days watch for snow fleas. These moving black specks often appear in old footprints.
- White-tailed bucks begin shedding antlers.
- Watch for animal tracks – they often tell a story of who has been about and often of what they have been doing.
- Black bear cubs are born.



Birder's Bookshelf

On Rare Birds

By Anita Albus

This book tells compelling stories of ten rare or extinct bird species – from the demise of the once abundant Passenger Pigeon to the shooting death of the last Carolina Parakeet in the wild. The illustrations and images are stunning and the stories fascinating - from the failed attempt to save the last Spix's Macaw in the wild to the Barn Owls who are having a hard time finding prey on modern farms. It makes clear why the demise of a species is a great loss both to the natural world and our culture. Anyone who loves birds will appreciate these stories.