

# Chequamegon Chirps



Medford, Wisconsin

December 2014

Volume 33 Number 12

## WINTER HOLIDAY PARTY

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 15**

Medford Public Library  
7 p.m.



*Celebrate the beginning of winter, which means the days will soon be longer, and before we know it, spring migrants will be returning.*

- Bring cookies, bars, snacks to share (Club officers will furnish a beverage.)
- Silent Auction - Donate new or like-new items that may be of interest to club members. Proceeds of the auction will go to fund club projects. Bird- and nature- related items are especially enjoyed, but other items are also appreciated.
- Please bring a non-perishable food donation for the food pantry. Our area food pantries are always in need of food.
- Enjoy bird activities, quizzes, and conversation.

## Christmas Bird Counts

The Chequamegon Bird Club helps sponsor six Christmas Bird Counts in our area, including:

- Sunday, December 14 - Spencer
- Sunday, December 21 - Willard
- Friday, December 26 - Clam Lake
- Saturday, December 27 - Medford
- Thursday, January 1 - Gilman
- Saturday, January 3 - Owen

Contact Ken Luepke (715-659-3910) if you are interested in helping with the Spencer, Willard, or Gilman counts; Joe Scott (715-965-3498) for the Medford count, and Gayle Davis (715-229-2022) for the Owen count. Birders of all abilities are welcome, wanted, and still needed for some of the counts. Those who are not confident in their i.d. skills will be paired with more experienced birders.

Each count covers a circle with a diameter of fifteen miles. The circles are divided into sections, and a

group of counters travels their assigned section, recording every bird they see or hear, both number and species.

Data from the counts, which have been going on in the United States for over a hundred years, is used to track bird population and distribution trends, helping to identify potential problems facing our birds.

## Thank you to Ryan Stockwell

Those who attended our annual banquet in October enjoyed a great presentation by Ryan Stockwell concerning bird conservation and agriculture. We were doubly fortunate when Ryan donated his speaker stipend back to the club. At our November meeting, members voted to put the money into our special projects fund to be used for purchasing birding backpacks that will be placed in area libraries. The backpacks will include binoculars, bird books, and information about birdwatching and bird conservation. Individuals and families will be able to check them out from the libraries.

## Okay, they're not birds, but they fly, sort of ...

If you feed birds and live in a wooded area, you may have night visitors soaring to your feeders. While they don't have wings that flap, flying squirrels may be gliding onto your feeders. Wisconsin (and North America) has two species of flying squirrel, the northern (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) the southern (*Glaucomys volans*). Here in north central Wisconsin, we have both. The northern flying squirrel is slightly larger and its belly hairs are grayish toward the base of the hair whereas the belly hairs of the southern are all white. The tail of the northern is longer and has a blackish tip; the tail of the Southern is one color. While southern flying squirrels are almost entirely arboreal, northern flying squirrels frequently forage on the ground. Both are nocturnal.



The main structure that allows flying squirrels to glide, or volplane, is the patagium, a flap of skin that extends between the front and back legs. Another structure, the styliiform process, extends from the wrist and widens the patagium. The tail is flattened and is used somewhat like a rudder. In order to "fly", they climb up a tree or other structure, glide in a downward arc, and land on another tree, then repeat the process. They land head upward. They can also maneuver well enough to make 90° turns. Glides of 60 to 70 feet are usual, but they can glide nearly 300 feet.

Fungus, nuts, seeds, and fruits make up the main part of their diet, but if other food becomes scarce, they will eat buds, especially in late winter. They will also eat meat, including young birds. Their eating of fungus plays an important role in forest ecology for they spread the fungal mycorrhizae that are essential to many forest trees and other plants.

Flying squirrels mate in spring and two to four young (up to six) are born after about a forty day gestation

period. The pups are hairless and blind when born. The patagium is already formed, however. They are usually weaned at about two months of age but may stay with the mother for several more months. They usually have only one litter.

Active year around, flying squirrels do not hibernate. To help them keep warm, they often nest communally, especially during the winter.

A good source of more information: <http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/er/ER0678.pdf>.

## And these are birds, but they don't fly ...

Penguins, emus, ostriches - they all have wings but don't fly. There are about 40 species of flightless birds. Many of these are in the group of birds called ratites, which includes not only emus and ostriches, but also rheas, cassowaries, and kiwis. Ratites are named for their flat sternum (ratis is Latin for raft), which lacks the keel of most birds, which is where flight muscles are attached. No flight muscles, no need for a keel. There are also many lesser known flightless species such as some of the steamer ducks, a number of teal, grebes, and rails, and the Kakapo, a parrot from New Zealand, which has more flightless birds than any other country.

Flightlessness evolved for a variety of reasons, including lack of predators, competition for limited resources, and efficiency. This evolution occurred



Kakapo

multiple times, and many of the flightless birds are not closely related to each other.

And then there are chickens, most of which don't fly very well, if at all. However, their flightlessness is a result of breeding by humans rather than natural evolution.

## Bird Reports: October 21 - November 17, 2014

Participants this month were *Connie Decker, Ken Luepke, Joan and Joe Rickert, Claire Romanak, Cam Scott, and Joe Scott.*

Total Number of Species Observed this month is: 91

- Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan (Luepke), Tundra Swan
- Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck
- Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey
- Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant
- Great Blue Heron, Great Egret
- Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk (C. Scott), Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle (Luepke), American Kestrel
- American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Whooping Crane (Decker)
- Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe
- Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull
- Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove
- Great Horned Owl, Snowy Owl (Decker), Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher
- Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker
- Northern Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark
- Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse (Decker), Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit
- Cedar Waxwing
- American Tree Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting
- Northern Cardinal
- Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird
- Purple Finch, House Finch, Common Redpoll (C. Scott), Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

*Please note that some families may be grouped together due to space limitations.*

## Congratulations to Laura Erickson

Laura Erickson, who many of you may know as an author and for her radio program "For the Birds", recently received the ABA (American Birding Association) Roger Tory Peterson Award for Promoting the Cause of Birding, in recognition of her lifetime of leadership in making birding and conservation more accessible and engaging to a broad spectrum of birders.

Some of the books she has authored or co-authored include *For the Birds: An Uncommon Guide (Appointment with Nature)*, *101 Ways To Help Birds*, *The Bird Watching Answer Book: Everything You Need to Know to Enjoy Birds in Your Backyard and Beyond*, *National Geographic Pocket Guide to the Birds of North America*, *Twelve Owls*, and *Sharing The Wonder Of Birds With Kids*. Her newest book, to be released next March, is *Into the Nest: Intimate Views of the Courting, Parenting, and Family Lives of Familiar Birds*.

Podcasts of Laura's radio show are available online as free podcasts. Her newer podcasts are, at least for now, available here: <http://podcast.lauraerickson.com>, while some of the older ones can be found on her website [www.lauraerickson.com](http://www.lauraerickson.com), where you will also find links to her photo galleries and other information. She also writes a blog at <http://lauraerickson.blogspot.com>.

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### Officers

*President* — Claire Romanak  
*Vice-President* — Connie Decker  
*Secretary* — Joe Scott  
*Treasurer* — Cam Scott

### Other Club Contacts

*Website:* [chequamegonbirdclub.org](http://chequamegonbirdclub.org)  
*Information:* [info@chequamegonbirdclub.org](mailto:info@chequamegonbirdclub.org)  
*Newsletter:* [newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org)  
(Cathy Mauer, editor)  
*Bird Sightings:* Connie Decker



## December - January Outdoors

- Joan Rickert likes the imagery in this excerpt from Henry Van Dyke's *The First Christmas Tree*, published in 1907:  
"The sun, declining through its shallow arch, dropped behind the trees. Darkness followed swiftly, as if it had been a bird of prey waiting for this sign to swoop down upon the world."  
• Full Moon - January 4
- Clean your feeders. This is especially important if you have large numbers of birds visiting.
- Birds are also attracted to water, even in winter. Heated bird baths are available or you put out fresh water daily.

## Birding on the Web

*IBC, the Internet Bird Connection*  
<http://ibc.lynxeds.com/>

This is a great website for browsing. It features a collection of photos, videos, and sound recordings of birds around the world and includes sightings maps, much like eBird. So far there are 136,352 photos covering 9,334 species, 89,231 videos covering 8,028 species, and 14,029 sound recordings covering 5,860 species.

Take a look at the Black-breasted Snake Eagle, the Mugimaki Flycatcher, or a Yellow-chinned Spinetail. Or look for well-known bird friends like *Poecile atricapillus*.

You can also upload your own files or take a bird i.d. quiz.