

Chequamegon Chirps



Medford, Wisconsin

December, 2015

Volume 34 Number 12

WINTER HOLIDAY PARTY

MONDAY, DECEMBER, 2015

MEDFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY AT 7 PM

This meeting is our opportunity to celebrate the soon to be lengthening days even though winter, as we know it, hasn't started yet. The highlight of the evening could be when Joe leads the other officers in "The Chicken Dance." He has considerable experience in this activity with his years of being a significant member of The University of Wisconsin Marching Band. Others may join in and hopefully no one will suffer permanent injury.

Officers will furnish a beverage. The rest of us are asked to bring something to share such as some kind of snack.

Silent Auction: Donate new or interesting items of potential interest to members. Proceeds help to fund club projects. Bird and other nature-related items are especially appropriate, but other items also help the club's treasury.

Non-perishable food items: Area food pantries are always in need of food. Any items you bring for donation will be put to good use.

Channel 20-2 will present a program about Bird-scapes for your backyard on December 16 from 9 to 10 pm. It should be an informative and entertaining hour.

Tee-shirts: Short-sleeve \$6, long-sleeve \$9 Good quality shirts with the Chequamegon logo will be available at the meeting. Excellent gifts.

Dates and organizers for the 2015-2016 Christmas Bird Counts:

Spencer: Sunday, December 20th Ken Luepke/Connie Decker 715-654-5819 or 715-659-3910

Owen: Saturday, December 26th Gayle Davis 715-229-2022

Willard: Sunday, December 27th Ken/Connie 715-654-5819 or 715-659-3910

Clam Lake: Wednesday, December 18th Keith Merkel 715-384-2383

Gilman: Friday, January 1st Ken/Connie 715-654-5819 or 715-659-3910

Medford: Saturday, January 2nd Joe Scott 715-965-3498

If you have never been on a Christmas Count, you should try it. It can be riding with others in a car for the whole or part of the day. If you lack practice, you will be put with more experienced birders. This is also an opportunity for a non-club member to participate in an educational and fun opportunity. Invite a friend.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Today Christmas Bird Counts are a major event that occurs annually all over North America from December 14th to January 5th. Tens of thousands of people participate and tens of millions of birds are recorded. This tradition developed as a breakaway effort from the hunting done on this day. At that time the hero of the day would be the one who bagged the greatest number of birds and other game. Frank Chapman, a curator of ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History and the man who established the magazine Bird-Lore in 1899 proposed a different activity that didn't require slaughtering birds. In 1899 he organized trial counts in Princeton, New Jersey and New York's Central Park. Participants were asked to record weather, list their area, tally their time and record birds encountered.

The first national count was held Christmas Day 1900 and 25 reports were published in the February 1901 issue of Bird-lore. This innocuous beginning has developed into an annual pastime and passion for many that provides a wealth of data for research. It offers substantial proof there is global warming taking place and how it impacts individual species and birds in general.

The Chequamegon Bird Club is a part of this massive bird count. We are somewhat unusual that members are largely responsible for six counts. Clam Lake is more to the north and while numbers there tend to be smaller than in the other five counts, oftentimes there are birds recorded there that aren't found in any of our other counts.

Here are a few figures from the Willard, Gilman and Spencer counts. Willard in 1979 and Gilman in 1980 were started by Sam Robbins. Ken Luepke established the Spencer count in 1983. A count area is a circle seven and one half miles in radius. That doesn't sound like too much area until you calculate the size of that circle. It is 176.6 square miles. That means there is a heck of a lot of ground to cover. Weather conditions for that particular day can have a profound impact on what gets recorded. Wind, rain, snow, fog, temperatures can all raise hob with recording bird numbers. It is an imprecise science. Different species can be much more or less visible or quiet than others. An area can be well covered, but the birds just happened to be someplace else, quit or hidden when the counters were in the area. Counters have different skill levels or abilities. I'm particularly aware of that as my hearing declines. It is embarrassing to have a person on the other side of the vehicle hear birds on my side that I'm not aware of. However, I feel I'm still able to contribute in some way or another by driving, recording information or sometimes spotting something that others hadn't seen. Although there was the time a few years ago... We had recently seen a nice flock of Snow-buntings and I thought I saw another flock as we went over a series of small hills on the Owen Count. As we got closer we discovered my "flock of Snow-buntings" was flatbed railroad cars crossing the road and casting flickering shadows. The fellow with me astutely observed, "That may be the first time anyone has ever mistaken a train for a bird."

Gilman, Spencer and Willard run roughly in a north to south location. There is enough distance among them that usually there are some significant number differences among various species every year. Will have that information in the January or February Chirps. Gilman has recorded 111,032 total birds in 35 years through 1395 hours of observation. Eighty different species were documented with a remarkable 54 species recorded in 2006. In 1985, only the third Christmas Count record of a Three-toed Woodpecker occurred. Forty five Ruffed Grouse were counted in 2007 which was at least the state high for any count.

Willard counts have recorded 177,592 total birds in 1426 party hours. Forty seven species were counted in 2004 with 73 different species over 36 years.

Spencer counts have come up with 177,235 birds counted in 1535 party hours. In 1989 this count had 92 Prairie Chickens which was the high count for that specie in any Christmas Count in North America. Unfortunately, it also has been documented that their numbers dwindled to the point where they no longer exist in the Spencer Count. To end on a more positive note, House Finches and Wild Turkeys were not recorded on earlier counts, and now are common on most of the counts.

Monthly bird report participants

Gayle Davis, Connie Decker, Hildegard and Loretta Kuse, Ken Luepke, Joan and Joe Rickert, Claire Romanak, and Cam Scott

Total species for this month is 94. Last month 118. November 2014 was 91.

Cackling Goose (Decker/Luepke), Snow Goose, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Tundra Swan, Wood Duck, American Widgeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Green-Winged Teal, Canvasback, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck.

Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey.

Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, (Romanak)

Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin (Luepke),

American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Whooping Crane (Luepke), American Golden Plover (Luepke), Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, White-rumped Sandpiper (Luepke), Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed Gull.

Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove.

Easter Screech Owl (Decker), Great-horned Owl, Barred Owl.

Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, (Davis), Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker.

Northern Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing.

American Tree Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting.

Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Purple Finch, House Finch, White-winged Crossbill (Davis), Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch and House Sparrow.

Last month I created a new specie. What was supposed to be a Dark-eyed Junco was written as a Dark-eyed Sparrow. Sorry for that goof. Unless—it was a first time recorded cross between a Junco and Sparrow or maybe the result of a scrap between a House Sparrow and a tougher bird that resulted in that House Sparrow having two black eyes. Until another one shows up, I won't try to submit the new creation to the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology Records Committee. Speaking along those lines—in a more serious fashion—what would be some of the rarest finds in this area of Wisconsin? Are there any one time occurrences that have documentation? I'd be interested in any such stories to include in some future issue. I remember an old timer in our neighborhood telling me about one time when his uncle walked along the river adjacent to our house and he could not avoid stepping on Passenger Pidgeon egg shells from recent hatchings. I assume this was in the later 1800's and while there is no certification of this that I know of, it kind of rings true to me. If anyone knows this probably wasn't feasible, let me know and I'll write a retraction. They probably weren't Dark-eyed Sparrow Eggs. Just wondering and checking to see if you are paying attention.

Chequamegon Chirps
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December-January Outdoors

Start of winter: December 22

Full moon: December 26

December 14 to January 5: Christmas Count period

Record high temperatures and open water are keeping more species in the area.

Pussy willows are now blooming in some places.

Some plants are breaking dormancy.

State frogs coming out of hibernation further south