

# Chequamegon Chirps



December 17, 2017 Volume 36 Number 12

## Annual Christmas Holiday Party

Monday December 17 at the Medford Library

The first two Christmas Bird Counts will be completed when we gather for our December meeting with the opportunity for you to get final details to participate in the remaining counts. At this session there will be a silent auction of donations brought by members to help fund future club projects. New or well preserved bird or nature items would make potentially timely Christmas gifts. If items are unsold, it is requested the donors take them back home. And a trivia contest to boot. The officers will provide liquid refreshments and according to Gayle, members are encouraged to bring your own drink container—cups and some kind of snack treat. If anyone wants to donate non-perishable food items to a food pantry, those can be brought to the meeting and they will be delivered to an appropriate place. Chequamegon logo tee-shirts available. Long sleeve \$9 or short \$6. Large and X-large sizes only.

Since this is the last meeting of the year, hopefully we can get updates on specie numbers from all members. If you aren't able to attend, please send your numbers to Cathy Mauer at [cathymauer@gmail.com](mailto:cathymauer@gmail.com) Last year the total count members recorded within Wisconsin was 257. In 2015 the total was 238 and the previous 12 year average 253. I hope these figures are accurate as I took this data from last year's Chirps, but now I can't remember my source. These are impressive numbers. A big thank you to all have participated in the collection and organization of this data.

What new species have you seen afield or have coming to your feeders? Where do Snow Buntings go when early snows melt? Are we on the western edge of the Snowy Owl eruption? Why so many questions? Well, why not? Each year and area is unique in its own way. Our particular feeders or yard aren't significant in the larger picture of things, but still, what we can contribute adds up and all together becomes relevant. Each one of us has a part to play. Back to the less philosophical questions. Last month I had one Pine Siskin show up at a feeder one time and that was it for more than a week. Later, another one and then two showed up. Today all three feeders were covered with them at times. I suspect others may be reporting similar stories. Two different times a single and then two Red Pols have come for feeder seeds, but not today (Sunday, Dec. 10). Slate-colored Junco numbers have increased along with Mourning Doves.

I hear one of one report of a Snowy Owl seen between Dorchester and Athens on a one time basis. Gordy and Cathy recorded White-winged Crossbills north of Medford. Who knows what else might appear either by our December 18<sup>th</sup> meeting or on upcoming Christmas Counts? If you or others are interested, (non-members are able to participate also) the Medford count is Dec. 30, Willard Dec. 31 and Gilman January 1<sup>st</sup>. What a great way to finish up this year and start the new one. News flash. An adult Snowy male was seen on a silo south of Dorchester Monday, 12-12. Merry Christmas Connie.

## Counting birds at Christmas time

The tradition of counting birds at Christmas time started in 1900, so this the 118<sup>th</sup> edition of this activity. Before that, it was more common for hunters to go on shooting sprees to see how many birds they could bag in a day with no limits on anything. Fortunately, the National Audubon Society started the non-shooting version of "bagging" birds which continues to grow every year. "Currently, data which is 100% volunteer-generated, has become a crucial part of the U.S. Government's natural monitoring database critical to understanding the health of bird populations. This work is vital in monitoring the status and health of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere."

"More than 2,300 other counts are taken from the Arctic Circle to the south tip of South America by 70,000 volunteer bird counters. Count results from 1900 to present are available through Audubon's website at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc)" ##

Wisconsin has 110 of the 15 mile diameter counts, so the six Chequamegon Bird Club members do represent the work of more than 5% of them, to organize, drive the miles, record numbers and pass on the information so that even if you only saw one Black-capped Chickadee, that information is recorded and included within the total data for 118 years, and counting, on the Audubon website. Pretty cool. And in addition to that, there are the priceless memories of seeing particular birds and the experiences, usually with other enthusiasts.

Last year, club members along with volunteers, contributed 276 hours on the six counts to record 26,261 birds of 51 species. Here's how they ranked in numbers by specie. Canada Goose-1, Wood Duck-1, Merlin-1, Belted Kingfisher-1, Brown Creeper-1, Rusty Blackbird-1, Northern Flicker-2, Tufted Titmouse-3, Brown-headed Cowbird-3, Barred Owl-4, Sharp-shinned Hawk-4, Cooper's Hawk-4, Golden-crowned Kinglet-4, Evening Grosbeak-8, Cedar Waxwing-9, Ring-necked Pheasant-12, American Robin-19, Northern Shrike-22, Bohemian Waxwing-23, American Kestrel-24, Rough-legged Hawk-25, Red-breasted Nuthatch-32, Pileated Woodpecker-32, Ruffed Grouse-37, House Finch-45, Pine Siskin-46, Horned Lark-56, Purple Finch-57, Red-tailed Hawk-60, Common Raven-81, Bald Eagle-98, Red-bellied Woodpecker-113, White-winged Crossbill-147, Northern Cardinal-171, Hairy Woodpecker - 182, Mallard -248, White-breasted Nuthatch-312, Downy Woodpecker-316, Snow Bunting-367, American Tree Sparrow-399, Common Redpoll-558, Blue Jay-779, Dark-eyed Junco-780, Mourning Dove-952, Wild Turkey-991, American Goldfinch-1,256, American Crow-2,206, Rock Pigeon-2,291, Black-capped Chickadee-2,808, House Sparrow-2,826, European Starling-7,839.

Each of the 16 counts is a 15 mile diameter circle which encompasses 176.6 square miles of area so the Chequamegon Bird Club is collecting data from over 1,000 square miles each year. It can be argued that this is "squishy" data. OK, but the consistency and total volume of data has credibility. The volunteers, with varying degrees of capability, are amazing honest in what they report. The currently popular trend toward, "alternate facts," at least in political representation, hasn't crept over to bird counting, and hopefully, never will.

Different birds, with different feeding patterns, habitat preferences, activity, and vocalization levels vary widely which can impact how easily their numbers are counted. If birds come readily to feeders, people are more aware if they are around or not. When a count is in an urban area, those feeder birds are more apt to be counted. In a forested region with few roads, counters are less apt to get to where some birds are. Even size of a bird can make a difference. A Brown Creeper which is innocuous in addition to a quieter call is harder to detect than a Common Raven which is many times bigger and louder. Ruffed Grouse, except near daylight and dark when they are feeding, may be well hidden and easily bypassed. Owls are usually hidden during daylight hours.

With consistency and quantity of information, The Christmas Bird Counts have gathered invaluable information about health, patterns of migration as well as rises or declines of general bird populations.

##These quotes are from an article by Anna Marie Hansen and Tom Nicholls in the Country Today newspaper.

## Cardinal Time

The word cardinal has many different meanings. My favorite is a red bird. However, let's look at some of the other variations. If you currently are a cardinal, you might be in line to become the next pope. It would help if you had cardinal virtues such as justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude. You could practice these virtues while facing one of the four cardinal directions and holding a cardinal flower and reciting cardinal vowels and cardinal numbers. Or you could moonlight a mascot for a major league baseball team in St. Louis—even though your beak (bill) should be red rather than yellow.

Cardinals are admired for their beautiful color and songs. They are the state bird for Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Ohio. By the state names in that list, you can tell where their greatest concentrations have been. But this is a bird whose territory is expanding, especially northward. In addition to global warming, it is felt their northward movement is helped by bird feeding stations. They don't migrate. Being highly territorial, they do get pushed from their nest sites. Usually that movement is five miles or less. The defense desire sometimes results in males attacking windows or hubcaps where they see their reflection.

Cardinals are generally the first to arrive at your feeders and the last birds you'll see at your feeders. There are three theories for this by Stanley Temple, professor emeritus at UW Wisconsin. First, the male's bright plumage is less conspicuous in dim light and less easily seen by predators. Second, Cardinals usually live close to the feeders while other species roost further away and it takes them longer to arrive and they need to leave sooner in the evening to safely roost. Third, they have less or no competition in low light conditions.

Ryan Brady, an ornithologist with the Department of Natural Resources says numbers of Cardinals are strong, their status "common." An estimate by Partners in Flight put the global Cardinal population at 120 million with 77 percent in the United States. From personal experience, I don't believe I saw a Cardinal in this area until some 40 years ago. This year there are only a couple, but I do see them on a fairly regular basis. Our high feeder numbers were 13 one winter some years ago. Seeing a cluster of males in fresh snow is an unforgettable sight. Their early songs signal that warmer weather is getting closer and their pairing up, nest building, and hatching of eggs will soon follow. Always good things to think about in the later stages of winter.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps

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#### CLUB CONTACTS

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Bird sightings: [connie1@charter.net](mailto:connie1@charter.net)

December and January Events:

Winter Solstice December 21

Full moon January 2

Snow can highlight tracks and their stories

Data collected from Christmas Bird Counts

Bear cubs are born