

Chequamegon Chirps



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Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all of us. This coming Monday, 7:00 P.M. at the Medford Library will be a good time to celebrate the season and the soon to arrive winter equinox. Just think, in only a few days, daylight will—even if almost undetectable at first—become just a bit more each day, as we proceed toward another spring. That is as good a reason as any to spend an evening goofing off. To make it more organized and sort of official there will be a trivia quiz (I think) and a silent auction of bird and wildlife themed objects. White elephants are a part of that, aren't they? Members are encouraged to bring appropriate things, remembering that if they don't sell, you are expected to take them back home—at least until next year. This year's junk might become next year's treasure. Seriously, (something I tend to practice less of as another year draws to an end) any funds raised with these sales will go to club projects that develop during the year. Officers will provide liquid refreshments and members are welcome to bring treats. Traditionally, many members bring their own cups for this event. It is a good opportunity to show off a favorite cup. I now have several cups with pictures of grandchildren on them which I'm positive you would be amazed and impressed to see. Grandparents can be so obliviously obnoxious to introduce such wonderful individuals to innocent bystanders. Hope you can come to the Medford Library on Monday the 17th at 7:00. Guests are always welcome.

A couple more odds and ends pertaining to the evening. Cam would appreciate membership payments to help her establish a 2019 membership list as soon as possible. Also, The Owen Christmas count will be Saturday, December 15th and Spencer the following day. That should add some interesting information for the meeting and it is a reminder that, if you haven't yet, it would be a good time to contact Connie to still sign up for either count. That phone number is 715-654-5819. At this late date it probably would be to ride along in a car since individual territories will have been determined by now. It is really helpful to have extra people in cars to record data and extra eyes always see more birds. And under the right circumstances, an extra pusher to help get out of a drift or shallow ditch. (There have been recorded instances of Bird Count drivers paying more attention to some interesting bird than where they were driving.)

Christmas Bird Counts

The Chequamegon Bird Club members participate in and organize an impressive number of Christmas Bird Counts each year. Personally, it is among my favorite activities of the year. It is a case of a fun activity that produces valuable information which is compiled and used for research. Data collected becomes preserved in a national data base. Each bird recorded through sight or sound is added to the information gathered in the previous 118 years. We become a part of the cadre of volunteers that number 70,000 for 2,300 Christmas Bird Counts that stretch from the Arctic Circle to the tip of South America. That in itself is impressive. How neat to be part of something of that scale.

Hundreds of peer-reviewed scientific articles have resulted from analysis done with Christmas Bird Count data. This information is also used by United States federal agencies as an important basis for making decisions about birds. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition, a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holiday rather than hunt them.

On a local basis, we contribute substantially to counts in the Willard, Spencer, Owen, Medford, Gilman and Clam Lake areas. These are among the 110 counts done in Wisconsin. They are completed within ten days of either side of Christmas and involve circles 15 miles in diameter. Any wild birds seen or heard within that area by counters, who usually travel by car, and are supplemented by others counting birds at their home feeders within the 24 hour day. Domestic farm birds as well as any pet birds are excluded.

Some species are really good at staying hidden and are difficult to document. The sheer volume of data collected over the length of time is the greatest gathering ever by citizen scientists. This boils down to the first Chickadee seen on a local count by a first time birder to the most exotic documented by a full-fledged scientist using the most sophisticated equipment. To me, it is sort of like looking at a building the size of the Pentagon and thinking, "Hey, a few of those bricks are there because of my efforts." That gives me a quiet feeling of satisfaction.

In addition to the statistical data compiled there are a whole lot of memories accumulated in a less organized fashion. Those can range from memorable bird sightings to the odd to outright goofy behavior by birds and people. It is entertaining to gather at the end of a day of birding to warm up and compare numbers of species and individuals in friendly competition. The warmth of friends gathering together to share the day's experiences is enlightening both for friendship and information. Each circle area is 177 square miles which produces contrasts in birds recorded among different parties. Each

group finds unexpected birds and sometimes shocking misses. That's to be expected and a part of the day. Several club birders have more than thirty years of experience on particular counts. The variation of weather conditions can be memorable in itself. Counts are rarely cancelled due to weather once a date is set. Birders are a tough lot and are not stopped by rain, sleet, snow or super cold temperatures. Welcome to the world of 2018-2019 Christmas Bird Counts. Hope you can be in at least one. Guests are welcome.

Dates and contacts for this year's counts. Owen: Saturday, Dec 15—Gayle 715-229-2022. Spencer: Sunday, Dec 16—Connie 715-654-5819. Also for Willard, Sunday Dec 23 and Gilman Tuesday January 1st. Medford will be Saturday, Dec 29—Joe 715-965-3498.

Bald vs Golden Eagles

There isn't much size difference between Bald and Golden Eagles. They can be easy to tell apart—usually. The golden mantle vs a white head and tail on mature birds is a sure indicator. Juveniles also have the golden mantle and when flying overhead show a more distinct tail band than Bald Eagle juveniles. Dark Golden Eagles can be mistaken for Turkey Vultures with their slightly dihedral soaring but longer wings and steady flight help to tell them apart. Golden Eagles are a sometime thing in our area, but they do occur. Take notes, use a camera and have your favorite bird book handy. Good luck.

Wisdom and Chandler Robbins

The New York Times recently published a short article about the oldest known wild bird in the world. Interesting this fact that has a bit of a connection to the club. Wisdom is a Laysan Albatross who is known to be at least 68 years old and she and her long-time partner, Akeakamai (which means lover of Wisdom) are in the early process of hatching and raising another chick. Sharing duties, they will take two months to hatch the egg and then another five months to bring the hatchling to fledging. This remarkable event is taking place on Midway Atoll which is now a National Wildlife Refuge.

This bird was originally banded by biologist Chandler Robbins in 1956 among some 8,400 birds he banded at this time. In 2002 he returned at age 86 to do more banding at the same site and recognized this bird he had banded 46 years earlier. Wisdom is believed to be the oldest known wild banded bird and more remarkably, continues to be fertile and with her partner successfully raising one chick a year. It is estimated she has flown more than three million miles during her lifetime. Chandler, of course, was Sam's older brother and known worldwide for his expertise in the field of ornithology. Certainly remarkably brothers. And our club is a part of their legacy. That's a nice note to end this issue on. Happy New Year.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps

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CLUB CONTACTS

Website: Chequamegonbirdclub.org

Information: info@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Newsletter: newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

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December and January Events

Full moons December 22 and January 20

Winter equinox December 21

Summaries of Christmas Bird Counts

Later January events:

Bear cubs born

Earliest nesting of Great Horned Owls

Enjoy the beauty of the season, even from inside

Christmas shopping possibilities

The club has some items that are timely and reasonably priced.

Make Birds Not War: Step by Step Instructions for saving the World a Birder as a Time is an autographed book by Steve Betchkal, a former banquet speaker. See Joe.

Connie still has a few long or short sleeved gray tee-shirts with the Chequamegon logo on them. for only \$6 or \$9. They are good quality and helping to keep me warm today on a rather cool day. She will have them at the meeting.