

Chequamegon Chirps



December 21, 2020 Volume 39 Number 12

The Year Zooms along

December 21 is a significant day in that the Zoom session starts at 7:00 P.M. Joe is lining up a trivia contest. He is also processing data collected from Medford Audubon counts to look at significant numbers, trends and whatnot. Should be interesting. Another topic will getting a committee together to nominate officers.

Other events make this day extra significant. First of all it is the winter solstice. This is one of my favorite days of the year because now day length starts to increase. Sure, the extra daylight isn't noticeable at first and the coldest temperatures are ahead of us. But, those slight increases add up and within a month are making a noticeable difference. And there is the once in a lifetime happening, or in this case many, many lifetimes. Saturn and Jupiter for the first time in nearly 800 years appear to merge to make a super star in the southwest shortly after sunset. The next time this will happen is only 80 years in the future. I don't know about you, but it has always impressed me to the point of bewilderment, (not a total infrequent event) how these events can be predicted with such absolute certainty. Just a thought to wonder about as we wait for snow and real winter weather to jump on us. It looks and feels more like October than December as I write this on the 12th.

Last month Cam presented information about pros, cons and concerns of winter feeding of birds. Feeding doesn't goof up migration. Bread shouldn't be fed. Sanitize your feeders. Cheap feeds can be a poor buy. Cam also passed on two suet recipes. She tried the one with gelatin which birds showed little interest, possibly due to the seed selection. You might like to try this one. 1 ½ cups shortening; ¾ cup peanut butter, 3 ½ cups bird seed (use a good quality mix-they aren't the cheapest); 1 cup quick oats; ½ cup corn meal. Melt the shortening with the peanut butter and then stir in the rest of the ingredients. Store in a freezer in convenient sizes for your feeders. Another method is to get a hunk of deer or beef tallow and hang that from a convenient limb or feeder. Chickadees, woodpeckers and nuthatches will be frequent visitors.

What's Around?

It sort of depends on how near something needs to be considered “around.” Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Red Pols, Snowy Owls, White-winged and Red Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks have been in the area and now seem to be east, north or south of here. Meeting participants will have the opportunity to tell what their observations have been.

Audubon Christmas Counts/Year End Totals

In spite of Covid-19, many Christmas counts go on—in a modified form. Counters will travel individually in cars unless they are close family members. Results will be called in, mailed or dropped off at a designated site. Dates are December 20th for Spencer so some of those results may be available on the 21st. The Medford count will be Saturday, December 26th, Willard the 27th and Gilman on Sunday, January 3rd. The results may be published in January. Speaking of publishing, I hope to include year end totals for all species identified by club members within the state during all of 2020. Send those results to Connie Decker at connied1@charter.net Past yearly totals are often around 250 species. It will be interesting to see how totals compare in this discobulated year vs. normal times. I would hope all members send year end info to Connie to see how group numbers are for the entire club.

Staycations

This was a word I wasn't familiar with until I saw it in a recent special issue put out by the Medford Star News. It included an extensive article about birding for things to do in Taylor County during the winter. The Chequamegon Bird Club received recognition and Joe Scott was quoted several times as the expert information source. Even allowing for a smidge of bias, I felt the article was well written, informative and timely.

What's Around

As mentioned earlier, some of our most desirable visitors came—and went. At this time we can't say they moved on to greener pastures since we have plenty of green around here with our currently zero snow cover. The pine cone crop is suspect, so that could be a deciding factor for some species. Feeder activity seems to be down which is to be expected with bare ground everywhere. Makes one wonder if this will be a green Christmas. Well, so many things have been abnormal this year, it would go along with the general trend of things.

I talked with a few members and here are some of the birds that are coming to feeders or observed around their home areas. First of all, feeder traffic is down significantly for some which is to be expected with no snow cover and exceptionally mild weather

conditions (until now, anyway). Most people mentioned good numbers of Blue Jays and woodpeckers.

Cathy Mauer has one or two Pileated Woodpeckers that often visit on a daily basis. She also had Brown Creeper stop by once and the Juncos—with the exception of one—and Pine Siskens haven't been seen in a week. She has been hearing Barred Owls as have Dean and Leah Haas. Dean observed Bluebirds in a nearby swale in mid-October for an exceptionally late time in this area. Speaking of late hangers-on, Randy Draeger had a first year Baltimore Oriole hanging around into last month. He also mentioned little feeder activity, but has had good sightings of Snow Buntings, Red Poles, Ravens House Finches near his house south and west of Marshfield. He is an avid and frequent ice fisherman so it gives him the reason (excuse) to travel little used backroads and birding opportunities. Joe has had Cedar Waxwings visit his yard in Medford. Travel as a mailman in the Lublin area gives Gayle Davis the opportunity to see Red Poles, Shrikes and a Cooper's Hawk. An ever bigger event was a brief visit by three Evening Grosbeaks. These elusive birds, who were at one time common on our area Christmas counts, are such rare visitors now. Maybe Joe's data will highlight Evening Grosbeak trends over the last almost 40 years around Medford. He has been hearing Barred Owls, too, as have had Don and Millie Larson in the Longwood area in addition to Great Horned Owls. While deer hunting near the convergence of the Black and Popple Rivers, Millie could see up to three or four Kingfishers at once, a remarkable concentration of the usually solitary species.

Laid an Egg

There are rotten eggs and egg-heads plus a nest egg and egg on your face. Where did "Laid an egg" to describe poor effort or results come from? This was the term I heard used to describe a professional football team's effort in a game this weekend. At least it wasn't the Packers. Actually, laying an egg is kind of a big deal. They come in many sizes, colors and shapes. Some produce chicks that can run in minutes to being cared by parents for months. Some get poached, fried or scrambled to join us at breakfast. We color and decorate them for Easter. They get intricately designed in some eastern European countries.

A bird's egg has five principal parts: the shell, the shell membranes the white, the yolk and the germ. Eggs are composed of 65.5% water, 12% protein, 11% fat and 11.5% minerals. Number of eggs produced per year varies hugely among species. Eagles may lay two eggs in a year while some domestic ducks and chickens can lay up to 350. Colors can vary from white to black with all kinds of different colors and patterns. The egg of Mute Swan weighs 700 times more than that of a Broad-tailed Hummingbird. Smaller birds tend to lay eggs that are heavier in proportion to their weight. A Wren lays an egg that is 13% of

its body weight. Ouch. So why is “Laying an egg” a put down for unproductive effort? I have no idea why. Does anyone else?

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December and January Events

Full moon December 30

Winter solstice December 21

Joint viewing of Saturn and Jupiter

Christmas bird counts 12-20 Spencer,

12-26 Medford, 12-27 Willard,

January 3 Gilman

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year

Stay healthy



This stunning male Evening Grosbeak posed for David Franzen in Vilas County in early February.