

Chequamegon Chirps



December Volume 40 Number 12

The December meeting will start at 7:00 P.M. on Monday December 20th. It will be a Zoom Session available by the hospitality of Scott and Peggy Stalheim. The contact number is **870-3717-5938**. Last month's session had about a dozen participants who had an educational workout in shorebird identification which included member input.

This meeting will include an early report from the Medford Christmas Bird Count on the 18th. In addition to What's Around, a nominating committee will be selected along with a discussion of officer roles. Joe has made it clear that other obligations will interrupt his lifetime commitment to the presidency of our club. He has mentioned hari-kari, but that could include a lot of mess and passing on a bloody gavel to the next president. She or he might object to that. Please be thinking about possibilities and even volunteering for a committee position. The annual December trivia contest tradition will continue. The winner will receive the huge Knows It Owl Trophy filled with cash. On second thought, that might be for a different contest.

Continuing the owl theme, Barn owls, "Are one of the most widespread birds in the world—found on all continents except Antarctica—but have always been uncommon in Wisconsin." I suspect different senior members may have seen them in this area many years ago. Now, for the first time in over 20 years there is proof of a pair nesting again in state. This family nested in a decayed tree and they will use nest boxes. It is not entirely understood why the barn owls shifted southward, but now it appears there is a northward trend. How far will that be?

Now some news about our special owl visitor from the north. As of December first, there had been 72 recorded Snowy owls reported in 30 counties. They seem to be more prevalent along the ports on Lake Michigan with 12 reported in one area of the south section of Green Bay. There are several that we know about in the area where club members live. Last week I had the pleasure to see one just two miles from my house and others have been reported north-west of Dorchester and in the Loyal area. There may well be other reports by the meeting and Christmas bird counts.

Why Ornithery Works

The quoted material that follows comes from an article in Bird Watching Daily by Marta Curti. Ornithery is defined as, “Birding for the specific purposed of reducing stress.” It is information about how interacting with nature, especially birds, is good therapy during stressful times. The last couple years have been a test of tolerance for all of us. Holidays and winter can add another depressive layer to this situation.

“Birding, by its very nature, teaches us patience and gently coaxes us into calm. Loud noises and quick movements will frighten most birds away. Thus, observing birds in the wild begs for stillness and silence—skills that, once learned, can help us in other trying situations.”

“Birds are everywhere. Whether you live in the mountains, by the sea, in the desert, or near the neon-lit streets of a major city, birds will be near for you to find, which means ornithery is accessible to everyone.”

“Though there is no one right way to practice ornithery—what works for one person might not work for another—it can be fun and rewarding to try birding in a new way. And it just might do us good.”

Here are ways she suggests to do this. **Go it alone:** If you feel comfortable and it is safe to do so, spend some time with only birds and birdsongs to keep you company. **Take comfort in the familiar:** Actively focus on observing a bird you have seen dozens if not hundreds of times. Observe the patterns of the bird’s feathers, listen to its calls. Perhaps you will notice something new. **Bring a friend and bird like a child:** What might it mean to bird like a child? How might it feel to experience genuine joy at the smallest of things? (grandchildren can be wonderful teachers)--my note. **Leave the list and field guide behind: Listen to calls:** Birds are some of the best musicians around. When you hear a bird calling, stop what you are doing, if you can. Close your eyes and just listen. Don’t worry about identifying the bird or what it might mean. Just enjoy the music for what it is. **Forgo the camera and pick up a pencil:** Photography is a wonderful hobby, and for some, it might be a way to enter a mindful state. For others, however, photography can be a distraction. It is easy to become drawn in by the view finder—trying to get the perfect shot—rather than actually looking at the bird. A wonderful alternative to this is nature sketching. Whether you can draw or not, try sitting for a few moments with pencil and paper in hand. Sketching compels you to focus on the tiniest details and relaxes the mind.

If drawing seems too daunting, journaling about your experience can also be very calming and restorative.”

“Practicing ornithotherapy can help us to relax, to focus our minds, to work through grief and to find solice.”

“Other benefits of birdwatching include **Physical benefits:** Birding keeps us fit and active. Walking to find birds improves circulation and cardiovascular health. And training our binoculars on a bird before it flies away develops our reflexes. **Mental benefits:** birdwatching promotes patience and mental alertness and helps us become more observant. As we age, learning to identify birds and their calls are a great way to keep our minds active and sharp. **Emotional benefits:** Birding brings us together across countries and cultures, language barriers, and time zones. Joining birding trips is one of the best ways to meet other birders and make lifelong friends. **Social benefits:** In the U.S. alone, we are nearly 50 million birders strong, and we can be a huge and positive impact at home and around the globe for local economies, families, and communities.”

Winter Birding Changes in Our Lifetimes

One thing I remember from the organizational meeting of this club some 40 years ago was a comment by George Ruesch, Gordie’s father, who delivered mail on foot for many years in Medford. Born in 1902, he lived until 2005, which probably made him the first born member of the soon to be organized club. He commented that he now saw many more crows in winter than years before when they left the Medford area in fall and were little seen until the next spring. As a kid, I can’t recall seeing crows in town. They were strictly a country bird.

Other birds George wouldn’t have seen in this area during the winter would have been turkeys, cardinals, red-bellied woodpeckers, mourning doves and possibly starlings. One thing I remember about mourning doves is that they were a rare sighting in winter and they usually showed obvious freeze damage to their feet and numbers declined during the winter.

However, there were other species that were significantly more numerous, some of which we don’t have here anymore. There are no more prairie chickens around here that I know about in areas where they were common. Tree sparrows are rare now where they were once plentiful. Finch numbers are way down. Ruffed grouse, crossbills and grosbeaks-pine and evening are now uncommon winter finds. Bird species locations and numbers are volatile figures.

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December and January

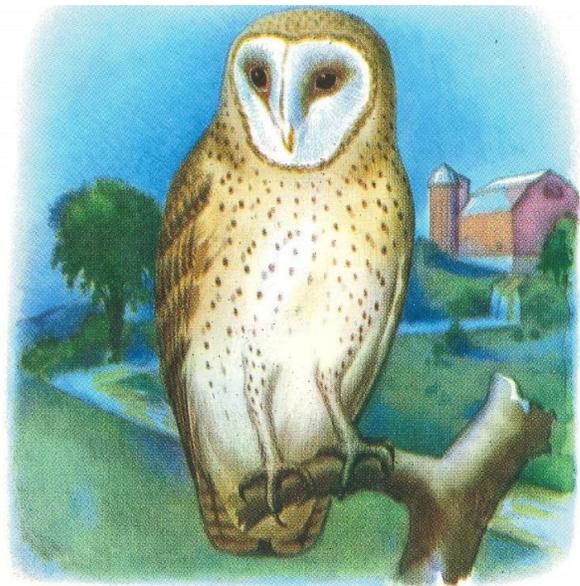
Full moons 12-19 and 1-18

Winter equinox 12-21

Mating season for great-horned owls

Will our crazy weather continue

Into our official winter?



COMMON BARN-OWL This long-legged bird (14 in.) is unique among American owls, belonging to a separate family. The white, heart-shaped face and dark eyes identify it. The light buff plumage is conspicuous, but this owl is rarely seen by day, and the hissing call that it gives at night is not often heard. It nests in barns, belfries, and hollow trees, and is important in controlling rodents injurious to orchards and garden crops. Its range is worldwide.

