

# Chequamegon Chirps



Medford, Wisconsin

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February, 2016

Volume 35 Number 2

NEXT MEETING Monday, February 15, 2016 7 PM at the Medford Public Library

PROGRAM: CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS: SUMMARY, TRENDS AND TIDBITS.

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This title may make you think of the January program. Actually, it is the same program since the weather was cold enough to keep nearly everyone in their warm homes that night. Hopefully the weather will be more cooperative for the February meeting. In this repeat program, we'll go over some of the general themes and trends of all six Christmas counts. More specifically, we'll concentrate on the Willard, Gilman and Spencer counts which began in 1979, 1980 and 1983 respectively.

When you total up data from the 106 years these three counts have been conducted, the numbers are almost overwhelming. Together, they involved 4500 party hours while people traveled 43,111 miles to identify 478,549 birds. Big numbers that have significance telling about the changes of particular species as they increased or decreased. Also there are species which are counted annually now that weren't around at the start of these counts as well as those that are no longer present. This is where the experience of members will add greatly to the depth of discussion for our February meeting. Joe and Gayle will also have good insight into the Owen and Medford counts in reference to trends as well as unexpected numbers in both the high and low ranges. And as always, there is the thrill of something really unusual showing up. All counts have been blessed with unexpected birds which adds to the thrill of the hunt. Some of the most distinguished birds recorded have been spotted by people on their first Christmas Bird Count. Serendipitous discoveries can be made by anyone at any time. (I'm not positive serendipitous is an official word, but serendipity is a fun word to say and if the ious ending doesn't exist, I vote that it should)

The following list is of species who have at least a thousand on one of the Gilman, Spencer or Willard Christmas counts during the duration of these counts and the total for the three areas for all the counts.

	Gilman	Spencer	Willard	Total
House Sparrow	15,938	44,636	47,622	124,134
European Starling	10,511	35,291	22,703	58,605
B-capped Chickadee	19,880	14,322	17,169	51,371
Rock Pigeon	8,938	20,208	14,776	43,922
American Crow	8,165	11,881	15,380	35,426
Common Redpoll	7,617	5,819	5,224	26,277
Snow Bunting	6,798	10,811	5,168	21,777

	Gilman	Spencer	Willard	Total
American Goldfinch	5,154	3,907	9,691	18,752
Blue Jay	4,532	4,499	9,187	18,218
Mourning Dove	1,894	7,056	4,573	13,473
American Tree Sparrow	1,823	2,854	4,633	9,310
Dark-eyed Junco	604	2,892	5,192	8,688
Wild Turkey	2,018	2,784	3,723	8,525
Evening Grosbeak	4,499	70	2,683	7,252
W-breasted Nuthatch	2,255	1,858	2,277	6,390
Downy Woodpecker	1,229	1,766	1,607	4,602
Pine Siskin	2,410	630	881	3,921
Northern Cardinal	317	1,379	1,835	3,531
Hairy Woodpecker	1,200	788	777	2,765
Common Raven	1,624	28	369	2,021
White-winged Crossbill	1,180	698	15	1,893
Canada Goose	5	1,287	21	1,313

This information is intended to be a lead off for discussion in the February meeting. Hopefully, the addition is reasonably accurate. It was done on a hand calculator since I couldn't find my abacus. If there are errors, glaring or slight, sorry about that. What I think is interesting how much variability there is with some of the species from north to south. Cardinals show a definite increase in the south as do Blue Jays, Juncos, Crows and Tree Sparrows. White-winged Crossbills display an opposite preference.

But remember when thinking about these numbers that they are spread over some 30 years. I don't know what might have statistical significance. Possibly some mathematician in the club can play around with these numbers. Was it Mark Twain who said, "There are lies, damn lies and then statistics." That is probably all screwed up, but somewhere, there should be some quote somewhat like that.

Evening Grosbeaks. How do you figure out this bird? Where are they? Why have they disappeared? In 1989, 667 were recorded on the Gilman Count. How many years has it been since any have been recorded on any of our six familiar counts? Other species, just because they are on this list of more numerous birds, do not necessarily mean they are doing well. It might mean their numbers were once good, but now they are much less common. Or, it could mean a specie wasn't even recorded for the first years of the counts, but now is consistently counted. Ken, who has extensive knowledge with these counts, and birds in general, can give can give much more meaning to these numbers than what I put on these couple sheets.

There are so many variables to skew these numbers. But, as data continues to be compiled, the sheer mass of it has more value. A tip of the hat to the many people who have contributed their time, effort and expertise to compile this considerable amount of information and to the Chequamegon Bird Club for supporting these efforts.

I'm writing this on Groundhog Day while weather forecasters gleefully say we are going to be buried under a foot of snow from an advancing storm. It is noon on an overcast day with nary a snowflake in sight--yet. February, with a major blizzard predicted doesn't seem like incumbent spring migrant arrival time. But it is. We should have Robins and many of their companions with us by March 22<sup>nd</sup>. That's only five weeks from this meeting. I don't know about others, but it seems that time has a way of coming and going more quickly the older I get. That means those spring arrivals are just around the corner. (It has started to snow.)

Continuing on the Robin theme, here are two more things along that line. The first meeting to get the Chequamegon Bird Club established occurred March 23, 1981 in the Robbin's living room where 37 people gathered. In the next Chirps I plan to include an article written by (I think) John Fadness which has initial information about the club and is a tribute to Sam. I would like members to send me personal memories of Sam and earliest events of the club so I can include them in the March issue.

The second Robin thing is a Red Robin Haiku. This form of Japanese verse is three unrhymed lines of five, seven and five syllables. I visited a writing class in New Iberia, Louisiana last March and this was the contribution in Haiku form by Kathy Baus who had a large group of Robins visit her yard.

Daisies blooming wild

A welcome first sign of spring

Early birds arriving

From gray rainy sky

Hundreds of Robins flocking

Trees alive with song

Nature performing

Playing two days only in March

Birds dancing in rain

Robins here then not

A path followed they vanish

Sky parts as wings flap

South afternoon breeze

Puddles gather, grasses wave

Yard silent once more

Are there any Haiku writers, poets, writers or photographers among our membership who would like to share some of your talent? I'd like to include such contributions in future issues of the Chirps. I feel this newsletter would have more value if there is a greater diversity of contributors. If each member would contribute one of the most memorable bird or outdoor experiences in his or her life, just think how much more interesting these issues would become. To help prod some of you along in this process, I will make phone calls or even visits to pry this information out of you. I hope I don't have to go to this extreme, but I'll do what seems necessary to get the stories that I know are there and should be shared with other members.

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A gentle reminder to please submit your 2016 membership dues (\$18) so the annual membership list can be completed.

## **FEBRUARY AND MARCH OUTDOORS**

- > Full moon February 23
- > Great Horned Owls are nesting
- > Canada Geese come north
- > Maple sap starts to flow
- > Tom Turkeys begin to gobble
- > Cardinals and Chickadees are singing their spring songs
- > Gray squirrel young are born

*I get significant help from others who have more computer skills than I (it is difficult to have fewer). This month it is Cathy who made the Chirps possible. Be sure to tell her thank-you.*