

Chequamegon Chirps



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The January meeting of the Chequamegon Bird Club will be called to order on Monday, January 16th, 7:00P.M. at the Medford Library. Hope to see you there in person or 816 9573 6767 via Zoom. Scott Stalheim will present a program about bird intelligence and their brains. Oftentimes bird brains are given little credit in phrases such as Dumb Cluck or Featherbrain although Egghead is a complimentary title for a highly educated person such as Einstein. So, in the spectrum of intelligence, where do avian brains fit? Modern science and improved data collection keeps discovering new facets of information. As human awareness increases, we keep finding new area of animal intelligence that we had no idea existed.

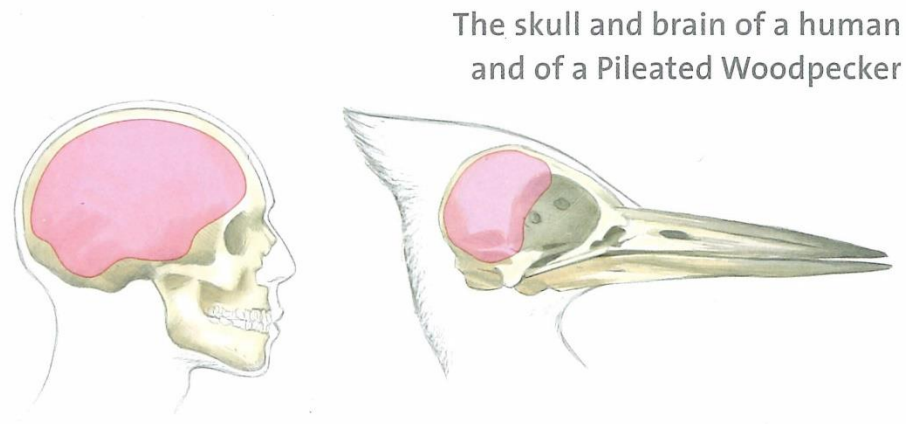
To follow along this theme, here are some scrambled bird names to test our brain's ability in rearranging some letters. Personally, I'm glad survival doesn't depend on knowing all the correct answers. Two of the names are two words and answers are on page 4. #1-BONIR, #2-AUJLEYB, #3-NRWE, #4-LSATGINR, #5-RWOC, #6-DBCITAR, #7-KDCU, #8-LGAEE, #9-HWBBIOET.

In addition to regular business, the January session will include some numbers, impressions, and tales of happenings on the 2022 Audubon Christmas bird counts. The CHIRPS has to be printed early this month which means the complete numbers of the six counts will be in the February newsletter.

WOODPECKER TIDBITS

Why don't woodpeckers get concussions? Mainly because their brains don't weigh very much and are oriented to absorb impact from the front, unlike our brains, which are more massive and oriented to absorb impact from below (like jumping). Woodpeckers have several other adaptations that reduce the impact. Their lower mandible is slightly longer, striking the wood first and transmitting the force through the lower jaw rather than into the skull. A layer of sponge bone at the

base of the upper mandible helps cushion any impact there. They always hammer their bill straight into the wood, so the forces are always in the same direction.



AND ON THE OTHER END

Woodpecker nests are not large in diameter. A nest is very close quarters for four or more young birds, and managing the waste products of those growing babies is critically important. One remarkable adaptation of nesting birds is a big help in this effort. At the end of the young bird's intestines just before defecation, a gelatinous mucous encases each white-and-black dropping in a fecal sac. The baby bird produces a neat "packet" that the adult can pick up and carry away. Newly hatched baby birds instinctively defecate after being fed, and the adults wait for the fecal sac and fly away with it, scattering the evidence up to 100 feet from the nest. The primary purpose of this is probably to keep the nest clean, but scattering the droppings also helps to avoid accumulation that could give away the location of the nest. These two articles came from *What It's Like To Be A Bird* by David Allen Sibley.

ODDS AND ENDS

A nine year study in Norway found bird strikes are reduced by painting one blade of a wind turbine black. Scientists believe this reduces what they call motion smear, allowing birds to see the three rotating blades. Reader's Digest May 2021.

A site that I check regularly for outstanding bird and nature pictures is GORGEous Nature Photography by John Davis at www.flicker.com/photos/johns_pics John, who is my brother-in-law, lives in the Columbia River gorge and posts pictures daily.

A varied thrush has been seen recently just east of Hannibal. This bird of the south west is a rare winter visitor to Wisconsin.

HERE TO THERE AND BACK AGAIN

There are many documented stories of birds returning to the exact spot or nest after traveling hundreds or even thousands of miles. The varied thrush mentioned in the previous paragraph is the extreme opposite of that. This bird's territory is in the south-western part of the United States. However, a very few tend to end up in Wisconsin to be included in Christmas Bird Counts and others wander even further east. Why? I suppose you could surmise that they are males who are too stubborn to check a map or ask for directions. Do a few of them ride winds to wherever they are taken? Is there something in their brains that leads them astray? Birds by nature travel varying distances from where they are hatched. Cardinals do not migrate and stay within ten miles or less of where they fledged. Warming conditions and feeders have contributed to the slow spreading of this species. The collared Eurasian dove will travel hundreds of miles from its nest which is why this non-native bird is spreading so rapidly across North America.

New tracking tools reveal movements unsuspected before. These can provide data that tracks daily distances and routes during migration. Also scientists are finding that some species travel much more than suspected after nesting and before migration. Radio nanotags, which can be as light as 1/5 of a gram are providing amazing amounts of information. "High-tech bird tracking is taking rapid flight in an era of global scientific cooperation. Birds as small as warblers are signaling their locations from breeding and wintering grounds, from stopovers and long migrations thanks to ever-more-sophisticated miniaturized tracking devices. Scientists harness the power of the sun, satellites, automated radio telemetry, and even the International Space Station to follow birds like never before."

"At stake? The future of bird life on earth. Three billion birds lost since 1970 in North America is incentive alone for scientists coming together and to assure that critical technology is affordable and accessible."

'We don't have a lot of time', says Pete Marra, director of the Georgetown Environmental Institute. 'Many species are declining right before our eyes and we don't know why.' Tracking tools applied to smaller and smaller species help scientists come closer to understanding the full annual and life cycle of birds."

Quotes are from an article in the February 2021 Bird Watching magazine.

editor

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1-ROBIN, 2-BLUEJAY, 3-WREN

4-STARLING, 5-CROW, 6-CAT

BIRD, 7-DUCK, 8-EAGLE

9-BOB WHITE

■ The robin-like Varied Thrush is common in the moist evergreen forests of western North America, and rarely wanders east as far as the Atlantic coast. Even though it looks similar to a robin, the dark breastband and patterned wings are very distinctive. It finds insects and berries within the forest, only occasionally venturing out onto open lawns.

Varied Thrush

