

# Chequamegon Chirps



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For the first time in several months we will be meeting at the Medford Library again, meeting to start at 7 P.M. This session will give all members an opportunity to contribute to the program by submitting favorite pictures or experiences of a bird encounter. If you would like to have a picture on the library screen, contact Joe Scott at [joeyramon1@yahoo.com](mailto:joeyramon1@yahoo.com) so he can download it. This is the first time to try something so there may be a wrinkle or two, but it does have the potential to show some of the beautiful photos individuals have taken and unique experiences. For example, at last month's picnic, Curt Staab showed me some beautiful bird photos from around his place. I had no idea of this treasure trove. Bet there are other examples of such member talent, too.

## **Wacky Fact #1**

Aren't Flamingos supposed to be tropical birds? Apparently not always so. If you Google frozen flamingos, it shows when they overwinter in shallow water at high altitudes or the far north, their feet freeze in ice that is formed and they have to wait for the ice to soften up enough for them to take off the next morning. Is this fact true? Does Google always tell the truth?

## **Wacky Fact #2**

Every once in a while, science produces results that seem impossible, but with the right circumstances are provable. Hank Weber in the latest issue of Bird Watchers Digest reported on scientific research. The following information is almost all from his article.

"Scientists at the University of Iowa have determined that Pigeons are just as good as highly trained humans at correctly reading mammograms. Pigeons are known for their visual abilities. The scientists placed a pigeon in a specially designed test chamber that contained a single mammogram image. On the left of the screen was a large blue button; to the right a yellow button. When a mammogram image was flashed on the screen, the Pigeon was trained to peck at either the right or left button. If it pecked at the correct button, the Pigeon was rewarded with food. When it chose the incorrect button, nothing happened."

“The scientists designed the experiment so the blue button was the correct answer if the mammogram showed a malignancy. If the mammogram did show malignant tissue and the Pigeon pecked at the blue button, it received a reward. If it pecked at the yellow button, it received nothing. Conversely, if a mammogram contained only benign images, the correct action would be to peck at the yellow button. That would bring a reward. In this case, the blue button was the incorrect answer and did not reward the Pigeon with any treats.”

“Each Pigeon was shown multiple images in random order; some images were benign, some were malignant. The Pigeon had no way of knowing.”

“At first they did no better than chance. Blue or yellow? Right or left? They were correct about 50% of the time—about as accurate as flipping a coin. However, over time and with daily practice, the Pigeons became better at identifying malignant tissue. After eight days, a Pigeon would improve to correct choices 80% of the time. After 15 days, it could distinguish a benign tissue from a malignant tissue more than 85% of the time. When multiple Pigeons evaluated the same mammogram, they were correct more than 99% of the time—about as good as an experienced pathologist.”

“How did they know? What this experiment illustrates is a bird’s amazing visual discernment. Birds are keenly aware of what goes around them. They notice small changes, and they can relate visual stimuli with resultant actions. And Pigeons will work for chicken feed.”

### **Milkweed for Monarchs**

Last year we had a program about Monarch development and migration. Here is further information how cooperation can help declining species. Monarch butterflies have received considerable publicity about their steep decline in the last five years. Milkweed is a critical factor in their life cycles. Development of herbicide resistant corn and soybean seeds in the mid-1990s really accelerated the downward trend of Monarchs. Milkweed—vital food for Monarch caterpillars—would no longer survive between the rows, and fence-to-fence plowing. Eliminating grassy margins, field edges, buffers and road edges in order to have neater, more “eye appealing” landscapes all took out untold acres of milkweed. I put eye appealing in quotes because that phrase is in the eye of the beholder.

Teachers, students, clubs, parks and others joined in milkweed planting. The 125,000 member Pheasants Forever group joined this campaign. As grassland stewards, members of Pheasants Forever significantly increased the common milkweed in the seed mixes promoted to create and sustain thousands of acres of Pheasant habitat.

In the process, Pheasant hunters became huge promoters of Monarchs and other pollinators. Recently, Pheasants Forever emphasized the grassland songbirds that also share habitat with Pheasants and Monarchs. They recently highlighted ten “prairie jewels” songbird species that are co-habitants. These include Bobolinks, Dickcissels, Meadow-larks, Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows and Kingbirds.

This article also came from the same issue of Bird Watchers Digest as well as the genesis for much of the following information. The reason for this and any of the blank space at the end of this article is because I’m traveling and don’t have usual resource on hand. It is an excellent magazine whose six issues for \$16 a year provides interesting information.

### **Some recommendations for field guides by Pete Dunne**

How many to own? Which is the best? The answers could be start with one and go from there. Whichever well-worn one to the point of raggedness is a great endorsement for a guide. Meetings are a good place to see what other members are using. New books continue to be available and apps on Smart Phones offer amazing potential.

Here are some recommendations in no particular order.

Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of America

Sibley Guide to Birds—Eastern and Western editions

The Golden Guide (Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification)

Peterson Field Guide to Birds Eastern and Western Editions

The National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America

### **Just Wondering**

How many birds fledge from boxes that club members have built, monitor or nests around your house or yard? I think it would be interesting to have a general idea of species represented and of numbers that might suggest trends and changes in populations. If you would be willing to pass those numbers on to me, maybe I could work up a yearly summary or some kind of story. How much seed and nectar do we feed yearly? Any more suggestions along that line would be welcome.

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