

# Chequamegon Chirps



Well, it is about to happen again. We will have a face-to-face, real life, in person meeting for the first time in over a year. Hope that doesn't scare you away because it should be an extra good session. We will meet at the Kuse Nature Preserve on Monday, June 21<sup>st</sup> starting at 5 p.m. The first hour is the work day portion of the meeting where we will be assisting with exotic plant removal. People are encouraged to bring work gloves, loppers and other appropriate attire, however there will be some tools available

At approximately 6:00 we will break for supper. Hot water with instant tea and coffee will be available, but otherwise this a bring your own food and drink event. (There will be a wild food menu for another time). Chairs are also provided and all eating will take place outdoors.

At about 6:30 Hildegard will give a presentation on her guide that is in the works entitled "How to Walk in Nature Trail Guide." The media are suggesting that people walk in nature as a means of stress reduction, but people are often unsure how to do this. The guide includes using a mindfulness approach as well as a "be-a" approach where a visitor would wear a different hat for reasons at different seasons i.e. Botanist, Artist, Ornithologist, Meteorologist, Herpetologist. This trail guide helps users reduce stress on a nature trail or in their own back yard. After the presentation attendants can practice the newly acquired skills on the trail around the preserve.

The guide is still in draft form so Hildegard would also like input on the ornithology aspect of the guide.

In the event of rain, the work portion of the meeting will be cancelled, but the show will go on. We can begin with the picnic at 6 p.m. There is an indoor meeting facility where doors and windows will be opened to all more air flow.

The Kuse Nature Preserve is located at W6219 Allman Avenue on the west edge of Medford. It is about two miles west of Highway 13 and a short distance north of Highway 64. You can take the south traffic circle on Highway 13 north of Highway 64 and go west. Coming from the west, go north of the road by Klingbeil Lumber and go east on Allman. You are asked to use the east driveway and park near the barn. Don't park on Allman Avenue. There is a large scrap yard within a mile to the east and they are always looking for more material. Just saying. You can get additional information by checking [www.kusemuseum-naturepreserve.org](http://www.kusemuseum-naturepreserve.org)

## Feathers—and such

We can be “feather brained,” easily pick up something as “light as a feather,” put a “feather in our cap,” when we accomplish something significant, “feather our nests,” and of course “birds of a feather flock together” such as at bird club gatherings. Humans use tons of down to make things more comfortable for our pillows and warmth for coverings and clothing. We decorate with them and imitate their colors, texture and patterns.

Freshly hatched birds vary from naked to fully feathered individuals. Feathers are classified in the following categories: Filoplume—tiny, attached to nerves to help a bird sense its surroundings. Bristle Feathers— are around eyes and beaks. Some birds use bristles to locate food. Down—to trap body heat. Semiplume—which help with warmth and keeping dry. Countour feathers cover most of the body and provide color and shape. Flight to lift and balance flying. Each kind has a distinct appearance and purpose. The physiology of feathers is a substantial field in itself.

Here is a listing of some of their uses that are as variable as to the birds they are attached. Feathers can **warm** like a blanket. **Cushion** like a pillow to warm nests and eggs in addition to themselves. **Shade** out sun like an umbrella to keep young more comfortable and to search for prey. **Protect** skin like sunscreen. **Soak up water** like a sponge to bring moisture to hatchlings. **Clean up** messes like a scrub brush. American bitterns clean up after they eat as its feathers have brittle tips that crumble into a dusty powder that scours away dirt and slimy fish oil that sticks to its feathers. **Distract** attackers like a bullfighter’s cape. **Hide** from predators like camouflage clothing. **Make high pitched sounds** like a whistle. **Attract attention** like fancy jewelry. **Dig** holes like a backhoe when bank swallows use their bill and tough feathers on their lower legs to dig a two-foot-long tunnel in a stream bank and then push the dirt out with its wings before building a nest. **Carry** building supplies like a forklift. Feathers can help birds **Float** like a life jacket. **Plunge** downward like a fishing sinker. “Most birds make a special oil to waterproof their feathers, but not the anhinga. The weight of its wet feathers helps the hungry hunter dive deep down in search of fish, crayfish, and shrimp. **Glide** like a sled when penguins flop on their bellies to make it easy to slide across snow and ice. Act like **snowshoes** when willow ptarmigans grow a thick layer of feathers on top of their toes. Like snowshoes the feathers increase the size of the birds’ feet so they can shuffle across the snow instead of sinking in. **Lift** for flying. These uses were listed along with more interesting information in a book available at the Abbotsford Library titled appropriately enough Feathers—Not Just for Flying by Melissa Stewart and illustrated by Sarah Brannen.

## Love and White Lightning

This is an extraordinary story about a special friend and the couple that loved and took care of a domestic goose that was their companion for 23 years. Let me give you some background information for this story and her caretakers. Dean and Nadine Willett have a variety of animals on their farm that have to abide by this rule. **Everybody has to get along.** Goose, ducks, sheep, dogs, and cats. And they do. No exceptions.

When White Lightning joined the Willett Family—who was named by their young children—it, soon became apparent this gosling was much more than an ordinary domestic goose. They believe she imprinted on Dean, but was extremely comfortable with all people, especially children. She attended school some days along with church and Vocational Bible School activities and befriended little children who enjoyed her soft neck feathers and gentle disposition.

When White Lightning was eight years old, she was attacked by two foxes who severely injured her before Dean drove them off. Unable to control her damaged neck at all, with additional damage to her right leg, it affected her to the point where she couldn't control her balance and would end up upside down. Only patient and persistent care kept her alive. They would hold her head up to feed and water her and used splints, vet wraps and whatever else they could conger up, although Dean assured me he didn't use Duct Tape. What helped her recover the most was a hammock/sling they designed by them to keep her upright and also provide support for her non-functioning neck. It took two months of extended care before White Lightning could dependably get around on her own. For the next 14 years she continued to share her charm with whomever she came into contact with, but especially with Dean who shared many conversations. He is well versed in the special language of Honk. For the last year, her health and mobility declined to the point where Dean and Nadine converted their garage into a senior center and rigged up special equipment to help her safely continue as much mobility as possible. This also included innumerable checks on her wellbeing day and night.

Sadly, after giving joy to others for all of her 23 years, White Lightning passed away earlier this month. Her legacy will continue on in Willett Family lore and many other memories she shared with others. Nadine is considering producing a children's book about her life and legacy. Love comes in many shapes and forms in giving and receiving. We are all richer for the experience.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps

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Club contacts

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### **June and July Events**

Full moons June 24 and July 24

Lightning bug nightly displays.

Enough heat and humidity to fondly recall winter.

Admire the many shades of green.

Enjoy the color of birds and flowers.



White Lightning