

Chequamegon Chirps



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7 pm Medford Library

We are on the cusp of spring migration. Early Robins are already here, soon to be joined by many other species as they move northward. This month's program will be by two members who recently did some migrating to Texas and back. Cathy Mauer and Gayle Davis went to the southern tip of Texas to see a multitude of new birds including those who will soon be coming through or to this neck of the woods.

Speaking of meetings, at the last one, Joe Scott talked about the many factors government regulations consider when protecting endangered bird species with his professional work experience. Since then Joe has performed--nearly naked—in a local play. A couple female members suggested having him combine these talents with his next club presentation.

The business aspect of this meeting focused on activities the club sponsors and dollars required as we often work with other groups to provide educational and fun activities for our communities. Here is a breakdown of these events as they come in the next couple months. Maple Fest at the Taylor County Fairgrounds is April 29. The club will sponsor a \$50 booth at this well attended event to promote club activities. May 13 is International Migratory Bird Day to be celebrated at the Perkinstown Winter Sports area. The club is putting \$350 toward sponsoring REGI speakers to come with live birds to highlight the day long activities for all ages and interests. More detailed information about this event next month. Finally, hundreds of 5th graders from Taylor and adjoining counties come to the Medford fair grounds in late May for the day long Taylor County Youth Expo that is sponsored by many area conservation clubs and businesses. The Chequamegon Bird Club provides \$450 toward supplies and prizes plus a booth for this outstanding educational experience. With all three of these community events, club members donate many hours of help and materials to offer educational and fun experiences to help people learn about and to better appreciate bird lore.

Bird Migration Basics

Ready or not, they are on the way. Spring migration is in full swing and has been for a while—they just (mostly) haven't arrived here yet. After months of short days, cold and snow, it is so refreshing to hear and see those early arrivals which signify a flood of more to soon show up, often on a daily basis.

Why, how and where do approximately half of the 650 species in North America leave Central and South America to come to the U.S. and Canada? The why part of this question is believed that birds move from areas of low or decreasing resources to areas of high or increasing resources. This would be a good time to submit the caveat that patterns change over time and shifts occur. Weather changes, habitat, among other things can cause differences that we may see in our lifetimes as well as much longer, subtler differences. Birds that go north find longer day length which allows them more daylight hours to raise young before they start their return trip. Data shows birds who migrate to longer day length tend to hatch 30 to 50 per cent more eggs per nest than birds of the same species who don't migrate. These longer days provide greater numbers of insects and plant growth for maximum feeding in the frenzy to grow the next generation.

What triggers migration? Day length, temperature change, changes in food supplies and genetic predisposition are all part of this formula. Interestingly, temperatures by themselves may not be as important as changing food sources to cause movement. Even Hummingbirds can withstand freezing temperatures as long as an adequate food supply is available. Genetics developed over thousands of generations are an influence. Wild birds held in captivity show more restlessness during migration periods even when all other factors are not present. The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology is a wealth of information on the many variables present in migration. Knowledge is increasing exponentially with much more being studied. However, there are so many variables. Birds are not known to be avid readers of scientific studies and are wont at times to go off and do their own thing at times.

How do birds migrate? The neat and simple answer is that sometimes answers aren't always neat and simple. The secrets to their amazing navigational are admired, but not always fully understood. How does a Snowy Owl come back to the exact place in the Dorchester area seven years in a row? How do Purple Martins leave Brazil and come back to the same Martin Houses west of Little Black? Compass info from the sun, the stars, sensing the earth's magnetic field, position of sun sets or rises, landmarks and genetics all play into the remarkable process. Maybe magic, too. As much as is known about the process, there is still the unknown or yet undiscovered dimensions which add such an

interesting factor to what we don't know. How do first year birds make these long distance travels on their own. How is that possible? Sometimes instead of wrinkling brows and getting a headache trying to figure out a wonderfully difficult problem, the solution may be to lean back and just admire the beauty of something we admire but can't fully phantom.

Not all birds do long distance migrating. Some don't migrate at all and others may go short distances depending on current weather conditions. Cardinals stay within several miles of where hatched. Black-capped Chickadees and Blue Jays may head north or south depending on the season while others move into the territory they vacated. They all look alike so what we assume are the same birds may well be different ones. Penguins swim up to 1,000 kilometers while some birds walk up or down mountainsides to get to more favorable nesting conditions.

The written wonder of migration has been around for thousands of years recorded by Greek writers Hesiod, Herodotus and Aristotle. More modern writings recommended by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology are: Songbird Journeys: four seasons in the lives of migratory birds by Miyoko Chu. Living On The Wind: Across the hemisphere with migratory birds by Scott Weidensaul. Atlas of Bird Migration: Tracing the great journeys of the world's birds.

Continuing with the migration theme, do any individuals have recommendations for field trips to spring hotspots in your neighborhood or to a daylong driving trip? The March meeting would be a good time to start these plans. Some field trips can be planned weeks in advance while others can be short notice when something extra interesting comes along. Letting others know of your interests makes it easier to gather a group for getting together.

The Chequamegon Bay Birding and Nature Festival is scheduled for May 18 to 20 at Ashland. The 11th year of this three day event offers over 100 programs for birders and nature lovers of all skills and ages. This year's theme is climate change. Five activities will have primary focus and an additional 18 will have secondary focus on climate change. The birding is generally great at this peak migration time. Last year the weather was an amazing 70 degrees. Remember though there have also been years with snow and wind. Even with lousy weather, an average of 180 species have been tallied each year with 234 recorded over the 10 years. Last year a Tropical Kingbird was found—a state record! To get information or to register get complete information at www.birdandnaturefest.com or Ashland Visitors Bureau 1-800-284-9484 or Great Lakes Visitor Center 1-715-685-0680.

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CLUB CONTACTS

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March & April Outdoors

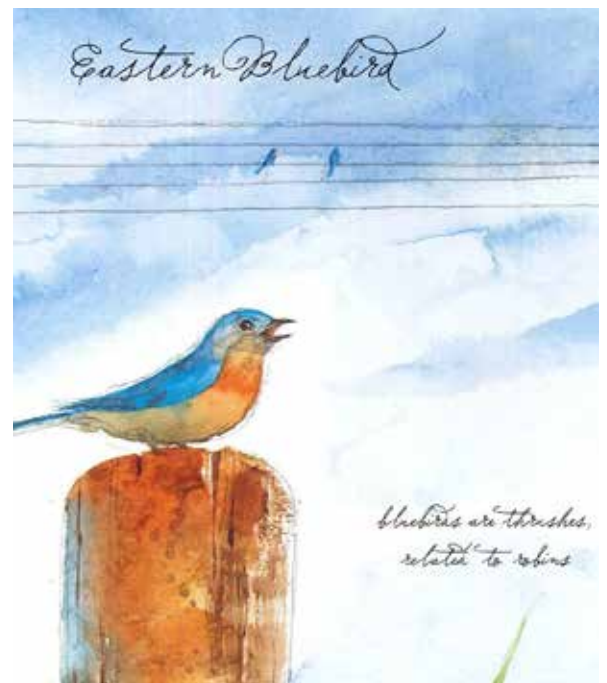
Full moon 3-12 & 4-11

Great-horned Owls hatch

Bald Eagles start nesting

Gobs of birds come back

Bears leave dens



on a staff of wires

blue notes inked from April skies

truly, spring's first song