

Chequamegon Chirps



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We will have a double presentation of programs by Joe Scott and Claire Romanak for our 7 P.M. November meeting at the Medford library. Joe will present information about Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. He is currently in Mississippi and studying this endangered specie due to overcutting of mature pine and fire suppression. Claire will show us pictures of birds recorded while visiting Arizona last winter. She and Bob have discovered winters are warmer and birds more numerous south of a Wisconsin winter. One of the neat things about birding is this hobby travels easily with us and makes travel that much more interesting while adding numbers of bird species recorded and depth of overall avian knowledge.

Banquet summary

Some thirty members and guests enjoyed a fine meal and fellowship at the Chelsea Conservation Club for our October session. Speaker Anne Geraghty gave an interesting and informative presentation about some programs she participates in and birding highlights. Her dynamic speaking style kept everyone alert, even after the filling meal. My favorite comment by her was about her 400th recorded specie—she has since added 132 to that total. In northern Wisconsin she spotted what she thought might be a Spruce Grouse far off in the distance on a road. She started to walk toward it, taking pictures to verify this scarce bird. She walked within six feet and the bird never flushed, plus another came out of the woods to feed almost at her feet. Her conclusion was, “That bird is dumber than a doorknob!” Well, I think many of us can relate to that in various situations.

Bird feeding study

When winter arrives; we know it will, it is just delightfully tardy at this time of mid-November. That is when bird feeding gets special emphasis. Interestingly, a recent summer bird-feeding study collected data about effects of wild bird feeding on the health of individual birds. The study showed a consistent greater overall health for the birds at sites with feeders than those that did not. This was demonstrated by increased antioxidant levels, reduced stress levels, higher quality feather growth, improved body

condition scores and a stronger immune defense system. You can find the study at (I hope) at the web link <http://m.conphys.oxfordjournals.org/content/3/1/cov058.ful.pdf>.

This study was conducted by Millikin University and used multiple sites, species, and feeders over several years. Data was collected from over 1,000 birds. Collection of data was done concurrently at control sites facing the same environmental patterns as sites without feeders. This information came from an October 16, 2016 column by Lori Schubring, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop in Rib Mountain.

Carrier pigeons race to come home

Common pigeons aren't a favorite bird of many. But, then there are racing pigeons who can be an addicting hobby for people who admire their unique capabilities. These birds are trained to return home after being released hundreds of miles from their destination.

"Pigeon races were developed some 3,000 years ago. Today's modern racing pigeons can be traced to Europe, especially Belgium. They must be bred and trained to develop the stamina to sustain speeds of 50 mph over distances of more than 500 miles." They are fitted with sensors on banded legs that activates a timer when they arrive home. Successful racers are mated for hybrid vigor and aerodynamic swiftness. They breathe and exhale every time they flap a wing which can be 180 times per minute.

"Modern history documents the role of homing pigeons in both World War I and World War II in communicating vital information while directly responsible for saving hundreds of civilian and military lives. Cher Ami, a French carrier pigeon saved some 200 American lives in World War I."

"An American pigeon, G.I. Joe, is credited with saving the lives of more than 1,000 troops in an Italian village in World War II. It delivered a message that British forces had retaken a village that was intended to be bombed. Many believe G.I. Joe to be the most outstanding military pigeon in history. History says that G.I. Joe flew 20 miles in 20 minutes to a U.S. Air Support Command base. The message he carried resulted in U.S. planes not taking off on their planned bombing run."

Dan Shingen of Mount Calvary, Wisconsin has raced pigeons for 50 years. He stated some of his birds have flown up to 10,000 miles a year until they are five or six years old. How do they find their way home? Cornell studies have provided distinct theories, but as of yet, there is no direct evidence on what guides them to their homeward destination. Magnetic polarity, sun position, infra sound, subsurface noise are all suspected aides.

I borrowed much of this information from an article by Judy Brown in a recent issue of the The Country Today newspaper.

Citizen contributions to the science of ornithology

Is there any other area of science where volunteers make such significant contributions? Various bird counts produce immense amounts of data that gets incorporated into scientific studies.

This is a good time to remind everyone that the 117th annual Christmas Bird Counts will be starting within a month. The Chequamegon Bird Club has a significant part of this winter ritual as club members are responsible for more than 5% of the states 111 counts. Clam Lake, Gilman, Medford, Owen-Withee, Spencer and Willard offer an interesting diversity of habitat and different bird species within these count areas. Each circle is 15 miles in diameter and counters record every bird identified by sight or sound during a selected 24 hour period. Frankly, these counts are also fun social events. Counts usually run from daylight till dark with a gathering of counters in the late afternoon to tally up the day's total species and bird numbers. There are almost invariably some surprises that add spice to the compilation of data. Counters usually travel together in cars so it is an excellent time for more novice counters to learn as the day goes on. People who record data during the day are an important part of each team. If you haven't yet taken part in a Christmas Bird Count, I strongly recommend it. Since Christmas falls on a Sunday this year, it makes scheduling counts more problematic. However, for sure there will be counts the weekends before and after Christmas. Hopefully, most of the counts will be scheduled by the November meeting. Connie Decker 654-5819, Gail Davis 229-2022 and Joe Scott 965-3498 are organizers for counts. It would be nice to see you take part in one or more of these fun and educational events.

Another phase of information gathering is by banding birds. Here birds are generally caught in mist nets, banded and then released. Data is recorded on quantity and species banded. Then if they are later recovered or recaptured, this provides information as to where the bird traveled and its age. Ken Luepke banded birds for many years with his favorite being Snowy Owls. Ken put in countless hours pursuing this beautiful visitor from the north. I would strongly suspect that no one else in Wisconsin has banded more Snowys than Ken. The Dorchester area is a hotspot for these birds to arrive at for whatever reason. Perhaps it is satisfy Connie Decker who does a remarkable job of keeping track of their arrivals, departures and whereabouts on a daily basis. A tip of the cap to all who volunteer their skills to further the science of ornithology.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps
3221 Town Hall Road
Abbotsford, WI 54405

CLUB CONTACTS

Website: Chequamegonbirdclub.org

Information: info@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Newsletter: newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Bird sightings: connie1@charter.net

Phased like tilted moons
half shadow, half reflection
juncos cross the snow

November and December happenings

Super full moon November 15.

Time to practice reading snow tracks?

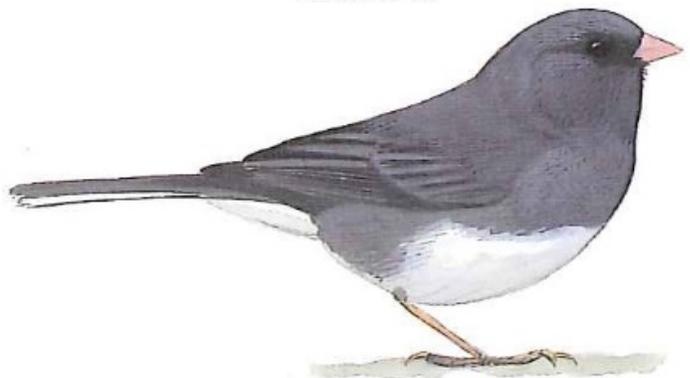
Deer hearts for REGI.

Last Sandhill cranes head south.

Far north birds arriving?

Happy Thanksgiving.

Adult ♂



Dark-eyed Junco