

# Chequamegon Chirps



November 20, 2017 Volume 36 Number 11

7 P.M. at the Medford Library

This meeting will be a little bit like food the day after Thanksgiving. Lots of stuff with plenty of variety. We would like to have people bring in bird articles of interest for discussion. It can be particular books, articles, poems, or some of your own writing or questions. If we don't get to all of the issues, we will stockpile them and fit them in as we go along in future meetings. Along this line, I recently came across a ten year old issue of the Birds and Blooms Magazine that discussed differences between beaks and bills which was the genesis for the article that follows on the next page.

---

A couple dozen members and guests gathered at the Stetsonville American Legion Hall last month for fellowship, fine food and 101 Ways to add more birds to your life by speaker Steve Betchkal. Visual equipment didn't cooperate for his presentation, but that didn't hinder him or lessen the dynamics of what he presented. Some of his interesting observations included: What is the most common bird in the world? (chickens) Poetry—where Ogden Nash worked molting and revolting in one of his limericks. Fake bird songs, or at least misplaced ones, in movies. Collecting bird stamps or other forms of avian arts and crafts. Building bird lists for our yards, counties, state, country, continent or world while traveling. And, since many of us now are in an empty nest phase of our lives, it is an excellent time to develop more citizen scientist skills. To close the evening, he signed many copies of *Make Birds Not War*. There may be a few more copies of this book available at the November or December meetings.

---

## Christmas Bird Counts

Tentative dates for two of the counts this year are December 17 for the Owen Count and December 30 for Medford. If these dates should change, and as the other four at Spencer, Willard, Gilman and Clam Lake are scheduled, organizers will give potential participants as much lead time as possible. It also would be extremely helpful if interested people (you don't have to be a member) contact Ken Luepke 659-3910 or Connie Decker 654-5819 for the Spencer, Willard or Gilman counts. Gayle Davis 229-2022 for Owen, Joe Scott 965-3498 for Medford or Keith Merkel for Clam Lake.

## Beaks Vs. Bills

We have seven different kinds of Grosbeaks, Pied-billed Grebes, Black or Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Long-billed Curlews, Ring-billed Gulls, Roseate Spoonbill, Long-billed and Curved-billed Thrashers plus Red and White-winged Crossbills. So what's the difference between a beak and a bill? Maybe the question should be, "Is there a difference between beaks or bills?" That answer isn't nearly as clear cut as I expected.

"A duck walks into a pharmacy and asks for some Chapstick. The cashier asks how he wants to pay for it. The duck replies, put it on my bill." Now if that bird was an Eagle, the joke wouldn't work as well. But technically, according to reliable sources, beak or bill are interchangeable. Others use a definition that if a bird is a meat eater or has a hook on its "bill," it is a "beak." Beaks and/or bills are mostly similar except for their shape. The included sketches are of some more extreme shapes. Bills can determine identification. Think of what is often used to determine if we are looking at a Hairy or Downy Woodpecker. For the rest of this article I'll use bill/beak as one word and you can use whichever word you prefer.

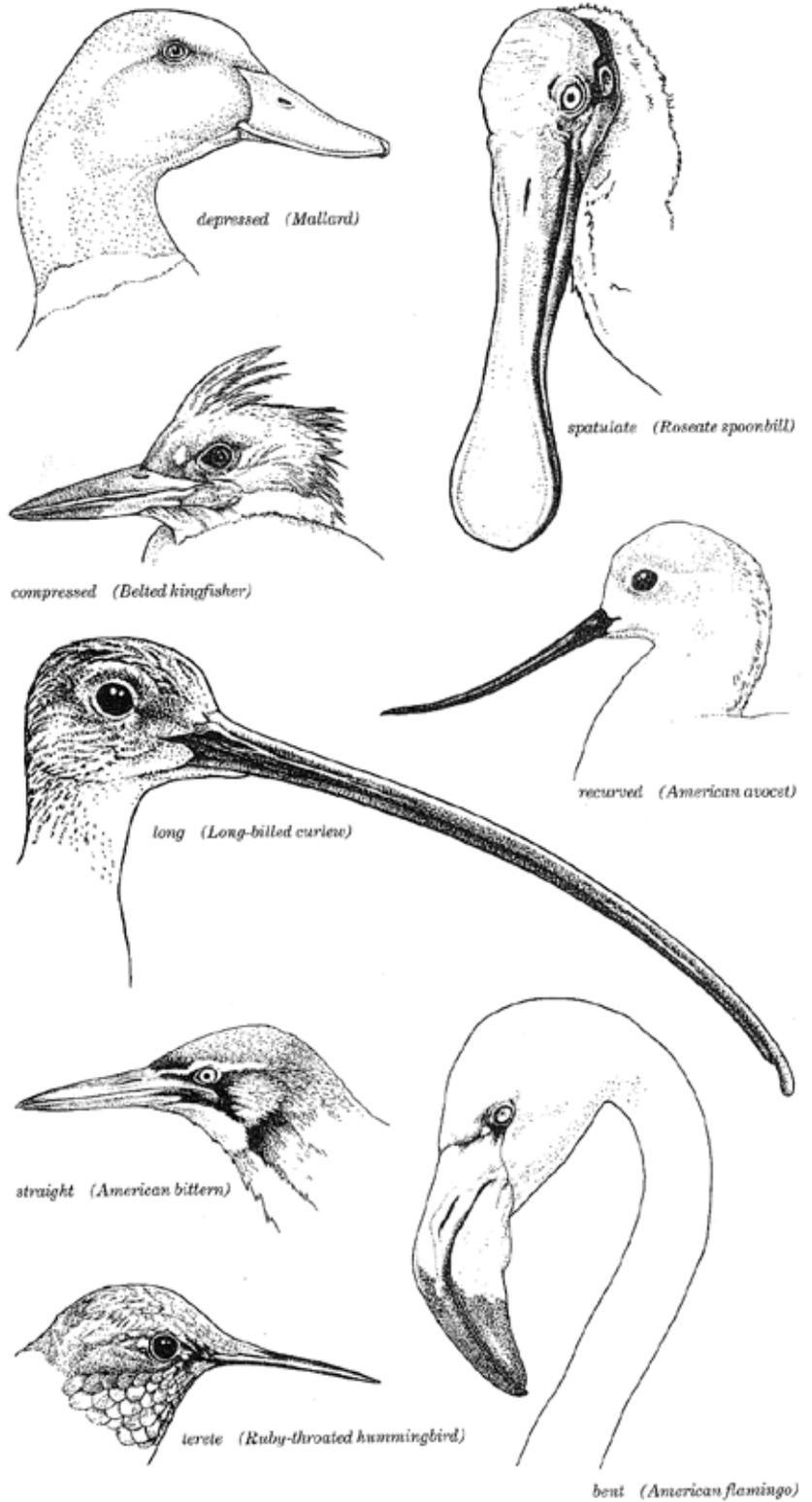
Birds rely on their bills/beaks for just about everything. Bills/beaks are a birds hands and mouth together. Above all, a bird's bill/beak is used to get its food and to break up that food into sizes it can swallow. As part of the mouth, the bill/beak tears, cuts or crushes food as needed. Also essential uses are preening of feathers, building nests, tending their young and in some cases, courtship.

Bills/beaks are covered with a hornlike sheath of keratin, the same substance in our fingernails. Most wear down, but they grow continuously and renew themselves toward the tip. Some bills/beaks are extremely hard and durable. Think of the pounding on wood that woodpeckers do. Others such as Snipes and Woodcocks have a soft bill/beak that is a sensory organ for probing in soft mud for worms.

"In most birds, the bill/beak is black, (Pettingill, 1972) but they can be almost every color. In some Toucans, the bill/beak is the most colorful part of the body. The color of some bills/beaks change with the seasons; Starlings and American Robins have a yellow bill/beak in the breeding season, a dark brown bill in the fall; the reverse is true of the Bobolink and House Sparrow—their bills/beaks are black in the breeding season and yellow or pale brown in fall; the olive-yellow bill/beak of the Evening Grosbeak becomes bright apple green in the breeding season. In birds with brightly colored bills/beaks, it does not attain full color until the bird is sexually mature. Some birds, such as Puffins molt the brightly colored parts of the bill/beak after the breeding season.

## What's Around?

This is an interesting time of year in that winter arrivals and late departures overlap and you might come across Robins and Snow Buntings in the same field. Some large flocks of the Snow Buntings have been spotted along with Lapland Longspurs and Horned Larks mixed in. In the last week I definitely saw a couple Harriers and (probably) a Rough-legged Hawk. Ken Luepke has heard of several Snowy Owls in the Ashland area and seen a Rough-legged Hawk and a couple Northern Shrikes in the area. Ron Draeger and Connie Decker have seen Thrashers since it has snowed. The last couple meetings haven't worked out for pooling what species members have seen or heard. Hopefully we can get caught upon recorded species within the state by members during 2017. Club members identified 257 species in 2016.



Editor Chequamegon Chirps

3221 Town Hall Road

Abbotsford, WI 54405

## CLUB CONTACTS

Website: [Chequamegonbirdclub.org](http://Chequamegonbirdclub.org)

Information: [info@chequamegonbirdclub.org](mailto:info@chequamegonbirdclub.org)

Newsletter:  
[newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org)

Bird sightings: [connie1@charter.net](mailto:connie1@charter.net)

November and December events:

Full Moon—December 3

Better opportunities to see Northern Lights.

Still time to visit the Birds In Art exhibit at Wausau.

Winter visitors arriving from the north.

