

Chequamegon Chirps



Medford, Wisconsin

October 2014

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OCTOBER MEETING

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20 - ANNUAL BANQUET

Multi-purpose Room, Taylor County Fairgrounds (NE corner of State Highways 13 and 64 in Medford)

Dinner at 6:30 p.m. preceded by socializing at 6 p.m.

Featured Speaker: Ryan Stockwell, Agriculture Program Manager for the National Wildlife Federation

"Agriculture and Bird Conservation"

(Banquet reservations needed to be made ahead of time. If you are not attending the banquet, we hope to see you at the November meeting.)

"Fool Hens"

Searching for "fool hens" can often turn into a fool's errand. "Fool hens" or Spruce Grouse are rare in Wisconsin and if found at all, are often in conifer swamps. Last weekend Gordy and I dragged ourselves out of bed by 4 a.m. and pulled out of the driveway shortly after 4:30. That alone was a minor miracle. Our goal was to be to Forest County, where two of the birds had recently been seen, by the time it got light so as to increase our chances of seeing one, and we were there as the sun came up.

A drive up and down the roads in the area yielded nothing for the first hour or so. As it got lighter outside, we were both starting to think we were on a wild goose chase when I spotted one less than ten feet from the car. By the time I stopped, it was so close that Gordy couldn't even see it from where he sat. When he cautiously opened the door, it flew across the road and landed along the shoulder. From then on, it lived up to the "fool hen", or in this case "fool cock", reputation of being so tame that people can approach to within a few feet of them. As we took photos, it seemed little bothered by our presence and worked its way toward us, picking at gravel along the

side of the road as it came. It eventually crossed the road, picked around on some gravel and rocks from a badger digging, and then wandered into the woods.



Spruce Grouse

Cathy Mauer photo

Although uncommon in Wisconsin, Spruce Grouse are found across the northern part of North America from New York and New England to the western US and into Canada and Alaska. They are protected in Wisconsin but are hunted in many other states,

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“Fool Hen” continued

including Minnesota. Two subspecies are recognized, the Taiga and the Franklin’s. The Taiga is found over most of the area. It has rufous tips on its tail feathers. The Franklin’s is found mostly in the northern Rockies and Cascades. It lacks the rufous tail tips, and the male has white spots near the base of its tail.

The range of the Spruce Grouse is restricted by their habitat and dietary preferences. In the upper Midwest, they are strongly associated with black spruce/tamarack swamps but also use nearby upland jack pine, white spruce, and red pine stands. Throughout the year, their diet consists mostly of conifer needles, though in spring, summer, and autumn, they also eat the fruit, flowers, and leaves of blueberry and related plants. The young eat invertebrates, fungi, and blueberry for the first few months. As both the adults and young switch to a diet of completely conifer needles in the winter, their gizzard grows by as much as 75% and the length of the intestinal tract by as much as 40%. These changes increase energy availability to help them survive during cold weather and short days that have limited foraging time. Their crop can hold up to 10% of their body weight, allowing for digestion to occur even during the night.

Like Ruffed Grouse, Spruce Grouse have other winter adaptations, too. Their feet develop pectinations, the somewhat comblike projections along the sides of the toes that function like snowshoes and may also help them move about on tree branches since they spend more time in trees during the winter. As do Ruffed Grouse, they also roost in snow burrows or under overhanging conifer boughs, taking advantage of the insulate values and protection from wind.

Come spring, courtship displays differ between the two subspecies. Both do flight displays, but the Franklin’s adds wing claps to his repertoire. Nests are shallow depressions lined with conifer needles and feathers located under some overhead cover, such as a conifer branch. The hen lays from four to six eggs that hatch after about a twenty-one day incubation period. The precocial young are brooded by the hen and periodically during the day but find their own food.

Although there are no guarantees of finding one and you may go on a fool’s errand, looking for Spruce Grouse is a great excuse for being outside at any time of year in some beautiful parts of the state.

Squirrel-resistant Bird Feeders

Like many other people, I do battle with squirrels. Some others decide to feed them, either because they have given up or because squirrels are, admittedly, cute and funny, but I continue to engage in trying to defeat them. I have tried several supposedly squirrel-proof feeders. Some have been easily raided by the furry critters, but a few have met the test.

Brome Squirrel Buster

One of my current favorites is the Brome Squirrel Buster. Not only has the feeder been mostly effective at keeping squirrels from feeding, the company’s customer service is among the best I’ve ever encountered for any product. I emailed the company after a perching ring broke. Within a couple days I had a new ring shipped to me at no cost. Plus, and totally unexpected, was a new bottom section for the feeder. In my email to them, I had mentioned that a squirrel had chewed on that section and done some minor damage that did not affect the feeder, but they replaced it anyway. One of the things that I especially like about the feeder is that it can be taken completely apart for easy cleaning. In fact, it can be put in a dishwasher. The Squirrel Buster Plus holds 3 qts. of seed. They also have other styles and thistle and peanut feeders. The feeders are available at Wild Birds Unlimited in Wausau and online.



Roller Feeder

Another feeder that outfoxes the squirrels is the Roller Feeder. This unique design has a hopper that remains fixed while the outer part of the feeder rotates around it, dumping off any squirrels that try to get on it. It also keeps out larger birds. Supposedly Cardinals can use it, but I haven’t seen one on mine. The only time a squirrel got seed from it was after a snow/ice storm that froze up the rolling function. The feeder keeps the seed dry, but it does not have a very large capacity. It is available online.



Bird Reports: August 19 - September 16, 2014

Participants this month were *Connie Decker, Ken Luepke, Joan and Joe Rickert, Claire Romanak, and Cam Scott.*

Total Number of Species Observed this month is: 129

- Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan (Luepke), Wood Duck, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal , Northern Shoveler , Green-winged Teal , Hooded Merganser
- Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey
- Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American Bittern, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron
- Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk (Luepke/C. Scott), Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin (Luepke)
- Sora, Sandhill Crane, Whooping Crane (Luepke), Black-bellied Plover (Decker/Luepke), Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher
- Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Forster's Tern
- Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove
- Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl
- Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher
- Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker
- Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Western Kingbird ** (Luepke), Eastern Kingbird
- Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo (Luepke), Red-eyed Vireo
- Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark
- Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow
- Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Sedge Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
- Eastern Bluebird, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Wood Thrush, American Robin
- Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing
- Golden-winged Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Black and White Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat
- Chipping Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco (Romanak)
- Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting
- Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Brewer's Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Northern Oriole
- Purple Finch, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

Please note that some families are grouped together due to space limitations.

Saw-whet Owl Banding Observation at Beaver Creek Reserve (Fall Creek, e. of Eau Claire)

Tuesday, October 21, 8:30 until 10:30 p.m.

Free for Friends, \$3 for Non-Members

Also, Tuesday, October 28

Pre-registration is REQUIRED by noon of the previous day.

www.beavercreekreserve.org/explore/events_and_programs.phtml or 715-877-2212

Kameron Perensovich
photo - Flickr



Chequamegon Chirps
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Officers

President — Claire Romanak
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Other Club Contacts

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(Cathy Mauer, editor)
Bird Sightings: Connie Decker



October - November Outdoors

- Solar Eclipse - October 23
- Full Moon - November 6
- Leonid Meteor Showers - November 17
- Red-winged Blackbirds gather for migration
- Redhead duck and Canvasbacks migrating
- White-throated Sparrows head south
- Find invasive buckthorn plants by their still green leaves. This is a good time to control these problem plants.
- White-tailed bucks in rut
- Black bears begin denning
- Mallard and Scaup migration at peak

Birds in Art

The 39th Birds in Art exhibit at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau opened September 6 and runs through November 16. This year's Master Artist is Barry Van Dusen, a watercolor artist who does a lot of his work in the field. He has had his work included in the exhibit fourteen times.

The exhibit includes 126 paintings, graphics, and sculptures by 112 artists from all over the world. The works were all created within the last three years. Those who have visited in past years already know that they will find many bird species portrayed in a wide range of styles.

The museum is open Tues-Fri, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (Thursday until 7:30 p.m.); Sat-Sun, noon-5 p.m.

It is located at 700 N 12th St in Wausau.

Admission is always free.