

# Chequamegon Chirps



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Our next meeting at 7:00 P.M. Monday will again be a zoom session due to Covid-19 and to provide greater security for our members. The educational part of the meeting will deal with Understanding Variations in Plumage, a National Geographic film. What's Around should have some interesting tales and numbers from member's observations of the fall migration. Hope to see you virtually on the Monday, the 18<sup>th</sup>.

The connect number is **870-3717-5938**.

## **Extinction**

Extinction means the death of all individuals of a species. Every last one. Recently the U.S. Government announced in an official report the extinction of 23 species in North America. Not all of these were birds. This has political implications as it eliminates funds for research and potential data collection. The headliner for this group is the ivory-billed woodpecker which also includes Backman's warbler and nine Hawaiian species. These species had once lived in 19 different states.

What causes extinction is not something caused just by humans. Three most significant factors are: 1) Changing habitat. 2) Invasive species. 3) Climate change. Some species adapt to changing conditions and thrive because that. Others don't. Until as recently as a couple hundred years ago, our immediate habitat was very different. Mature forests have been altered to now be acre after acre of farmland which is becoming more and more of a corn and soybean monoculture. An older woman who I knew many years ago told me that, "Her mother who was a homesteader six miles east of Abbotsford, was so happy whenever her husband cut down another tree by their cabin, because then she could see more sky." Four lane Highway 29 now passes that former tiny clearing. What a huge change in habitat. Is this a good or bad change? It depends on how you look at the situation and what measurements you use. Many species numbers have changed dramatically, usually downward or they have been eliminated on an at least local basis. Now this area produces crops that feed cattle who produce tons of milk that appear on grocery shelves in a multitude of products that can have world-wide distribution in addition to providing needed local food and

employment. Is there a simple yes or no answer if this change is good or bad? If there is, I don't know what it is.

Invasive species can sometimes thrive when introduced to a new area and whose numbers explode to disrupt other species to the point of elimination. In time, other factors can contribute to these number leveling off or decreasing. Two memorable examples of this are house sparrows and starlings who have had a significant impact in our immediate area. With international travel and shipping being so much faster and extensive than even in the last one hundred years, different species are getting established around the world, sometimes with devastating results.

Climate change is finally being recognized for the impact it is having on our own lives in addition to every living thing in the world. Sure, there has been climate change since the earth was created. The alarming speed at which it is happening has now gained much more recognition. This rapid change is causing huge problems for multitudes of species. Many will go extinct. Scientists estimate it is causing extinctions to increase by 1,000%. The natural, pre-human influence, scheme of things is a species would evolve, hang around for a million or two years, and then go extinct. Will that be our fate? Allowing 20 years per generation that would be 50,000 generations for the first million years. Maybe we can figure out something to remedy the situation before that happens. Numbers like that make the decision to have peas or carrots for supper seem less significant in the greater scheme of things.

Obviously, the most invasive species is us. An ecosystem is so vast and interconnected that everything, absolutely everything, in some minute way or another, impacts something else and the ripple effect continues on. It is necessary for survival. Humans just do it, hundreds? thousands? millions? times more than any other animal.

As I write this, I'm thinking about the warm shower I took this morning, the meat I had for supper, the gas I used to drive to town, the comfortable house I live in and the furnace oil I'll use this winter to keep it warm. Is this needed? The definitive answer is "sorta." I could survive with less comfort. Do I want to? Not really. It is much easier to be a martyr when one has a comfortable margin to start. If you and your family are struggling to survive, your main concern is to avoid extinction yourself without any regard for anything else. It is easier to preach than to practice.

## **Mumurations, Murders and Conspiracies**

These ominous sounding words describe bird gatherings. Conspiracy—ravens, Murder—crows and mumurations are groups of starlings in flight. Starlings, who, I admit, are my least favorite bird, can gather in tight flocks and maneuver in impossibly tight and cohesive formations. Tom Hill, a San Frisco based sculptor, returned to the Woodson Art Museum this fall as an artist in residence. He, joined by community members created wire birds to make a flock installed as a single sculpture for this year's exhibit. He explained, "Experiencing a mumuration is a shockingly spectacular event. A nightly impromptu air-ballet forms layers of dark and shade in ever-changing swirls against the evening sky, a Rorschach test of social choreography." These events are more common in the United Kingdom where starlings are much more appreciated than in North America. "This avian aerial phenomenon, reminiscent of a school of fish, occurring usually from October to March when large flocks—up to 100,000 fly as one to create undulating cloud-like forms." It is believed this confuses predators such as peregrine falcons and helps to warm them up before they roost for the night.

The United Kingdom has seen an 80% drop in starling numbers in recent years due to loss of permanent pasture, more farm chemicals, shortage of food and nesting sites.

### **Birds in Art**

"In its 46<sup>th</sup> year, this internationally renowned exhibition features artwork by 113 artists. All-new paintings sculptures and graphics are presented in mediums ranging from acrylic, oil, and watercolor to linocut, wood, and wire. In all, 510 artists submitted 813 artworks for the jury's consideration; ninety-two artworks were selected in addition to work by twenty-one previously honored Master Artists." The exhibit focuses on six themes: day at the beach, ducking out, enchanted evening, follow the line, in the pink, and carved in stone.

The museum's collection features a Birding by the Book exhibit which comprises illustrated bound volumes along with framed, hand-colored engravings by early explorers, artists and naturalists. Weather permitting, be sure to visit the newly opened Rooftop Sculpture Garden.

The picture on page 4 is one of the sculptures on exhibit by Fererico Uribe Blue Parrot 2019, bullet and shotgun shells.

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### **October and November Events**

Full moons 10-20 and 11-19

Fall color is waning

No frost as of 10-13

Winter preparations continue

