

Chequamegon Chirps



Medford, Wisconsin September 18, 2017 Volume 36 Number 9

Scott and Peggy Stalheim will host the September meeting at N2207 Cardinal Drive which is a dead end road south off of Highway O. It is located about 3 ½ miles west of Highway 13 or, if you come from the west, take O east off of Highway 64 for about 4 ½ miles. Cardinal Drive is located between Castle Road and Sunset Drive. When you get to their driveway, you still have a winding quarter mile drive west to get to their buildings. It is worth it though as they have a beautiful couple acres of prairie they have established and are continuing to maintain. We will start with a prairie/bird walk at 6 p.m. with the meeting at 7. Hopefully, the weather will be dry and we'll sit around a campfire afterward. If not, we will still meet at that time for a round table discussion in their garage about prairie establishment, maintenance and flavor our talk with animal experiences and emotions—theirs as well as ours as we go about this business of living. Bring along your favorite chair although seating will be available, too.

Current Events

In addition to migration, there are a whole batch of bird activities going on this weekend. #1 Stevens Point is hosting the **2017 Federal Duck Stamp Art Competition** and other activities September 15-16. Since first issued in 1934, funds generated through stamp sales have helped to protect 6.5 million acres of wetlands in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The contest moves around the country to generate interest in wetlands and waterfowl. This is the first time it is being held in Wisconsin. For more information, call (703) 358-2145 or www.uwsp.edu/ cnr

2 **Birds in Art** began September 9 and will continue through November 26, 2017 at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau. This highly acclaimed exhibit is in its 42nd year that features outstanding bird art from around the world. This really should be on your "Don't miss it list."

3 (This isn't about birds, but it is at the same time, interesting and convenient) Wausau is hosting a **Ginseng Festival** September 15-17. Marathon County is the capital of the U.S. ginseng industry. Tours, demonstrations, food and activities will be in Wausau's downtown 400 Block, adjoining streets other area locations.

4 **Hawk Ridge Festival and workshops.** Hawk Ridge in Duluth is blessed as one of the main concentrations of raptor migration in the U.S. Professional bird counters monitor this location from August into November and count all birds passing through. With optimum conditions, the numbers can be incredible. At this time of year, Broad-winged Hawks are at their peak and counts sometimes run into the thousands per day. This weekend features many educational speakers, programs and workshops. Google Hawk Ridge Festival for more detailed information.

The **annual banquet** will be held October 16 in Stetsonville. More details to follow in the next Chirps. Two things are important now. First, tickets will be on sale for \$15 at the September meeting in addition to raffle tickets. Secondly, the speaker, Steve Betchkal, offers a tantalizing list of presentation possibilities. He is willing to do whichever one we select as a club. (A dictatorship is more efficient, but it is still nice to be involved in a democratic process.) Here are the seven options. #1 From point A to Z: The basics of bird migration. # 2 Way out there: Birding the Pribilof Islands of Alaska. # 3—101 Ways to Add More Birds to Your Life. # 4 A Wisconsin Farmboy in Galapagos. # 5 Exploring the American West a Step at a Time. # 6 The Cloud Forest Birds of Ecuador. # 7 Hitting the Corners: Birding the edges of the U.S. I drooled a bit as I typed this list. Personally, I'd like to hear all seven. It will be a tough decision, but any one of them will be a winner. Steve has an impressive pedigree with extensive recognition. Again, more details to follow next month.

Leucism vs Albinoism

Recently we were treated to an unusual sighting at the Medford Pond. What was that white bird? A Great Egret? An albino Great Blue Heron? Some other specie? It involved considerable head scratching, but fortunately, it cooperated by being out in the open and it hung around for a considerable time.

It was determined to be a leucistic Great Blue Heron. Leucism or leukism is an abnormal plumage condition caused by a genetic mutation that prevents pigment, particularly melanin, from being properly deposited on a bird's feathers. That can result in bold white patches or paler overall plumage that looks faint, diluted or bleached. Birds that show only white patches or sections of leucistic feathers, often in symmetrical patterns, are often called pied or piebald birds while birds with all white plumage are referred to as leucistic birds. While leucism does occur in a small number of wild birds, it is more often seen in captive birds or exotic birds deliberately bred to encourage this type of genetic mutation. Pure white peacocks are one of the most common examples of this selective breeding.

Albinism is another genetic condition that can turn a bird's plumage pale, but there are distinct differences between albino and leucistic birds. Leucism affects only the bird's feathers, and typically only those with melanin pigment, usually dark feathers. Albinism, on the other hand, affects all the pigments and albino birds show no color whatsoever. An albino mutation also affects the bird's other pigments in the skin and eyes resulting in pale pink or reddish eyes, legs, feet and a pale bill. Leucistic birds often have normally colored eyes, legs, feet and bills.

Leucistic birds can be a challenge to identify. The size and shape of the bird as well as its range, feeding habits, behavior and what other birds it associates or flocks with can be clear indicators of its species. Birders who know how to bird by ear can identify birds by sounds and songs, regardless of what the bird's plumage may look like.

Birds with lack of normal coloration face special challenges in the wild. Those with lighter plumage may be robbed of protective camouflage and make them more vulnerable to predators. Melanin is also an important structural component of feathers, and birds with extensive leucism have weaker feathers. This means feathers lacking melanin will wear out more quickly, making flight more difficult and eliminating some of the bird's insulation against harsh weather. White feathers also reflect heat more efficiently, which can be fatal for birds that rely on sunbathing and solar radiation. All in all, it creates a situation where these birds have distinct disadvantages in life which probably shortens their life to some degree.

While not advantageous to the bird, it can make for memorable sightings for the lucky birder. One time I saw a white bird among a flock of House Sparrows and assumed it was an albino without considering the possibility of it being leucistic. Two other instances involved piebald birds that came to our feeders. A couple years ago a distinctly pale Black-capped Chickadee visited our feeders for most of the winter. Years before that, a fall migrating Dark-eyed Junco displayed a pure white head and cape that resembled that of a Bald Eagle. Plumage pattern and color are often used for bird identification. Seeing something that doesn't fit normal patterns can be initially confusing. By understanding what leucism is and how it can affect birds, birders can rely on other identification keys to ID a particular bird. Good luck and happy birding. _____

Winged flyers other than birds. (notes from members)

A friend of Connie tagged a Monarch Butterfly recently recovered in Texas. Joan was reminded of the last two lines of the poem The Wasp by William Sharp when harassed by wasps at a recent outdoor event.

Yellow and black-this tiny thing's

A tiger- soul on elfin wings.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps

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September and October events

Full moon September 6 and October 5

Fall equinox September 22

Indian Summer with beautiful fall colors

Continuing fall migration with arrivals and departures

Good-by mosquitoes

Birds in Art exhibit