ChequamegonChirps

August 2026 Volume 44 Number 8

Our next meeting will be on the third Monday of the month, August 17. It will be at the Medford Library with a bird walk at 6:15 followed by the meeting starting at 7:00. Orientation will be the theme of the information session with a few other necessary business details including "What's Around.

Orientation

Orientation has a dictionary definition of, "the ability to locate oneself in one's environment with reference to time and place. The ascertainment of one's true position." I wonder how much we have lost our ability—due to lack of necessity—of this skill. Birds and other migrating species continue to amaze and baffle us as to how they get to where they want to go without ever having been there before. The following tale combines orientation as part of a remarkable happening.

Kara, Alberta and Manitoba

This story fascinates me in that it offers questions not considered before and offers unexpected interaction between species—when the right individuals are involved.

Kara is Nadine and Dean Willett's daughter, so you know she has extraordinary goose sense. Some four or five years ago Tara and her family lived at her folk's home near Spencer for several years. She was hatching duck and goose eggs in the spring when someone gave her two more goose eggs to add to the hatch. Lo and behold, when they hatched, she discovered they were Canada geese. Oops. They blended in well with the other critters and given free rein to mix with the other geese and ducks. Their wings weren't clipped so it was expected they would join other migrants in the fall. When migrating geese passed overhead that fall, Alberta and Manitoba watched them carefully but did not try to join them then or in following migrations.

Alberta developed a remarkable connection to people, especially Kara, who she bonded with. A side note here. The Willett family has an extraordinary relationship with their animals. There is a cohesion among the species to call it anything less than remarkable doesn't do it justice.

All the ducks and geese were fed regularly and weren't penned up. Kara and family lived at their Spencer home two more years before moving to the Athens area. They took all their accumulated poultry with them including Alberta and Manitoba. In the next two years he died but Alberta continued to stay with Kara's family at their new home.

This March, after the major snow storm, Alberta disappeared from her Athens home. Several days later she appeared back at her former Spencer home. This is a distance of some thirty miles or so as a crow flies—or in this case; a goose. After a few days, Alberta disappeared again. There is an wetland area near the Willet home where geese nest. Alberta paired up with a male pair came from there and he also showed exceptional comfort being around buildings and near people. When Kara visited her former home, Alberta greeted her with great enthusiasm. She didn't cuddle with her but came right up to her as they conversed in honk. This is one of Kara's talents. Alberta continued to return to the nearby marshy area where it appeared she was hatching eggs.

Nadine goes for walks along their little used road, often accompanied by dogs, cats and Alberta. She didn't walk fast enough to keep up with the parade but would fly a short distance ahead and wait for the others to catch up as they traveled along.

One day Alberta came to the buildings in an agitated state obviously trying to communicate with Nadine. She wanted Nadine to follow her to the nesting area which no one did to avoid attracting predators. That was the last time Alberta was seen. It is suspected she became a prey victim. What had upset Alberta so much? What knowledge did she posses to find her original home? Some questions produce more questions, not answers. Thinking is a good exercise—even when there aren't obvious answers. The story is a remarkable tale of an extra strong connection between Alberta and the Willets, especially Kara. Love stories can come in many forms. Some can leave webbed footprints on your heart.

Douglas B. Pledger

1940—2026

One of the benefits of the Chequamegon Bird Club is meeting members with a rich diversity of backgrounds. Doug and his wife Willow were long time club members who awarded Starbound Scholarships to Medford High School graduates. Doug was a former club president.

A Wausau school system graduate, he studied at the UW-Marathon for two years and then enrolled at the University of Colorado in Boulder to study astronomy and astrophysics before returning to UW-Madison to pursue a PhD in nuclear physics. After passing preliminary examinations, Doug spent three years doing research with the particle accelerator at the UW-Madison. His doctoral thesis was Study of Detailed Balance for Atomic Particles As A Test of Time Reversal Invariance.

Doug was employed by MITRE Corporation, a think tank funded by the U.S, Air Force located in Bedford, Massachusetts from 1969 to 1974. His work required national and international air travel. He spent 128 days at sea in South Pacific supervising the observation of the denotation of five thermonuclear bombs by the French government. Data was collected one summer while aboard the USS Norton Sound and Wheeling merchant marine another year.

Doug was hired by Honeywell Systems and Research Center in 1974 until 2000, During years in the Space Defense Subsystems Division, he spent time at Mission Control in Houston, Texas communicating with Space Shuttle crews testing a Honeywell patented device.

Doug and Willow enjoyed their two children and activities including tapping maple trees to make syrup. He taught at the Medford Education Center, National Guard Armory and Mt. Scenario College.

A memorial service will be held at a later date.

103633 Fence Road

Abbotsford, WI54405

Club contacts

Website: Chequamegonbirdclub.org

Information: Info@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

August and September events

Full Moons: August 27th Sturgeon

September 26th Harvest

Southbound migration increases;

Including Monarch Butterflies

Birds in Art Exhibit:

Common nighthawks begin migration

Alberta and Kara