

ChequamegonChirps



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Monday, December 16 at the Medford Library 7:00 P.M. will be our Christmas party. This session will include a white elephant sale, games, Christmas treats and refreshments provided by the officers. It is a handy time to renew your \$18 membership. What's Around could include year highlights in addition to current feeder customers and new arrivals. The Spencer count results, held two days previously, will be presented along with any additional details for the Willard, Medford, and Gilman counts. The last I heard, the Owen count tentatively scheduled for Sunday, December 22 may not occur due to lack of participants. It would be a shame to lose that tradition.

She's 74 and expecting:

Wisdom the Albatross Astounds Once Again

Wisdom is thriving in America---Wisdom the albatross, that is. The Laysan albatross is now at least 74 years old, and she recently laid an egg at the Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in the Pacific Ocean.

It's quite a feat for the oldest known bird in the wild. Wisdom was first identified and banded in the 1950s, after she laid an egg on the atoll at the northwestern edge of the Hawaiian Archipelago.

"Of the more than 250,000 birds banded since [biologist] Chandler Robbins banded Wisdom in 1956, the next oldest bird we know about currently is just 52 years old," Jon Pilssner, supervisory wildlife biologist at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, tells NPR.

In 1956, Dwight Eisenhower was president and Hawaii was not yet a U.S. state. In the decades since, Wisdom, like other Laysan albatross, or moli in Hawaiian, has continued to fly to Midway every year to nest. NPR has followed Wisdom before: she made headlines when she hatched a chick back in 2013, and she was seen brooding in 2018.

Wisdom is resilient. Eggs she and her mate incubated have occasionally gone missing. In 2011, she survived a deadly tsunami. She's also been able to navigate man-made threats, from fishing gear to plastic debris scattered over the ocean. Part of her species' Latin name,

Phoebastria immutabilis, refers to its unchanging plumage, And for decades, Wisdom's consistency has been seen as an inspiration.

She' believed to have flown more than 3 million miles over the open sea---enough distance to fly from the Earth to the moon and back six times. Wisdom likely spends the year flying "in the North Pacific and/or southern Bering Sea, around the Aleutians and perhaps west toward the Kamchatka Peninsula and Japan," Plissner says,

The large seabirds normally have only one mate in their lifetime. But after Wisdoms longtime mate, Akeakamai, failed to return to the atoll, she started performing Laysan albatross's intricate courtship dances with other males.

So, who is this new fella? Might his relationship with Wisdom be an avian equivalent to the current Hollywood trend of older women pairing up with younger men?

"We don't know her mate's age, as he was unbanded before this week," Plissner says, because of their never-changing plumage, he adds, it's hard to determine the exact age of an adult Laysan albatross unless they were banded as chicks.

Over the years, Wisdom has likely produced 50 to 60 eggs, and brought as many as 30 chicks to the fledgling stage, Plissner says. She has persisted, even as the risks to her and millions of other seabirds have increased, from predators to habitat changes.

Plissner notes, "The ongoing effects of climate change causing sea level rise, as well as larger and severe storms has resulted in the loss of breeding habitat through inundation."

But, he adds, "Wisdom has somehow managed to avoid all the hazards for more than 70 years."

This article, written by Bill Chappell, appeared on the NPR website on December 6, 2024

I included it in this issue because of the novelty of the article.with the connection to the Chequamegon Bird Club has to the story which I think is pretty neat. Chandler Robbins was the brother of Sam Robins, our club founder. Chan was the principal author of *Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification*, first published in 1966—a bible for millions of birding enthusiasts. Brother Sam authored *Wisconsin Birdlife* which when published in 1991 was the most comprehensive source of information on the status and distribution of birds in Wisconsin Chandler worked for more than six decades as ornithologist at the Patuxent Research Refuge in Laurel, Maryland. In the 1950s he documented the damage wrought by the pesticide DDT, including its thinning effect on osprey and eagle eggshells. Rachel Carson, a colleague at the time, relied on his research for her environmental manifesto "*Silent Spring*." An early champion of citizen science, Chan founded the North American Breeding Bird Survey, an initiative that has grown in its founding since 1965 to involve thousands of volunteer birders in an annual effort of exacting rigor to measure the continental bird population. It is one of the two most significant avian monitoring programs of its kind. He participated in the other, the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count for more than 80 years.

“It is not an exaggeration at all to call him one of the giants of the 20th century ornithology and bird conservation,” John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithica, New York, said in an interview.

These two brothers made history with their authorship and other contributions to ornithology, both in research and while being gracious teachers for all levels of birders. They appeared together at a Chequamegon Bird club meeting. That was a significant event for our club.



Wisdom (center right), a Laysan albatross first banded in 1956, stands with her new partner as they admire their recently laid egg at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in late November.
Dan Rapp/USFWS volunteer

Winter Reading Possibilities

The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior by David Allen Sibley

Sense of Wonder by Rachel Carlson

The Laws Guide to Drawing Birds by John Muir Laws

Extreme Birder: One Woman’s Big Year by Lynn E, Barber

What an Owl Knows by Jennifer Ackerman

Sibley Birding Basics by David Allen Sibley

Field Notes from an Unintentional Birder by Julia Zaraankin

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December and January events

Full moons Dec 15 and Jan 13

Winter solstice December 21

Daylight starts to increase

Owl courting continues

Audubon Christmas counts

Relax and enjoy a time of no political ads

