

Chequamegon Chirps



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The July 7, 2024 Chequamegon Bird Club meeting will take place at the Medford School Forest starting at 6:00 p.m. The session will start with a picnic lunch with buns, barbecue and s'more provided. If so inclined you can bring a dish to pass but that is voluntary. You will need to bring your own eating utensils, drinks and something to sit on. We will eat outside unless it is raining, but there are indoor facilities if necessary. After eating and a brief meeting there will be a bird walk I, again weather permitting.

WHY BIRDS MATTER

The January issue of the 2018 National Geographic had a series of articles about why birds matter. One by Hannah Lang included information about egg shape and flight tendencies of different species. "Birds lay eggs of surprising variety, and scientists have long wondered why. Could it be certain shapes protect eggs from shattering? Or perhaps allow them to fit snugly in a nest? Or was Aristotle correct when he asserted that long, pointy eggs contained females while rounder eggs held males? (He wasn't.)"

"To crack the mystery about egg shapes, Princeton University evolutionary biologist Mary Caswell Stoddard examined almost 50,000 eggs from more than 1,400 species. They classified eggs based on their asymmetry and ellipticity, discovering the more pointy or oval shaped an egg, the more likely it came from a strong flier. "We were shocked see that one of the best explanations for egg-shape variation was flight ability," says Stoddard."

"Common murre, for instance, have particularly pointy and elliptical eggs and are expert divers. Perhaps a streamlined bird needs a streamlined egg; stout flightless birds like ostriches and emus hatch from eggs that are nearly round."

"Penguins, however, break the mold: Although the aquatic birds can't take to the air, their eggs are asymmetrical. This discovery initially left the researchers puzzled,

but they developed a working hypothesis, says Stoddard: “The same process that may influence egg shape in good fliers may also be at work in good swimmers, like penguins.”

POLITICS, RELIGION, CATS

If you would want a lively, contentious or just plain disagreeable debate, on up to a verbal or physical brawl, any one of the above three would provide plenty of ammunition for differing opinions. Come to think of it, any one of the three discussions will probably produce the same number of converts. Being totally chicken, (this is a bird newsletter, after all), I’ll just pick one topic tonight. There isn’t enough beer in the house to get me going on all three.

Cats. Love them or hate them. Herding cats is a statement that describes the futility of trying to accomplish something. Cats are their own animal. They are also surrogate family member that provide love and comfort for millions. They are an industry in themselves.

“From a puff-ball Persian to an inscrutable alley cat, the domestic felines that dominate the internet today began their worldwide spread from a common ancestor nearly 10,000 years ago. In the Fertile Crescent region, rodents that devoured grains likely drew African-Asian wildcats to settlements and people welcomed the vermin control. Ancient Egypt, where cats became treasured pets, saw a second wave of domestication, and Romans later spread them to Europe. During colonial expansion, shipboard cats protected food stores and proliferated nearly everywhere sailors landed. Today cats inhabit every continent except Antarctica, and they’ve left behind their mark on ecosystems far and wide. They’ve been linked to the global extinction of at least 63 species—40 birds, 21 mammals, and 2 reptiles—all on islands or in Australia, which have few, if any, native mammalian predators. Their presence threatens the survival of at least 367 other species.”

“In the United States, pet cats date to the late 19th century, when they were useful as mousers in booming cities. At the time, spaying and neutering were rare and kittens were often abandoned to fend for themselves. In a 1916 report, ornithologist Edward Forbush painted a grim picture: Vagrant cats abounded—in the previous decade, more than 210,000 had been euthanized in Boston alone.”

“The first national catfight ensued. Scientists and conservationists were alarmed by the threat to songbirds, which kept crop-destroying insects before the wide use of insecticides. Many avian species were also protected under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Cat lovers, meanwhile, accused avian proponents of hysteria and balked at recommendations to confine felines during nesting season, especially at night.”

“Cats began living inside gradually, though wildlife worries weren’t the reason. With scratching posts available at pet stores in the 1930s and commercial kitty litter hitting supermarket shelves in the 1950s, cats became less destructive and malodorous housemates—and with improved access to sterilization, less noisy ones, too. (Unsterilized cats yowl and spray urine during their mating season.) Concerns about the welfare of outdoor cats and strays were also growing. When a startling statistic that overburdened shelters were euthanizing 13.5 million animals annually—a significant portion of them cats—made headlines in the 1970s, the Humane Society of the United States and other animal groups began encouraging more responsible pet ownership to curb the creation of more kittens.”

By then, there were some 30 million pet cats in the United States. Outdoor cats are more prone to illness and vulnerable to attacks from cats, dogs, coyotes and raccoons. On average, outdoor cats live far shorter lives than their housebound kin. Outdoor cats are more prone to parasites and diseases that can be passed on to humans.

“To a growing number of owners, the answer is simple, keep your cat(s) under lock and key, as 63 % of owners do now. That number is up from 35% in the 1990s. More municipalities now enact cat licensing laws and pass ordinances that limit felines out on the landscape. Yet such laws are rarely enforced. And the cat population has more than doubled in the last half century. That means more cats than ever may prowl the outdoors. Recently I’ve seen some photos of people taking their cats for walks while leashed. Also, catios (a.k.a. cat patio) are becoming more of an item in some cities where people build enclosed outdoor facilities where cats can be outside without interacting with other animals as a part of responsible pet ownership.

Existing studies calculate cats kill at least 1.3 billion birds and 6.3 billion mammals annually.

This information came from the spring 2024 Audubon.

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Club contacts

Website: chequamegonbirdclub.org

July and August events

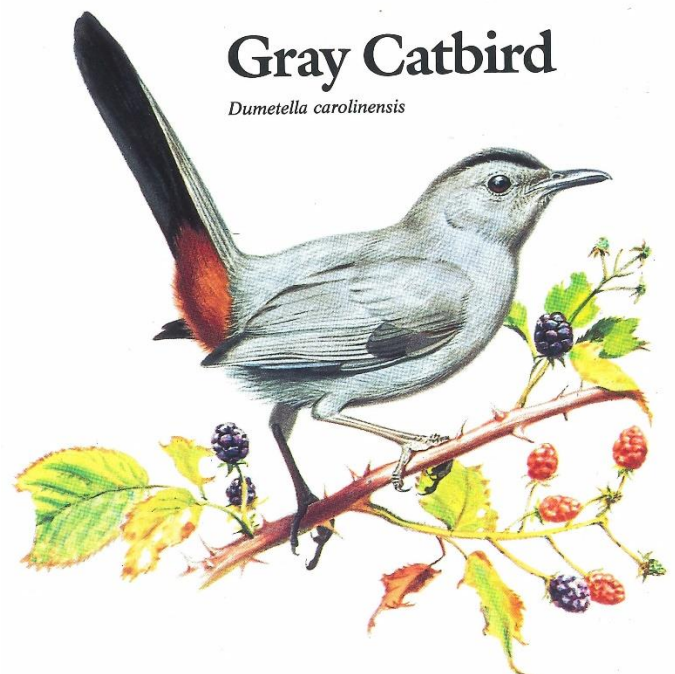
Full moons July 21 and August 19

Earliest migrants heading south

Town celebrations continue

Local fairs begin

Will the wet weather continue?



Gray Catbird

Dumetella carolinensis