

Chequamegon Chirps



June 17, 2024 Volume 42 Number 6

The **Monday, June 17th** Chequamegon Bird Club meeting will be at 7:00 P.M. at the large meeting room of the Medford Library. There will be—weather permitting—a bird walk by the mill pond starting at 6:00 P.M. Sue Vick will give a photo presentation of birds seen on a recent Costa Rica birding trip.

This newsletter is a week earlier than usual for a couple of reasons. I'll be traveling the week when you would normally receive the CHIRPS so for this June it is early or not at all. That works out well because there is a bird walk scheduled for **Monday June 10 at 7:00 P.M.** at the Kevin and Jayne Paul farm. We had a well attended bird walk there last July on a beautiful summer evening. This year if there is rain, there will be an alternate date yet to be determined.

The Paul farm is several miles west of Highway 13 on W6235 Elm Road on the south side of the road. This road is a couple miles south of Stetsonville or one mile north of the Taylor-Clark County line. Last year most of the meadowlarks and bobolinks had already headed south by July 17th. This year, by moving up the visit by a month, there should be considerably more of these two species whose numbers have declined drastically due to loss of habitat and changing farm practices.

Changing methods of dairy farming and crop production have decimated numbers of birds that nest in hay fields. Some 75 years ago it was traditional for farmers to start to mow first crop hay on the morning of July 4th and then take a vacation half day in the afternoon to participate in picnics and other 4th of July activities. Research showed that earlier cut hay had less fiber and higher protein which produces more milk from dairy cows. More milk, fewer grassland birds, because earlier hay cutting destroys nests before the fledglings are ready to leave their nests. Rain is holding back hay making this year which now begins in late May in dryer years. Larger equipment speeds up hay harvesting considerably, too. Hundreds of acres can be harvested daily of high quality forage which produces more milk per cow. Current milk production per cow has approximately tripled from 75 years ago. That makes our dairy products cheaper

at a grocery store but the changes to accomplish this impressive increase has made life much more difficult for grassland birds.

Why is there a concentration of bobolinks and meadowlarks on the Paul farm? He practices intensive rotational grazing. This involves maximizing livestock eating the most nutritional grass growth available. Rotation and intensive are the key words in this practice. Cows are timed to calve in late winter to early spring so their maximum production time meshes with greatest growth of grasses and legumes. Fences are moved one or two times a day and then the recently grazed areas are given several weeks to regrow so there is new growth when the herd briefly comes back to the area again. Cattle are more forgiving of nesting birds than large machinery. Intensive grazing produces a more biodiverse environment for bird nesting and survivability than large fields of weed free row crops and early and often mowed hay fields. This 200 acre farm supports about 100 milking cows with more land rented for other crop production. Fence rows, two ponds and a swale cross the land to provide different habitat for various kinds of nesting.

The walk is scheduled to start at 7:00 P.M. but if you want to make it a picnic you are welcome to use the area west of the buildings. There may be a bonfire to conclude the evening. Hope you can attend both events

TURKEY VULTURES or *Cathartes aura*

While many bird species are declining in Wisconsin, turkey vultures continue to move north and expand in numbers. "According to Sam Robbins' excellent book *Wisconsin Birdlife, the range of the turkey vulture* has been steadily moving northward in the state. They were rarely seen north of the Ohio Valley in the early 1950s. Today they are reported from every Wisconsin county in the summer."

"Its seemingly effortless soaring flight is beautiful to behold, perhaps unsurpassed by any native bird to our state. The dihedral (shallow V-shape) of its wings while in flight is an excellent field mark, as are its two-toned black and gray wings."

"Seeing several making lazy circles in the sky doesn't mean they have found carrion on the ground below. They simply may be riding thermals where they rise higher in the sky while they are searching for food, both with their keen sense of

smell as well as their superb eyesight, They don't flap their wings any more than they have to and, with good air currents may stay aloft for several hours at a time.

“These huge birds with a six foot wingspan chose very secluded nesting sites and consequently are difficult to locate and study. Once located, it takes a very dedicated ornithologist having a strong stomach and great determination to study the birds. Researchers who have worked with them claim they have been royally initiated into field ornithology. When frightened or angered, turkey vultures have a nasty habit of regurgitating what may be the most vile smelling matter imaginable. The scientific name *Cathartes* is from a Greek word meaning cleanser, scavenger, or purifier. *Aura* means a distinctive air that characterizes a person or thing, then the vulture's species name is well chosen, at least in the nostrils of the bird bander who works with and handles these strange creatures.”

“Many members of the Animal Kingdom, ranging from the smallest bird to the largest mammals, have nostrils for an excellent reason. For example, when a turkey vulture's esophagus is filled to capacity with food to be swallowed, it would soon suffocate were it not for its nostrils, which enable it to swallow and breathe at the same time. The nostril openings in a turkey vulture's upper mandible are unusually large.”

“These masters of the sky, its thermals, crosswinds and air currents may not appeal aesthetically to the great majority of people, but in reality, they serve as one of nature's most important unpaid disposal creatures of decomposing animal matter. Unquestionably, they help to reduce disease and help to keep our roadsides cleaner.”

This information came from an article written by Roy Lukes.

Once in Ohio I stopped to look at a pile of black feathers in a ditch. I knelt to see what I could identify. (Checking out roadkill has been a longtime hobby of mine.) A red head popped out and I was nose to beak with a turkey vulture. It calmly looked at me from only inches away and wasn't frightened at all. Injured, it awaited the fate it afforded to many others in its lifetime. The circle of life will run over all of us eventually. Hopefully I will handle the situation with as much aplomb as that critter whose calmness impressed me. I wished it well and trudged on my way.

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Club contacts

Website:chequamegonbirdclub.org

June and July events

Summer solstice June 20

Full moons June 21 and July 21

Drive carefully

Be aware of students out of school,

Newborn fawns,

Turtles laying roadside eggs.

