

Chequamegon Chirps



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The May meeting will be a bird walk starting at the head of the Aldo Leopold Trail beginning at 6:00 P.M. at the Mondeaux Dam Recreation Area. The trail head can be reached by going west of Medford on Highway 64, then going north on Highway E. After crossing M, it is about ten miles more north where you turn east on a marked road to the recreation area. Follow that until you come to a tee and take a left which will get you to a parking lot. There is a nearby food source with bathrooms and tables which opens at 5:30 P.M. With reasonable weather conditions, we should find the trail decorated with good numbers of spring migrants.

Another bird walk excursion is scheduled on **May 20 at 7:00 A.M.** in the McMillen Marsh Wildlife Area located just north of Marshfield. The gathering spot will be at the end of Marsh Road which comes off of Highway E on the east side of the marsh.

The first of the three scheduled club bird walks for May was at Mead Wildlife Area at 7:00 A.M. Saturday, May 6. Fourteen members and guests recorded 48 species. Some of the highlights included wood ducks, northern shoveler, rudy duck, pied-billed grebe, sora, American white pelicans, American bitterns, palm warbler and yellow-headed blackbirds.

Last month's session had the distinction of being the fourth month in a row that weather altered. A foot or more of snow will do things like that in the winter as well as April. In spite of that, there was an election of officers as follows: Scott Stalheim, president; Autumn Lahner, vice president; Mary Urban, secretary and Betty Danen' treasurer. Three are new to their positions so I think they would appreciate helpful suggestions for future activities and programing. Kudos to all the recent retirees. They have done good work over many years. Maybe we can come up with a program where all members—in addition to their membership—volunteer or are assigned to a committee or office as a part of being a club member. Recently joined member Autumn Lahner has been brave enough to accept the office of vice president.

Migration—Data

“ New ways of collecting bird migration are increasing more rapidly with greater precision as new techniques are developed. The map on page four is an example of collaboration among scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Colorado State University, and University of Massachusetts Amherst that uses weather radar and machine learning to track and forecast bird migration. BirdCast has been monitoring nightly bird migration via radar across the U.S. since 1999. This new analysis determined the peak periods of spring bird migration as measured by 143 radar systems from coast to coast, with each radar measuring aerial bird densities every ten minutes from 2013 to 2022.”

“While weather radar scans can’t be used to identify the bird species on the move, another project by some of the scientists will delve deeper into bird-migration patterns. A study published in the journal *Methods in Ecology and Evolution* spearheaded by researchers at UMass Amherst and the Cornell Lab, describes a new machine-learning computer model called BirdFlow that shows exactly which species are specifically going where on migration.”

“ BirdFlow processes multiple data sources—combining weekly estimates of bird numbers from eBird data submitted by birdwatchers with previous studies of birds outfitted satellite-tracking tags—to accurately predict the movement of particular bird species from location to location, week to week throughout their migrations. BirdFlow will unravel routes that birds take, from their breeding grounds to stopover points to wintering grounds and back without having to capture birds and attach tracking devices which will be critical to learning why some bird populations are doing poorly and some are doing well.”

Migration—Distances

Migrations are predictable in sequence and timing most of the time. And then there are wild exceptions which makes dedicated (or is it demented?) birders travel remarkable distances themselves. Such an event happened in Cudahy last week. A flame-colored tanager was photographed by Doug and Jessica Crofton at Sheridan Park which is a strip of vegetation along Lake Michigan. They originally thought the female was a pine warbler. When they got home, Merlin ID suggested it was a western tanager. That was exciting, but then they contacted Mark Korducki of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology and Jacob Collison, a local bird expert and photographer. Within hours they agreed it wasn’t a western tanager which would

have been rare for Wisconsin. Instead they said it was a flame-colored tanager, the first in the state of Wisconsin. This bird is native to Mexico and Central America and has been spotted in only two U.S. states, Arizona and Texas according to the eBird recording system operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The species spends most of its time in pine-oak forests in mountains in its native range. The site it was at the park provided the best combination for itself and birders. The birders could get relatively close looks as the tanager fed, often 30 to 45 feet away; and the bluff provided the bird protection from potential harassment. When it needed to it could fly down the slope or away from the crowd with only green space and Lake Michigan to the east. This information came from an article by Paul Smith on May 2, 2023 in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

Migration—Dangers

We know how dangerous bird migration can be for so many different reasons. In late April I learned of another weather peril that I had never considered. Airplanes need to be de-iced when certain weather conditions exist. But birds? Loons migrate at night and at altitudes of more than a mile. About April 20th, Marge Gibson of the Antigo Raptor Education Group, Inc. received at least 25 phone calls and dozens of Facebook messages asking for help after a loon was discovered on the ground. Loons fall from the sky “when atmospheric conditions are such that the migrating loons develop ice on their body as they fly at high altitude and crash land when they are no longer able to fly due to the weight of the ice on their body or the interference with their flight ability,” REGI said. They reported discoveries in Wausau, Gleason, Stratford, Neva, Rice Lake and Drummond. Marge said the loons are in good condition because they’ve been preparing to migrate from the Gulf of Mexico to as far north as Canada. Some loons have suffered injuries due to hard landings. When a loon lands on ground, it is helpless. They need about one-quarter of a mile to take off from water. Unless rescued, a loon landing on ground or even a pond is doomed. They are potentially dangerous because their bills are like daggers. If you find a loon on the ground or in a pond, it would be best to contact REGI at 715-623-4015 or Loon Rescue at 715-966-5415. This info came from a Journal Sentinel article by Drake Bently.

Many years ago my wife and I picked up a loon that was frozen on a road and kept it in our bathtub overnight. So clumsy on land and so beautiful when we put it in Lake Mendota the next morning. A memorable experience.

editor

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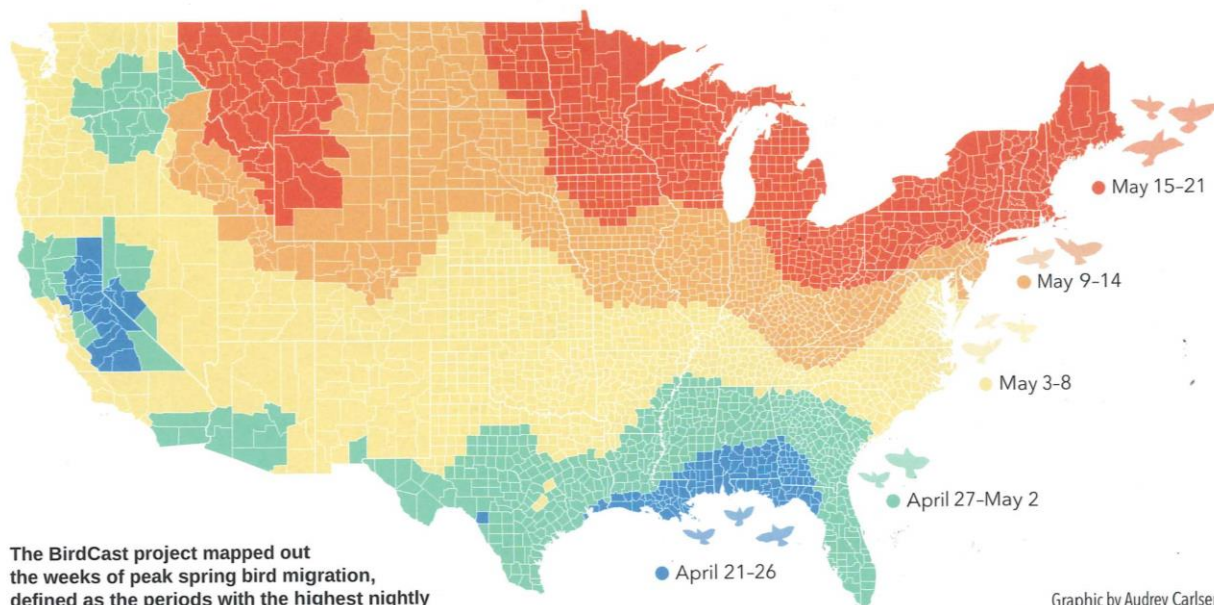
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PEAK SPRING BIRD MIGRATION VARIES ACROSS THE U.S.A., AND EVEN WITHIN REGIONS



The BirdCast project mapped out the weeks of peak spring bird migration, defined as the periods with the highest nightly average of aerial bird density. The data were collected from 143 radar systems from coast to coast.

Graphic by Audrey Carlsen.
Data analysis by Adriaan Dokter.
Migration data from BirdCast and eBird.