ChequamegonChirps

May 2026 Volume 44 Number 5

The May 18th meeting will be the third Monday as usual at the Kuse Preserve (W6219 Allman Avenue) with a nature walk at 6:30 p.m. (weather permitting) and meeting at 7:00.

In addition to any business that comes up, there will be a report on the Taylor County youth day where the club operates one of the information sites for area fifth graders. The attending students, teachers and chaperones I've talked with praise the variety, uniqueness' and quality of the exhibits. I expect there will be other reports from members who have attended various bird events. There will be a round table presentation by Gale Davis, Joe Scott, and Scott Stalheim about citizens contributing reliable information for research. Speaking of information. Sue Vic is an avid bird lister and had ten species that weren't on Ken's year list posted last month. They are: tufted titmouse, winter wren, snowy egret, willow flycatcher, least flycatcher, eastern towhee, warbling vireo, yellow-throated vireo, Cooper's hawk and field sparrow. Does anyone else have other additions? They could go in the next Chirps. Also, What's Around should have a slew of new additions.

The following information comes from an article in the latest issue of the Our Wisconsin magazine. I've paraphrased or quoted much of the material written by Larry Scheckel of Monroe County. Both pictures in this issue are of bluebirds. The one of a single bird was taken in Clark County.

Henry David Thoreau described bluebirds as, "The ones who carry the sky on their back." They can be in unexpected places.

When I hear Fort McCoy mentioned, I picture thousands of soldiers training in rough terrain covering many square miles as they work with all kinds of heavy equipment and weapons. Bluebirds don't fit into that picture for me. However, there are 264 bluebird boxes on this military base. Gordon Weber, Vietnam War Veteran and retired civil servant, monitors ninety of those boxes weekly which run in a line in the southern part of the grounds. Using a moped, it takes him over five hours as he monitors what's happening in occupied boxes and records data. He also has a private trail of 22 boxes.

"If you want to maintain or grow the bluebird population, you've got to help them along," he says. "And that means monitoring, fixing and repairing." He has done his part to protect these birds for forty-five years.

On his weekly rounds, Gordon keeps meticulous records. He's an expert on bluebird habits and their enemies which can be bears, racoons, English sparrows, house wrens and black flies. Arriving in mid-March, the bluebird brings in sprigs and stems to start the nest in the box, then more coarse grass and finally fine grass, all fashioned to fit its body. Most nests will have about four or five eggs that takes the female five to six days to lay. Then she'll incubate the eggs for thirteen or fourteen days until they hatch. From hatch to flight is about sixteen to twenty-two days. Sometimes when I'm counting, the mother isn't frightened away and stays right on the nest. I gently raise her up and count the eggs, then quietly shut the nest box and continue on."

Bluebirds return to Texas in late October. With their migration patterns, they can run into dangerous conditions that include cold temperatures, sleet, ice and snow. They are tough but can die off in large numbers due to extreme weather conditions. The adults prefer insects but can subsist on other food sources for a while when forced to. Severe Texas ice storms during the winter have greatly reduced numbers some years. And there are late cold stretches and snow accumulations which some survive and others do not. Provided meal worms are an excellent source of survival food for them during such times. Hatchlings who have not yet fledged are more susceptible. Several years ago, a clutch in one of our apple tree nest boxes all died after several days of cold wet weather when the adults weren't able to provide adequate insect nutrition for them. After I cleaned out the box, the pair renested, successfully the second time.

The bluebird population has rebounded from previously extremely low numbers some fifty years ago. In 1964 there were only an estimated 600 nesting pairs in the state. With extensive building of boxes, education, and published materials, numbers have increased dramatically. In 2024, a banner year, 17,660 fledglings were recorded.

"Bluebird caretakers meet annually in February at the PBS Wisconsin Garden and Green Living Expo at the Alliant Center in Madison. BRAW's 900 members maintain and monitor more than 7,000 nest boxes throughout the state and bring a wealth of experience to those who want to learn how to help." For information on attracting bluebirds, including feeding and nest-box building, tips, check out *bluebirdlandlord,com.* For resources on eastern bluebirds in Wisconsin, visit braw.org

I don't know how many from our club are also BRAW members. I'm sure you could provide more complete information and experiences than I have. I would like to present such material in future issues that involved any interesting, informative, exciting bird experiences you have had with whatever bird species involved. My phone number 715-223-7389, email jbragg41@hotmail.com mail address jim Bragg--103633 Fence Road—Abbotsford, WI 54405

103633 Fence Road

Abbotsford, WI54405

Club contacts

Website: Chequamegonbirdclub.org

Information:
Info@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

May and June events

Full Moon May 31st—a blue moon

New species continue to arrive daily

A new cycle of life is in full swing with

hatchings and births at or near peak

Enjoy the seasonal warmth and beauty