

ChequamegonChirps



November 2025 Volume 42 Number 11

Monday November 17—7:00 p.m. at the Medford library will be the time and place for our next meeting. Scott Stalheim will present information about bird evolution. We will plan for the Christmas meeting, have some reports, and discuss possible dates for Audubon Christmas counts.

For those attending remotely, please start 15 minutes early and use this link:

[Chequamegon Bird Club November | Microsoft Teams | Meetup-join](#)

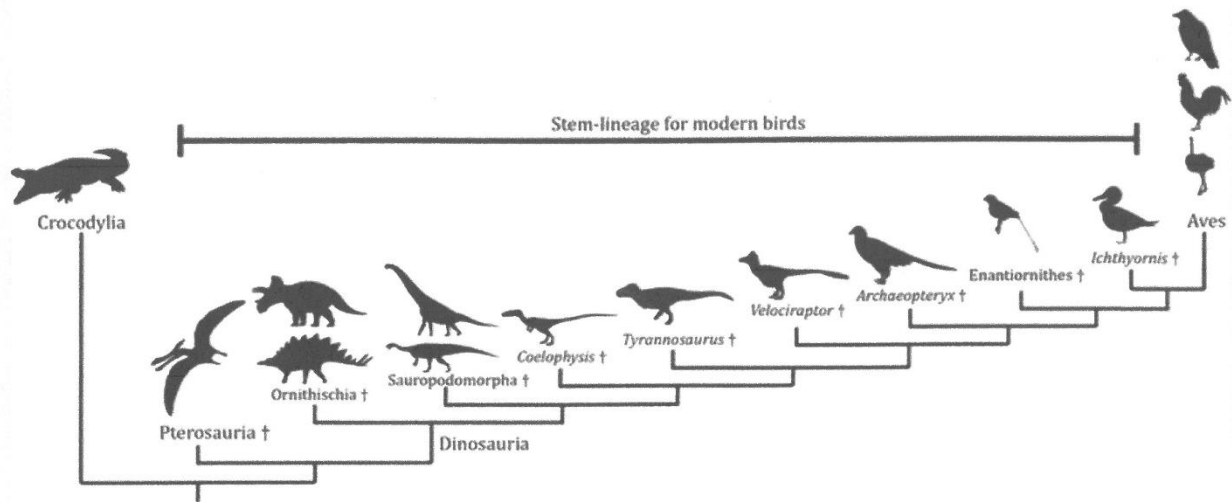
If trouble joining, call 715-965-2562

Birds are Dinosaurs

Many new fossils and genetic (DNA) discoveries have made it clear over the last few decades that birds are really dinosaurs. Birds and “crocodilians are the sole remaining modern animal groups from the dinosaur lineage. We now know that many dinosaurs in the Jurassic period acted and looked quite a bit like birds.

Birds emerged during the Jurassic period some 150 million years ago. That means that birds, as a group, emerged around the same time as T. Rex and the Velociraptor. Jurassic Park doesn't show the Velociraptor's feathers, but this dinosaur was covered in feathers. The following diagram shows stem-lineage for modern birds. One branch becomes Crocodylia which are now alligators and crocodiles. Another branch becomes Aves after a whole bunch of extinctions along these lines of Dinosauria: Pterosauria, Ornithischia, goose Sauropodomorpha, Coelophysis, Tyrannosaurus, Velociraptor, Archaeopteryx, Enantiornithes and Ichthyornis. (Bring a pencil on Monday because there will be a quiz of this information with emphasis on correct spelling.)

It may seem strange that we can know about the behavior of pre-historic animals. For example, we know that dinosaur-bird ancestors were already migrating to the artic in the Cretaceous Period 73 million years ago. Scott will have more information on these details. (Personal sidebar here) As I've been typing on this page, a pileated woodpecker spent at least five minutes at the sunflower feeder before moving over a chunk of suet. These are within eight feet of where I'm sitting. Their flying always makes me think of a dinosaur in flight.



Feather Facts

When dinosaurs roamed the earth there also lived a prehistoric, crow-sized animal with feathers; scientists believe it was related to reptiles and named it Archaeopteryx from its fossil remains: one of the first known bird species.

Today birds still have characteristics of their distant relatives. Reptiles have scales of solid keratin. Bird feathers are also formed of keratin, but in strands, which are much lighter. Feathers help a bird fly, stay warm and dry, and protect their skin. Feathers allow birds to swim through the water and fly with less friction. For some birds, such as owls, the features of their feathers quiet the sound of their flight. Feathers can be camouflage to help them hide from predators or bright colors to show off during courtship.

When a bird's feathers get old or worn out, they are shed one or two times a year, To keep their balance in flight, the feathers are shed a few at a time, in the same place on each side of the body.

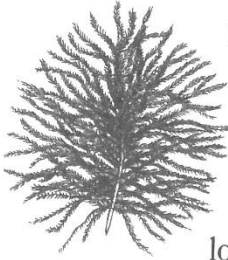
The feather material comes from an unknown source. Is it plagiarism if I can't give credit to the original author?



CONTOUR FEATHERS: Zipped in Place

Contour feathers overlap each other to give birds a streamlined body shape (a contour) for less friction for faster flight in the air and faster diving in the water.

Contour feathers are found on the body, wings and tail. Contour feathers have a central shaft (rachis) with vanes on each side. Attached to the vanes are barbs. On each side of the barbs are small barbules that make a “zipper” to hold the feather barbs together. When the barbs unzip, the bird uses its beak to zip them back together while preening.



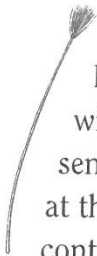
DOWN FEATHERS: Keeping Warm

Down feathers do not “zip” together like contour feathers, but stay fluffy. The air spaces hold the bird’s body heat close like a warm blanket. Young birds often have down first, to keep their small bodies warm until their contour and other body feathers grow in. Adult birds’ down feathers are located under their contour feathers.



SEMIPLUME FEATHERS: Support & Warmth

Semiplume feathers, which are found beneath the contour feathers, are a cross between a contour and a down feather. They have a stiff shaft, but also have soft down vanes that act like extra insulation.



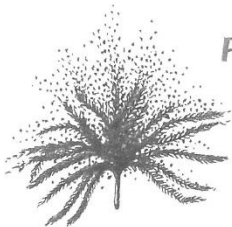
FILOPLUME FEATHERS: Information Receivers

Filoplume feathers are tiny, hair-like feathers comprised of a long central shaft tipped with a tuft of barbules. They help a bird adjust the position of its flight feathers. These sensitive feathers move with the slightest breeze, sending information to the nerve cells at their bases. Vibrations from the filoplume feathers tell the bird when to adjust its contour feathers for better flight.



BRISTLE FEATHERS: Sense, Guard and Guide

Bristle feathers are stiff, hair-like feathers with a firm central shaft. They are found near the eyes, nostrils and beak, and may help protect the bird’s eyes, help it to locate food, and funnel prey (such as flying insects) into its mouth.



POWDER DOWN FEATHERS: Talcum Powder Protection

Powder down feathers, found on birds such as Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets, are never shed, but grow all the time. The ends break down into a waxy powder that protects the bird’s skin from moisture and damage.

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Club contacts

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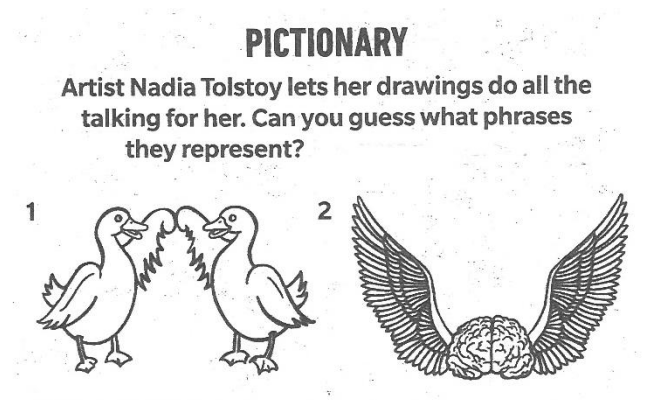
November Events

Many finches arriving?

What winter birds have you seen?

First measurable snow?

Some trees still have good leaf color



Answers at the meeting.