

Chequamegon Chirps



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The September meeting is going to be back at the Medford Library on the third Monday of the month with starting time at 7:00 P.M. This will be the first time we will be meeting there in some 18 months. It may seem a bit strange, but we should be able to socially distance and mask wearing is welcome, but not mandatory. If circumstances should change before the twentieth, you will be notified. This session will feature Ron Draeger's presentation of fall migration and information about different plumages due to recent molting and immature birds which can challenge identification. He does a thorough job with his presentations and these are timely topics. Business will include discussion of next month's banquet meeting. As a side note here, just as I'm typing this on Sunday afternoon, 14 turkeys—two hens with poults roughly 3/4 and 1/3 grown have come up to within five feet of where I'm sitting—on the other side of kitchen windows. One sunned itself on the grass and a couple dusted themselves on the driveway. That is the first time I've seen them so close to the house. A real treat for me. The What's Around part of the meeting should have lots of interesting input.

Covid-in various forms- vs. Corvids

Covid implications continues to impact our lives. Hopefully you and all possible members in your family are vaccinated, or will be as soon as possible. We will get through this, it is just taking longer with a more convoluted process than had originally expected.

Corvids are the family that includes ravens, jays and of course crows. "Corvid research has explored the exceptional size and function of crow brains, their long life spans (up to 30 years) and communal lifestyle." John Marzluff, ornithologist at the University of Washington has stated, "Big brain, long life and sociality, those are really related features." Other researchers determined that crows seem to exhibit a level of consciousness demonstrated only in humans and very few related mammal relatives such as primates. Studies have shown that crows show signs of perceptual consciousness and an ability to draw on subjective experiences from the past in order to solve a task. In research labs, they have bent wire to snatch baskets with food inside. Not only have they been observed to use tools, but to manufacture compound tools out of various materials. They have been known to

make probes, hooks and sharp spears that they use to skewer insects in hard-to-reach places. These discoveries add to new knowledge about the forebrain of crows, which has proven to be exceptionally large—another trait they share with humans. “For people and crow alike, the forebrain deals with higher cognitive tasks, including rational decision-making, problem-solving and executive function.” This information came from Timothy Meinck in a recent issue of the Discover Magazine.

David Sibley in a recent book What's It's Like To Be A Bird had further comments: “Crows are able to recognize us by our faces, and they associate each person with good or bad experiences. Furthermore, they can communicate that information to other crows. One researcher, who had trapped crows, was still recognized by crows that had never been trapped, nearly a mile away from the trapping site five years later!” This is a most interesting, attractive and informative book that has many life sized paintings that are fun to share with younger reader, especially grandchildren. Also in the book is this information. Ravens and crows understand the concept of trading, and have a sense of fair trade. In one study, human experimenters traded with ravens. Some humans were “fair” and traded items of equal value, while others were “unfair” giving a lower-quality item in exchange. The birds learned the tendency of each individual human and preferred to trade with the fair ones. To call someone a “birdbrain” may become a compliment in the future as we learn more about our feathered neighbors.

Six Ways Birds Change Before Migration

“While different species may change in different ways, these changes are widespread and many birds exhibit several of these changes before every migration. Molting: New feathers are more aerodynamic and make flight easier. Weight Gain: Birds can go through a weight gain phase that can double their weight, storing fat that will become fuel as they travel. Gonad Shrinkage: Bird’s testes and ovaries shrink to almost nothing which decreases internal weight so the birds can fly without needing extra energy. Hemoglobin Increase which allows birds to deliver more oxygen to their muscles to sustain flight more easily. Flock Formation: Many birds begin gathering in large flocks that number in the hundreds or thousands. These flocks are often in areas with rich food sources. Restlessness: As migration time near, triggered by light levels, daylight times and sun angle, many birds may wander in short flights to strengthen their wings before they begin the full journey.

Migration—A Dozen Different Ways

The following information is largely from an article by Melissa Mayntz that goes into some of the whys and hows of migration. “General agreement among ornithologists is that birds migrate to better enhance their survival. That may mean finding the best resources for successful breeding, taking advantage of different food sources or moving to different times of the year.”

We are familiar with the seasonal movements that are most common here. Some birds, many in Europe, accomplish the same goals by east-west or west-east movement. Another movement can be much shorter if it involves altitude. Descending or ascending a few thousand feet can make a huge difference in weather conditions. Some birds follow distinctly different routes that are loops if they are going north or south to make best uses of available food sources or wind patterns. “Nomadic birds tend to stay in the same range but may be completely absent from parts of that range when resources are scarce, but will return when the habitat becomes more suitable. “Waxwings are included in this group.

Irruptive birds are highly unpredictable that can bring large numbers into unusual areas, most often in winter, as they search for food and water resources. Snowy owls, crossbills, evening grosbeaks, varied thrushes, redpolls and pine siskins are all in this group that can make our winters more memorable. Other types of migration include dispersal where juveniles are forced out of their parent’s territory. This happens with woodpeckers. “Leap frog migration occurs when a northern population skips over a sedentary population of the same species. Reverse migration is most likely to happen in fall when young birds get confused and get way off track. Ducks are most apt to migrate to a more safe area to molt and then return to their regular range. “Drift migration is a rare but highly anticipated event many birders hope to see. When it happens, large numbers of migrating birds have ‘drifted’ away from their typical migration routes, often pushed by storms. This can result in spectacular fallout events and many rare sightings.”

Many birds use more than one type of migration, whether deliberately or accidentally. Birders who understand the various migration patterns more easily when migration is underway can plan their birding excursions to take advantage of great sighting opportunities.” An example of this occurs in Duluth where a cold front moving through with north-west wind can bring spectacular numbers of raptors over Hawk Ridge at this time of year while rainy days or strong east or southerly winds can stop movement completely or shift migrating birds miles to the west.

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[September and October Events](#)

[Full Moons Sept. 21 and Oct. 19](#)

[Birds In Art Exhibit at Leigh](#)

[Yawkey Museum, Wausau is now open](#)

[Fall Equinox September 22](#)

[More species have left or are southbound](#)

[Leaf color peaks](#)

[Mosquito numbers decrease](#)

Varied Thrush

Ictoreus naevius



[Sometime west coast winter visitor](#)