

# BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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David Foster, Editor  
[davdfost@aol.com](mailto:davdfost@aol.com)

## Officers

John Randolph, President  
David Foster, Secretary  
Carne Andrews, Treasurer  
Jim Krakowski, Program Chair  
Linda Dunn, Membership



## President's Message

*By John Randolph*

Our Annual Club Social was held again at Smokey's Restaurant on January 10, with interesting and excellent meal choices, a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere, and the company of our guests, Discovery Center staff Sarah Johnson, Zach Wilson, Licia Johnson, Beth Meyer and Carrie Stiegler. The highlight was Guy David's striking photographic review of the past Bird Club year, with sweetly nostalgic music from the Carpenters and occasional witty captions to add special insight to scenes of Club outings. Many thanks to Guy for this special program!

Because of sustained work by Carne Andrews and help from the Discovery Center, the Club will be going to Sax-Zim Bog in Minnesota, February 15-16. West of Duluth, the Bog is an excellent winter birding site with species that we don't often see in our area. The trip will have the advantage of an experienced guide, to maximize chances of exciting observations.

Hopefully, with impetus and planning organization from NLDC, the Club will decide to collaboratively participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, which begins on February 17. E-mails are being exchanged as this is written, and the GBBC will be discussed at the regular February 6 Club meeting.

### **WATCH FOR THE GBBC!**

#### **THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRDCOUNT**

At the NLDC: Friday 17th training 11:00-12:00  
At your feeders: Saturday 18th 9:30-11:00 surveys.  
**[Runs nationwide February 17-20<sup>th</sup>.]**

Contact Zach at [zach@discoverycenter.net](mailto:zach@discoverycenter.net)  
or 715-543-2085

Further planning at Bird Club meeting on  
Monday, February 6, at the Discovery Center,  
Bobcat Cabin, 6 PM.

## Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

### Life List

At the conclusion of our 2010 birding year the club had recorded 237 species to our life list. With the addition of three new species during 2011 the club's life list now includes 240 species!

Following is a list of the species added to the bird club life list in 2011.

Location	Date	Species
Crex Meadows Wildlife Area	6/3/2011	Red-necked Grebe
Crex Meadows Wildlife Area	6/3/2011	Whip-poor-will
Ashland Area	6/30/2011	Mute Swan

Note that all three new species were found outside of the club's normal home birding area. Despite the many hours spent birding in our usual local birding haunts over the past year, all species that we encountered and identified were species previously recorded during one or more of our outings in previous years. That doesn't mean we have found all of the possible species occurring in our normal stomping grounds, but it does mean that we probably have gotten the 'easy' ones!



Tundra Swan

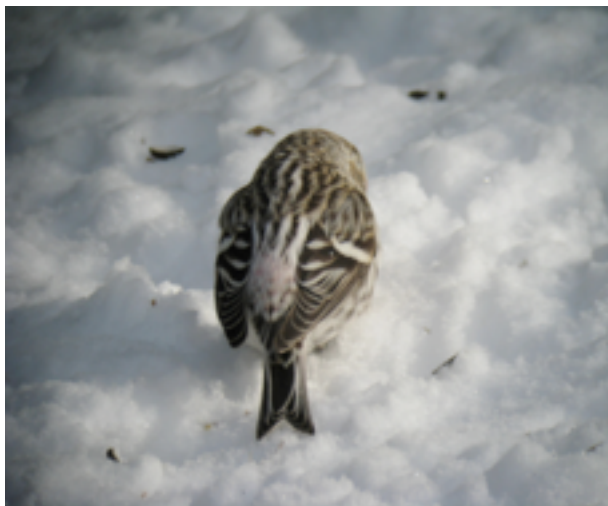
Guy David

Many of the species found on the official Wisconsin list of 435 species that we haven't encountered are rated as Rare, Casual, Accidental, or Extinct. Some of these species are found on our life list but most of them are not! Always looking ahead, following are some of the species that I think should be accessible to us if we work at finding them in 2012.

- **Tundra Swan** – We probably only need to be outdoors together some early spring or late fall days when flocks of these birds are migrating overhead. Otherwise, a well scheduled field trip to Central Wisconsin could net them when they are resting in open fields during spring migration. I'll submit a photo for this newsletter to show what we could encounter.
- **Spruce Grouse** – I haven't heard of a confirmed sighting in our area but they have been recorded in neighboring counties, so perhaps we could find them if we sought out and spent some time in one of these areas.
- **Willet** – I encountered a flock of these last August in the Mead Wildlife Area in a mud flat area specifically created by the WDNR for shorebird migration. With some good luck, we could encounter these in a similar area sometime in the future.
- **Upland Sandpiper** – Bird club members, including myself, encountered these in 2011 but not during a club outing. A field trip at the right time to the right habitat, like the Buena Vista Grassland, would enhance the club's chances of adding this species to our life list.
- **Northern Saw-whet Owl** – We know that this species occurs annually in our area and we could get lucky and spot one sometime. Typically our club has not done much night birding but this species is easy to identify when it is present and calling.
- **American Three-toed Woodpecker** and **Black-billed Magpie** – While rare in our area, I only mention these because these species have been reported in the Sax-Zim

Bog, a club outing destination scheduled for February.

- **Cerulean Warbler and Prothonotary Warbler** – These species also aren't known to occur in our area but a field trip being planned the late spring 2012 could yield these species in the area of the Wyalusing State Park.
- **Grasshopper Sparrow** – I was surprised to discover that the club hasn't recorded this species yet. Spending enough time in the central Wisconsin grasslands should do it.
- **Hoary Redpoll** – This rare species can be found among flocks of Common Redpolls in our area during the winter. Other than the Christmas Bird Counts the club hasn't been doing much winter birding. Even so, we may have unknowingly seen them but didn't observe flocks of Common Redpolls closely enough to prove it. I'll also submit a photo that I have of a Hoary Redpoll for this newsletter.



Hoary Redpoll

Guy David

### Annual List

The following table provides data for the club's 2011 outings compared to each of the previous seven years. This data shows that the club is very healthy in terms of member participation as well as number of species found.

Check out this eight year record!

Year	Number of Species	Number of Outings	Average Number Participants
2004	111	13	10.00
2005	150	29	11.86
2006	158	40	9.08
2007	150	40	8.35
2008	154	25	11.88
2009	169	38	9.87
2010	193	37	9.73
2011	180	32	11.38

Being so successful begins in the spring with a great start on our annual list via Bird Fest outings. By the end of Bird Fest and the Crane Count the club usually has recorded about 100 species including many migrating species we don't easily find the rest of the year. Thank you to Zach Wilson for organizing the Crane Count and to the Bird Fest Committee for all of the work done in behalf of birds and birding.

I feel that the club owes a handsome debt of gratitude to Donna Roche for her consistent effort toward planning, organizing and conducting our weekly outings on Thursday mornings throughout the spring, summer, and fall. The club members also significantly benefited from the efforts of Jim Krakowski for getting club members out for a very productive overnight trip to the Crex Meadows State Wildlife area and trips to the Ashland and Washburn area. Winding up the year with two Christmas Bird Counts always nets some winter species for the annual list. For example, the 2011 CBC efforts added three species to the annual list which were the Snow Bunting, Pine Grosbeak, and Common Redpoll.

Recording 180 species in one year is a notable accomplishment second only to our productivity for 2010, when we found 193 species. Organized outings to Horicon Marsh, Buena Vista Grasslands, Mead Wildlife Area, and Hawk Ridge in 2010 that didn't occur in 2011 perhaps resulted in the decrease in species observed in 2011. However, in my book, member participation in club activities

trumps number of species observed, and 2011 was a very good year in that respect.

Thank you, everybody, for all that you have done for the Discovery Center Bird Club during 2011. I have thoroughly enjoyed our outings and your company, and I am looking forward to seeing everybody frequently during 2012!



Evening Grosbeaks      *David Foster*

## Are They Here Yet?

*By David Foster*

Normally, many residents—human and avian—flee the northwoods in wintertime. When the going gets tough, many of the tough go south. Of course there are hard-core backyard birds that stay year-round—chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, goldfinches. However, the southward exodus is usually led by birds who hate snow, leaving as early as August, overnighting in low-cost wetlands, pools and woods as they make their way to the Gulf coast and ready themselves for the trip to Central and South America. However, there's another part of this travel picture. Some birds from even further north—the Canadian taiga—head south, but seldom get further than Vilas County, thanks to the hard work of local Chambers of Commerce and positive word-of-mouth from fellow travelers.

That's when we feeder watchers have our best winter fun. We wait expectantly for our usual winter visitors, keeping the lights on and the feeders

open. But sometimes they just don't arrive—as naturalist John Bates says may have happened this winter. In his column *Northwoods Almanac* of January 6, 2012, he notes that “common redpolls, purple finches, pine siskins, evening grosbeaks, and pine grosbeaks all are pretty much no-shows at people's feeders.” The reason, he suggests—quoting predictions by Canadian ornithologist Ron Pittway—is that “cone crops are excellent . . . across much of the boreal forest . . . [so that late 2011] will not be a flight year.” Specifically, Pittway says that “redpolls are unlikely to come south because the dwarf birch crop is bumper in the Hudson Bay Lowlands.” Our feeder guests, he's predicting, might be staying home.



Pine Grosbeak      David Foster

So how is this prediction playing out for our Bird Club feeder-watchers? Are we seeing any redpolls, siskins, evening grosbeaks, or other winter guests in early 2012? John Randolph, for example, near Bolger Lake south of Minocqua, says that “it has been really nice to see ten or more Redpolls regularly since around New Years.” Guy David of Lac Du Flambeau reports that “on January 14, 2012 after the 5 inch snowfall we had about a dozen Common Redpolls at the feeders.” The next day “the number of Common Redpolls swelled to about 60!” He adds that he has “been expecting a nice influx of Redpolls at our feeders this winter due to the fact that I have been observing flocks of them in the field since early November.”

David Foster of Natural Lakes in northern Vilas County has been seeing groups of a dozen Common Redpolls since mid-December at his feeders. At

Christmastime flocks of up to 30 evening grosbeaks began coming daily, crowding out other birds for hours at a time. In addition, in early December a Mourning Dove sat on his deck in torpor for hours before leaving.



American Golden-eye

*Guy David*

Carne Andrews, who lives near Boulder Junction on the Manitowish River, reports a special treat: “3 Common Golden-eyes on the river; one breeding female and two 1st-winters”— ducks taking advantage of the river still being open. Carne also reports a few Common Redpolls, but no Evening Grosbeaks. She has also hosted Mourning Doves and large groups of Wild Turkeys, a now-common sight in the northwoods by most reports.

These observations suggest that some of our usual winter visitors have finally arrived, perhaps after exhausting the crops that sustained them earlier this winter in their Canadian habitats. However, no observers in the NLDC Bird Club have reported Pine Siskins or Pine Grosbeaks yet at their feeders, so these winter visitors may have decided that home is still the place to be this winter.

## **Christmas Bird Counts, 2011**

*By Guy David*

Thank you to all of the bird club members who helped with our annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) efforts. It was another grand effort and outcome for both the Minocqua and Manitowish Waters CBC!

The Minocqua count was first completed in 1962 and was intermittently conducted since then. The Discovery Center Bird Club assumed responsibility for this count in 2006 and the club now has performed this CBC for 6 years in a row. In total, 2011 was the fourteenth year for the Minocqua CBC.

Over 14 years there have been 50 species of birds recorded during the Minocqua CBC. Two new species were added this year, the Northern Cardinal (first ever record) and Northern Shrike (recorded as a count week (CW) species in 2007 but 2011 was the first record for the count day. For 2011, counters recorded 24 species which was a good result as the third highest for the number of bird species recorded over 14 years. The highest years for the Minocqua CBC were 27 species in 2008 and 25 species in 2010.

While the Minocqua CBC had good results for the number of species that were found, the results for total number of birds (956) was the second highest number in the history of the count. The highest number of birds ever counted was in 2008 when 1,418 individual birds and 27 species were recorded. 2008 is remembered as an “irruptive year” due to large flocks of Pine Siskins and American Goldfinch being observed and recorded. Following are a few interesting facts regarding the historical data for the Minocqua CBC.

- Bird species recorded in all 14 count years = 3 (Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch)
- Bird species recorded in 13 of the 14 count years = 3 (Hairy Woodpecker, Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch)
- Average number of species recorded over 14 count years = 18.8
- Average number of individual birds recorded over 14 count years = 564
- Number of species recorded only 1 time in 14 years = 12 (Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Red-headed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, Red Crossbill, Common Grackle)

- Most recent new species added to the count day record:
  - Northern Cardinal = 2011
  - Northern Shrike = 2011
  - Wild Turkey = 2008 was the first record, recorded annually since then
  - American Robin = 2008 which was the only record so far
  - Cedar Waxwing = 2008 which was the only record so far
  - Red Crossbill = 2008 which was the only record so far
  - House Finch = 2008 and again in 2010

The Manitowish Waters CBC yielded results that were similar to the Minocqua CBC this year in that 24 species and 916 individual birds were recorded on the count day for Manitowish Waters compared to 24 species and 956 individual birds for Minocqua.

It is interesting to do a little comparison of the results of the Minocqua and Manitowish Waters CBC. While the summary numbers between the counts were similar there were differences in the underlying data. Combining all of the species observed from both counts during the count period there were 32 species of birds in total recorded for 2011. Both counts recorded some species that were missed on the other count.

Species recorded for the Manitowish Waters CBC but not the Minocqua CBC included: Trumpeter Swan, Ruffed Grouse, Coopers Hawk, Gray Jay, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Tree Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak and Evening Grosbeak. Species recorded for the Minocqua CBC but not the Manitowish Waters CBC included: Rock Pigeon, Great-horned Owl (count week, not count day), Northern Shrike, European Starling, Snow Bunting, Northern Cardinal, Pine Siskin and House Sparrow. While there are different species observed on the count day in different count circles, there are many more species consistently recorded during both counts. For 2011 there were 16 species recorded on both counts. Since Manitowish Waters and

Minocqua are located in the same general ecological region in Wisconsin it isn't surprising that many of the same species of birds are found in the area of both communities. The CBC data shows this to be true year after year. Among these are the same species reported herein that have been recorded in 13 or 14 of the 14 years of the Minocqua CBC.

The Christmas Bird Counts are only one way in which people who maintain bird feeders can participate in contributing to bird science. Another opportunity is coming up February 17-20, 2012 which is when the next Great Backyard Bird Count is scheduled. Anyone can do this, it is free, and you can do it at home! Check it out by going to <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/> to learn about the activity and how to participate.



Northern Shrike

Ed Marshall

### Passerine Terrorist

Ed Marshall got great photos of a Northern Shrike hoping for a dinner opportunity near his feeder. Ed says “this guy showed up at my feeder line on the 3rd of January. He was not popular with the other birds; they all left for safer territory. The squirrels even disappeared.” He left, apparently disappointed that there was no one to have for dinner.



## BETTY MURPHY

Recently all of us at the Discovery Center and the Bird Club were saddened to learn of the death of long-time club member and friend Betty Murphy.

Betty had a unique background: as a retired air-traffic controller and a passionate birder, she became a key member of the bird club and a delightful friend to club members. Betty served for years as the club treasurer, and much more as well: she volunteered to help with many club events over the years, from the annual Bird Fest (and all its preparation) to landscaping work and trail cleanup, to the multi-year bird sign project. For example, during the Bird Fest preparations she worked hard at food and materials preparation and clearing trails from storm damage. During the bird-sign project, she helped with the cutting and trimming of logs for the signposts, her sense of humor making the work go faster. She was a regular on the Thursday field trips, annual bird surveys, and service and cleanup projects. As a member of the club board of directors she brought smiles and wise counsel to our meetings. She was in every way a delight to be with—insightful, good-humored, and ready with a laugh.

Her presence made us a better group. We will miss her greatly,