

Newsletter of the Discovery Center Bird Club

November, 2008

Vol.5, No.4

In This Issue:

President's
Report -1
Life List
Quarterly – 2
Birds in Art – 3
Christmas Bird
Counts--4

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– Director and
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President's Report By David Foster

The snow is still lightly falling as afternoon fades. Our feeders have gotten busy with winter residents—chickadees, purple finches, house finches, goldfinches, nuthatches at the sunflower seed, hairy and downy woodpeckers at the suet. The last loon on the lake—this summer's young one—apparently has gone, after his calls went unanswered and the lake temperature plummeted. We don't expect to see him again, but maybe his parents will be back next April. That's the real upside of birding—we know the southbound birds will be back, probably before many of the migratory people!



The Bird club has been active this fall. In September club members journeyed to Hawk Ridge near Duluth to watch hawks, eagles and vultures on their flights south. The weather on our day—Saturday September 27—was decent, cloudy but without precipitation or much wind, allowing us to watch kettles of broad-winged hawks spill down the lakeshore.

Other plentiful species included red-tail hawks, sharp-shinned hawks, kestrels, bald eagles and turkey vultures. A stop at Prentice Park in Ashland yielded a few mallards and teal, skittish because it was the first day of the duck season. This trip also set a precedent, as club members travelled in the NLDC van driven by club members themselves.



*Pictured are ten of the thirteen club members who made the trek to Hawk Ridge on September 27, 2008.
Photo by Guy David.*



This juvenile Northern Goshawk loudly objects to being handled at Hawk Ridge. Note the bold 'eyebrow' and heavy vertical streaking distinguishing this bird from a juvenile Cooper's Hawk. Photo by Guy David

In late October the club also made a trip to the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, to enjoy their collections of birds in art. This visit allowed club members to enjoy some original early 19th century bird paintings by James Audubon, Alexander Wilson (he of Wilson's warbler), and a German painter named Alexander Rider who collaborated with Wilson in producing a book of paintings. Contemporary paintings included a collection by James Morgan, a featured artist of this year's museum offerings (see story below).

Other activities this fall include ongoing work on the birding trail under Sarah Johnson's leadership. The planning group met in September to walk the trails, identify sites already tagged for signs, and note the trees, plants and other ecological features specific to each site. The group noted these habitat markers for each site, in preparation for signs to be prepared for installation in 2009. The birding trail and its signs will extend the Discovery Center's nature trail network, demonstrating the important role played by the bird club in supporting the NLDC's offerings.

Planning for Birdfest 09, scheduled for May 15-16, 2009, is well underway. The planning group, including club members and Discovery Center staff members, has identified and is in the process of selecting keynote speakers, presenters and field trip leaders. Friday evening's events will include a reception and evening program. Saturday's schedule will feature morning field trips, two periods of afternoon presentations, and a final activity bringing together participants and trip leaders. Previous years' successful Birdfests continue to provide a positive model for this year's planning.

Life List Quarterly

By Guy David

Except for birding tallies to be reported from our 2008 Christmas Bird Counts, the club's 2008 season is drawing to a close. The club life list stands at 204 species, which was the threshold that we attained in June 2008 when we observed a Willow Flycatcher by the Presque Isle Ponds.

Our summer outings have resulted in new additions to our annual list which is a testament that we have

traveled around and visited a variety of habitats. Following are the new species added to our annual list since June.

Location	Date	Species
Powell Marsh South	6/26/08	Sora, Alder Flycatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Clay-colored Sparrow, Bobolink
Trout Lake Station	7/31/08	Great Egret
Turtle River (Canoe Trip)	8/14/08	Red-breasted Merganser
Ashland Area	8/21/08	Caspian Tern, Red-tailed Hawk, American Black Duck
Powell Marsh Vista	8/28/08	Semipalmated Plover
Hawk Ridge	9/27/08	Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon

The club life list has grown steadily since the bird club formed in 2004. During our first year, which wasn't a full year of recording data, the club recorded 111 species. Since then club members have appreciably improved our collective knowledge and ability to identify birds that we encounter. We also learned a lot about the importance of visiting a wide variety of habitats during different seasons to enhance our chances of encountering different species of birds. The following table depicts summary data for the club's first five years of birding.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Year List	111	150	158	150	144
Life List	111	162	192	197	204

As reported in a late 2007 club newsletter, the 2006 year list was the club's best production so far. It also was reported that a primary reason for the decline in number of species observed was attributable to our lack of success in locating shorebird species during their fall migration.

In 2008, our field trip organizers did a good job trying to place us in shorebird habitat in August, including the Rainbow Flowage and the Ashland area. Neither area proved to be productive during our visit, so this was an important reason why our 2008 list of 144 species still is below the 150 species observed during 2007.

There is cause for optimism that we will be adding several species to the 2008 club annual list before the end of the year. The reason for this optimism is that the club has two Christmas Bird Counts planned in December and there are several winter species that we have yet to record this year. It seems reasonable to believe that the following species could be recorded during our Christmas bird counts.

- Rough-legged Hawk
- Barred Owl
- Great Horned Owl
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Snow Bunting
- Pine Grosbeak
- House Finch
- Common Redpoll
- House Sparrow
- Red Crossbill
- White-winged Crossbill

It always is possible that a highly unusual species may show up during a Christmas Bird Count since too, so let us get out there and thoroughly scour the area during these high effort days. Why not add a couple of northern specialties like the Spruce Grouse and Black-backed Woodpecker? It will be surprising if, at the end of the year, we haven't exceeded our 2007 species total of 150 species. All we have to do is get out there and find them!

Birds in Art at the Woodson Museum

By David Foster

On a sunny morning in October club members gathered in the Minocqua Post Office parking lot to board the NLDC van for the Woodson Museum in Wausau. The weather was sunny and the conversation lively.

The Woodson museum offers a rich blend of traditional and contemporary painting and other artwork. Of special interest is the museum's

dominant collection of paintings, etchings and sculpture featuring birds. From a historical perspective, the museum's holdings are anchored by several pieces of work by James Audubon, Alexander Wilson, and Alexander Rider, all of whom worked in the first half of the 1800's. The major painting by Audubon in the Woodson is an oil painting of a pair of Pacific loons (see below)—an unusual form of art for Audubon, since his best-known bird art is comprised of watercolors reproduced in bound folios.



Pacific loons, oil on canvas, by James Audubon, c. 1834

However, though Audubon was the most famous of the artists who painted American birds in the nineteenth century, he was not the first—rather, it was Alexander Wilson, whose work is shown in the composite etching of several species below.



A composite engraving by Alexander Wilson, c. 1808

It is said that Alexander Wilson is really the “father of American ornithology,” since he published his collections of bird art 20 years before Audubon. Wilson didn’t have much money and therefore had to crowd as many specimens as he could onto one plate for his books. Another painter represented in the Woodson museum is Alexander Rider, who worked with Wilson and Audubon, helping both of them to produce their volumes of bird art in the first half of the nineteenth century. The look of Rider’s drawing of a Cooper’s hawk, shown below, suggests that he must have had a strong influence on James Audubon’s style of painting:



Cooper’s Hawk, hand-colored print by Alexander Rider, c. 1825.

Alexander Rider’s depiction of the hawk in a natural, watchful pose suggests that he tried, like Audubon after him, to show American birds in active, living images.

Another important feature of the Woodson Birds in Art collection are the paintings by contemporary American artists. James Morgan is the 2008 featured artist. According to the Woodson museum website, Morgan lives in Utah and has shown his work in many museums and galleries in the United States. The website says that he “wants to generate emotional participation from those who view his work, and . . . show the often-overlooked and intimate aspects of nature.”

To me, the most striking feature of Morgan’s art is his use of light to bring out the natural colors of the

birds he paints. Morgan’s use of oil on Belgian linen, rather than oil on canvas, gives his paintings a luminescence that canvas-based painting can’t achieve. As I stood in front of his work in the Woodson museum, the light seemed to glow as it came from the surface of the work. It is hard to tell from the black-and-white image below, but the white of the swans is echoed in the white of the shoreline, while the water in which the swans stand is a bluish-red that allows the white to stand out by contrast:



Trumpeter Swans, oil on Belgian linen, by James Morgan

Another striking work by Morgan is the painting of hooded mergansers, which also shows his use of blues and reds in water to contrast with the brightness of the rock slab that juts from the shoreline:



Hooded Mergansers, oil on Belgian linen, by James Morgan

As we left the museum that day, I think we all felt that these works of art gave us a pleasure hard to find anywhere else.

2008 Christmas Bird Counts

By Guy David

Mark your calendars, our 2008 Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) are scheduled as follows:

- Manitowish Waters - Sunday, December 14, 2008 (organized by Zach Wilson)
- Minocqua – Saturday, December 20, 2008 (organized by Guy David)

Participating in these bird counts is being part of an annual ongoing nation wide citizen science program. Not only does participation contribute to an excellent long term research project, it is just plain FUN!

Check your calendars and get in touch with Guy and Zach. As the political ads so familiarly exhort us to do, “Call Guy and Zach and tell them that doing the CBC is a good thing and that you will help!” Unlike the politicians targeted by many of those ads, Guy and Zach will be very happy to hear from you.

There two kinds of CBC participants. Field counters are people who are willing and able to get together and travel throughout a geographic area assigned by the count organizers. It is important to have as many field counters as possible because there are many species of birds that may not be readily observable around bird feeders. Likewise, there are many bird feeding stations in the count areas that are not reported by feeder counters.

The other participants are people who stay home and count the number of birds in their yards during a part of the day when their birds seem to be the most active, between 9:30 and 10:00 a.m. for example. In order to participate as a feeder counter, the bird feeders being observed must be with 7.5 miles of the center of the respective count area.

The center of the count area for Manitowish Waters is intersection of County Hwy W and State Hwy 51.

The center of the Minocqua area is the intersection of State Hwy 51 and Hwy 70 west. So if you live within 7.5 miles of a count center “as the crow flies”, join in by observing “your” birds, and counting and reporting them.

Likewise, please recruit friends and neighbors to do the same thing. The more observers that participate on the respective count days, the more birds that will be found, recorded, and reported.

As an added benefit, feeder and field counters are invited to enjoy a great lunch and camaraderie on the count days when we get together in the early afternoon to share our sightings. To be sure that you are a part of the fun, please sign up and participate.

Please call or email Guy at (715) 588-3694; bgdavid@earthlink.net or Zach at (715) 543-2085; zach@discoverycenter.net.

The December 1, 2008 bird club meeting will include some time to organize our 2008 CBC effort. Attending that meeting would be a great way for club members to help the organizers get our 2008 effort under way.



Guy David presents his “Discovery Center Bird Club: Three Years of Flight” slide show during the Howard Young Medical Center Volunteer fall luncheon. This was the second presentation that Guy has done in behalf of the Bird Club and Discovery Center recently, the other presentation having been made for the Lac du Flambeau Area Improvement Association.

Bird Club Events

*Club Meeting—December 1, 2008
6 PM, Bobcat Cabin, North Lakeland
Discovery Center

*MW Christmas Bird Count—December 14,
2008 (contact Zach Wilson at NLDC,
zach@discoverycenter.net)

*Minocqua Christmas Bird Count—December
20, 2008 (contact Guy David,
bgdavid@earthlink.net)

*Bird Club Social—January (day, place and time
to be announced)