

# Chequamegon Chirps



February 17, 2020 Volume 39 Number 2

The February meeting will be Monday February 17 at the Medford Library at 7:00.

February is a history month for different subjects, and this meeting will feature a presentation by Connie Decker where she summarizes club highlights of how the club was established from the efforts of noted birder Sam Robbins through the many activities and events up until now. Connie has been an officer and active member since shortly after the club was organized. Expect a dynamic presentation with many personal experiences and unique highlights.

## **Wisconsin Birds—Field Checklist**

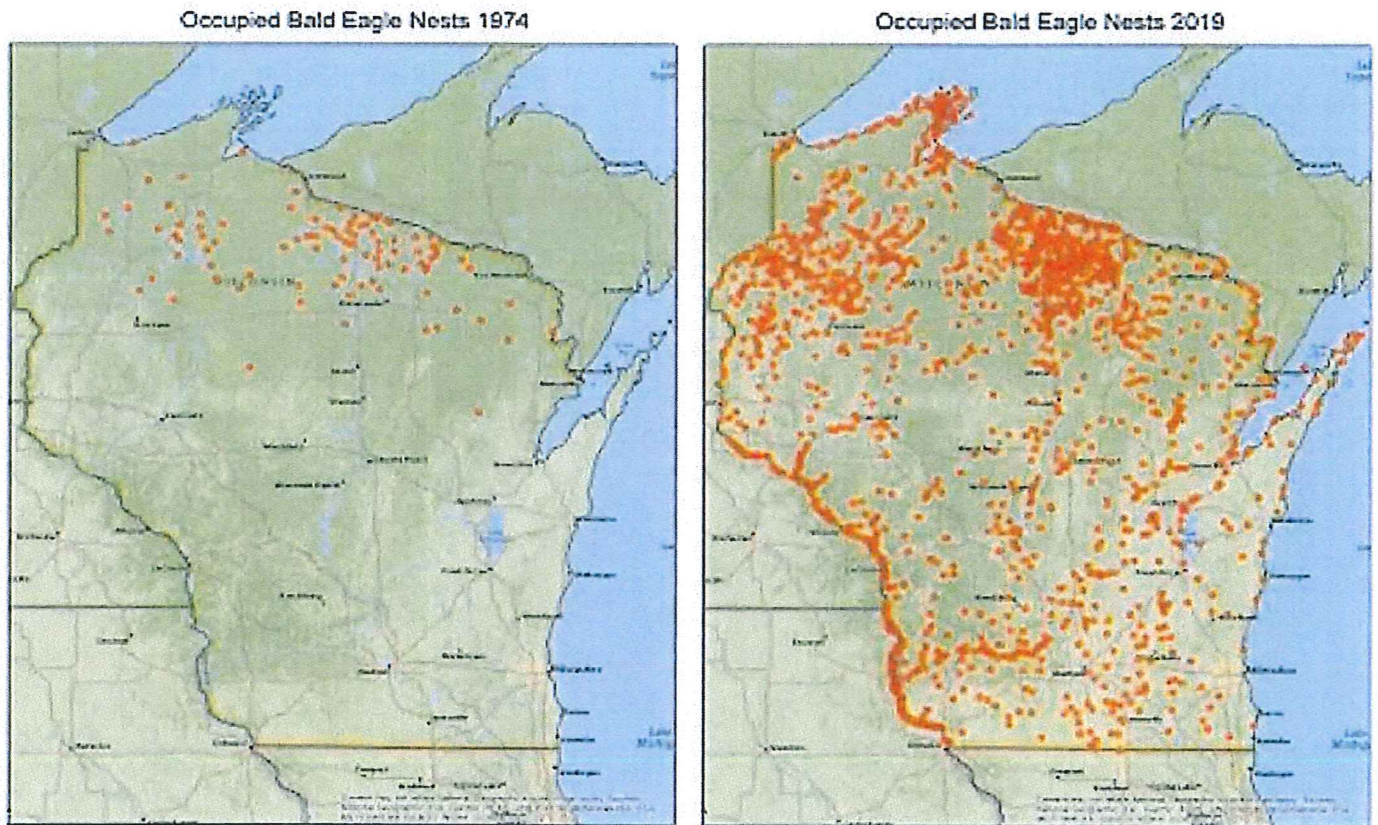
The purpose of this list is to keep track of birds documented by Chequamegon Bird Club members within the state. Documentation can be either visual or audio, but should be done by the member. Second hand information doesn't count. You can record this on the laminated list that will be at every meeting. One word of caution. If you have any doubt or want to confirm a specie, talk with others in addition to checking books or guides. The club is meant to be a learning experience and describing a bird or its actions is a great mental activity for both you and the listener.

The 32 species recorded since January 1st are the following: Mallard, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey, Bald Eagle, Northern Goshawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Snowy Owl, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, and Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, European Starling, American Tree-sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Snow Bunting, Northern Cardinal, Common Grackle, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow. Different people have mentioned seeing returned Horned Larks which are right on schedule on their late January, early February arrival in this area. I'm sure other species have also been identified to add to the checklist.

## Bald Eagles—A remarkable success story

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources issued the following statement, “The success of bald eagles in Wisconsin is a comeback story fueled by the national ban on DDT, added protection under state and federal endangered species laws, river cleanups under the Clean Water Act and public support of nest monitoring and protective efforts.”

Visiting nest sites and more documentation will be discussed at the meeting.



## Pileated Woodpeckers

Earlier I had mentioned that I was open to suggestions about selecting a group of birds and doing several articles on them throughout the year. Woodpeckers are the selection for 2020 due to an “extensive selection process.” Actually, Ron Draeger and I were on the Gilman Christmas Count January 1<sup>st</sup> and the first bird we saw was a Pileated Woodpecker: a good bird to start out a new decade. So woodpeckers it is.

My dad sometimes used the expression, “Hungry as a woodpecker with a headache.” Just think about that. Why don’t woodpeckers get concussions let alone headaches? Obviously the answer—or at least what we know about woodpecker physiology so far—is an animal that is remarkably adapted to what it does. *Unlike our brains which are soft and have room to slosh around, theirs are smaller, more solid*



*and tightly held in place. Also their skulls are thicker and supported by strong muscles which help in the whole hammering process. Therefore, they don't need a helmet as their head takes a beating. There is a lot more to this physical activity that just isn't known yet. They can tolerate G Forces more than ten times what we can. Sawdust and chips fly as they bang away on trees and stumps. Bristles protect their nostrils and their eyes close before their bill strikes its target. The tongue is remarkably long and equipped with barbs on the end to spear insects or to better retrieve them. No other bird has a tongue as long in relation to their body length which enables them to search cracks and under bark. Their tongues are wormlike and are folded accordion style in the head when not in use. Feet have four toes, two in front and two in back to give a strong grip. The central two tail feathers are important for supporting them as they rest and feed. When they molt, those two feathers do not drop out until after the new ones have grown in.*

Pileated Woodpecker numbers have increased and they are not endangered. One hundred years ago their numbers were much less, but they have adapted to changing landscapes. Unlike some birds, when you see or hear one, there isn't anything else quite like them. While weighing in at only 10 ounces, they are crow sized and their undulating flight lets you are not looking at a crow. If close enough, you will see white on the wings and possibly red on the head and crest. Even if not seen, their cackle can be heard a long way away. In fact, this is the bird that Disney used to make the famous Woody Woodpecker sound.

Another sure sign of the presence of a Pileated in the area is large holes or slots carved into a tree. Sometimes it looks as if a tree was attacked by a chainsaw rather than a ten ounce bird. Large chip piles can accumulate at the base of some of their work sites. Some people think the bird is killing trees, but really they are just after insects in a dead or dying tree. It is thought some drilling is initiated by hearing insect activity under the bark or within the tree. Rarely, they attack high line poles thinking they are hearing insect activity. Sometimes homes or other buildings host insects, too. Smaller woodpeckers can cause serious damage to houses, but not to the degree of what a Pileated is capable of. There are different woodpecker repellents on the market, but honestly, most of them are not worth the money. Netting hung from eaves is the surest deterrent, but not always practical or possible. Shiny strips that flutter in the wind can work and some people have had success putting suet or other easier food sources nearby—but not too close, as it might attract more woodpeckers.

Pileated is pronounced either with a long or short I. Is one more correct than the other? Nah. The politically correct answer is either one is just fine and you're more apt to say, "Holy---" when you get a really good look at this remarkable bird. Good luck and happy birding.

Editor Chequamegon Chirps

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#### Club Contacts

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#### February and March Events

Full moons February 9 and March 9

Days noticeably longer

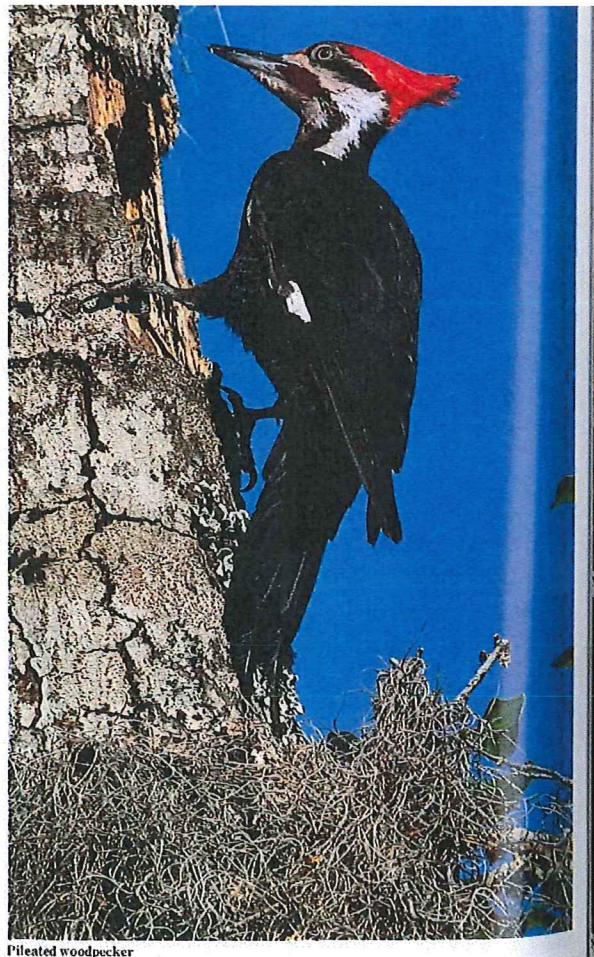
Great Horned Owls nesting

Cardinals and Chickadees start spring songs

Maple sap collection starts

Horned Larks arriving

Northern migration starting



Pileated woodpecker