

Chequamegon Chirps



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Happy New Year. The January meeting will be the third Monday, January 17th at 7:00 P.M. The connection ID number is **314 090 6270**. Thank you to the Stalheims for allowing us to use their zoom number. This session will include a verbal synopsis of Christmas Counts with the numbers to follow in next month's CHIRPS. We would also like to have each participant tell about one of their most memorable bird memories. Joe will present information about Avenza Maps which is a free app for cell phone and other electronics.

Odds and Ends

Recently I received a flyer that offered a whole bunch of different educational courses on sale that included Discover the Wonders of Birding by National Geographic. This course includes 24 lectures of 30 minutes each which are \$25 for Instant Video or \$35 for a DVD version that includes a printed guidebook. The club owns this series donated by a club member and have been used at a couple meetings. This sale ends January 27. For more information call 1-800-832-2412 or go online to www.getgreatcourses.com

Jim and Laurie Livingston of N4144 Division Drive live about ten miles west of Medford. There are several miles of groomed trails on their property which are open to the public. They are especially interested in any bird data that is collected by trail users and several members plan on going out there at least one day this winter and survey in the spring or summer. More information is at www.bearcrossing.sws-wis.com

Officer nominations have been accepted for vice-president, secretary and treasurer. That leaves the presidency position. Have any of you made a New Year's resolution to try something you have never been brave enough to do before? Birding experience or ability is not necessary. Help is available with a planning committee, fellow officers and it doesn't have to be a lifetime commitment. Really. Joe has held the office for several years and he is still rational and coherent most of the time—sometimes—well, he used to be. Come to think of it, he may have been a half bubble off of plumb before and look how good a job he has done.

Red Crossbills

One thing that appeals to me about the Gilman Audubon Christmas Count is that it is usually on January first. That gives me a good reason to go to bed early on New Year's Eve and to see new birds on the first day of the year. Sometimes the first species seen is extra special, as it was this year. It took nearly an hour for a first ID, which were five red crossbills. I hadn't seen this species in years, so to start out 2022 with them was memorable. Many years ago we had a flock come to our yard where they feasted on seeds and then disappeared and have not been back since. The following quotes from Book of North American Birds puts this in perspective.

“Like none of our other finches---and very few birds anywhere in the world---the crossbills are true nomads. They set up temporary colonies wherever they find enough food, and seem unconcerned with normal seasonal rhythms, frequently mating and raising their young in the dead of winter. Clearly, a nest one year is no promise that these habitual vagrants will return the next. The first nest of red crossbills ever discovered in the United States was found in New York City in April 1875. New York's bird watchers are still waiting for the second one”

Red crossbills are considered a northern bird. The majority spend most winters within their breeding ranges in the coniferous forests of Canada or the northern or western United States, although they can be found as far south as Texas and Mexico. The key to their location is availability of pine cone seeds such as tamarack while they also feed on plantations of red pine, white pine, Colorado blue spruce, and Norway spruce.

“Though the overlapping tips make the crossbill's mandibles look like gardening shears, the bill is actually used more as a probe and lever than as a cutting device. The bird hangs head-down over the end of a limb to work at the cone from above, then they insert bills between the scales and then their flexible tongues lift out the seeds.” These are also fed to hatchlings as regurgitated food and some insects if they are available.

The following information comes from the 2006 edition of Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Wisconsin. “Across their geographic range, Red Crossbills show considerable variation, enough so that recent studies suggest as many as eight different Red Cross species in North America, separated primarily by flight call notes along with body size and bill morphology. The bill and body size variation may reflect Red Crossbill adaptations to different conifer species and their

corresponding cone sizes. Though yet unproven, distinctive differences in flight calls, other call notes, and songs may provide the mechanism that maintains reproductive isolation that maintains reproductive isolation among the specific groups, even when the birds are feeding in the same vicinity.” (Adkisson 1996). “In Wisconsin the Red Crossbill is considered an irregular and uncommon migrant, a rare summer resident and uncommon winter resident north, and rare winter resident in the south. Due to its irruptive nature and high dependence on abundant conifer cone crops, nesting of Red Crossbills probably does not occur every year in the state but is certainly more widespread and frequent than past records show.” (Robbins)

“The future status of the Red Crossbill in Wisconsin can be expected to resemble past observations. Forest management aimed at increasing conifer forests, especially pines, through natural regeneration and plantations will benefit this species. As these forest communities mature, an adequate food supply of conifer seeds should continue to support a widespread breeding population of Red Crossbills in Wisconsin.”



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January and February

Full moons 1-17 and 2-16

Known as Wolf Moon and Snow Moon

Horned Larks will soon come back

Day lengths are noticeably longer

Great Horned Owls are courting

Enjoy fresh air as Covid increases

