

Chequamegon Chirps



July 20, 2020 Volume 39 Number 7

Last month there was some discussion if a July or August picnic might be feasible. The answer is—maybe. These are the plans, which are subject to last minute change if rain or other weather becomes an issue. We will gather at Cam Scott's place at 5:30 for a woods walk on one of her trails. Hopefully we will be greeted by cooperative bird sightings and songs. More certain will be mosquitoes and pesty flies. Bug repellent is recommended. There will be a bathroom available. Instead of potluck, each individual, couple, or family is asked to bring all of your own utensils, food and drink. There will be a bonfire where hot dogs can be roasted and/or smores toasted. Distance separation and masks will be appreciated and expected. Cam's home is at N 3566 Grover Drive which is about 12 miles west of Medford on 64 and just a bit west of the Black River. Turn north on Grover Drive and continue north for about a few miles and her house is on the right, but not visible from the road. On Sunday night a decision will be made if the picnic and walk is a go or not. If it won't be held, you'll receive a call and then the get together will be done on Zoom at 7:00 Monday night. Let's hope for a pleasant evening and a face to face meeting with proper distancing behind face masks.

What's Around?

Summer hatchings continue with more fledglings appearing around and at our feeders. Some of them are so clumsy at first along with being needy and sometimes dumber than a doorknob. But they do learn quickly with help from their parents. Last week one day a just fledged and odd looking white-breasted nuthatch came to a feeder. It had regular outer wing feathers and the rest were fuzzy down. It took me a bit to recognize it as a nuthatch. It flew OK, and grabbed a seed before it left. Now this morning a white-breasted nuthatch showed up with adult feathers except for some down on the back. Wonder if it is the same bird? Woodpecker numbers have been up around my house this year starting back in winter. Now some Downy, Hairy and Red Bellied fledglings are coming to the suet.

Gayle Davis has both Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos coming through her yard along with good numbers of hummingbirds. Nesting Ravens across the road from her house have

fledged three youngsters who are practicing their vocabulary with mixed results across the road from her house.

Ron and Randy Draeger have recorded Dickcissels plus Clay-colored, Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows at Buena Vista Marsh. At the Mead Wildlife Area Ron commented they saw lots of Bob-o-links in the southwest area in addition to Yellow-headed Blackbirds.

Joe Scott sees many birds in his work and commented about seeing two baby Barred owls and young Ravens. Also included among his sighting or hearing species were Wood Thrush, Turkey Vultures, Green Backed Herons, Red Starts, Red-eyed and Yellow-throated Vireos and Common Yellowthroat.

Claire Romanak has another year blessed with many hummingbirds. Unfortunately, no banding will be done at her place north of Athens this year due to Covid-19 precautions. Last year 112 were banded in a little less than nine hours on July 27 and 28. Hopefully, banding will be possible next year. Her hummingbird feeders are busy this year with newly fledged birds just starting to come to the feeders. She uses a 20% sugar to water ratio without adding any food coloring. So far she has dispensed 50 pounds of sugar with the heaviest feeding still to come. Having many feeders around in addition to an abundance of colorful flowers all make Clire's home a hummingbird haven. At this time there are young Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Catbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Baltimore Orioles coming to her feeders. Her Bluebird nest boxes have had a below average year. Only five of her 25 boxes have had Bluebirds nest in them. One of the nests was taken over by wrens and when that pair occupied a different box that was wrecked by a bear. Claire found three eggs from this disaster and put the box back together and the three eggs back in the damaged nest. Surprisingly, one of those eggs hatched. Her other 20 boxes were occupied by Tree Swallows, Wrens and three clutches of Chickadees. There were seven, three and six eggs in those boxes of which 14 of the 16 hatched.

Hildegard Kuse was recently featured in a Medford newspaper article titled Luna moths take to the skies. She and her late sister ,Loretta, have helped to propagate these beautiful large pale green moths for many years among their many other activities and interests in nature. She explained, "In the spring, the adult moths emerge from the cocoons, a process called eclosion. You can hear them across the room since the adult moths do not have mouths, they use a portion of their wings to saw their way out of the cocoon. Each year they release many of the moths to find mates in the wild. Hildegard has special mating cages where they keep a few of the female moths which draw in males to mate. The resulting eggs are collected and the cycle begins once more."

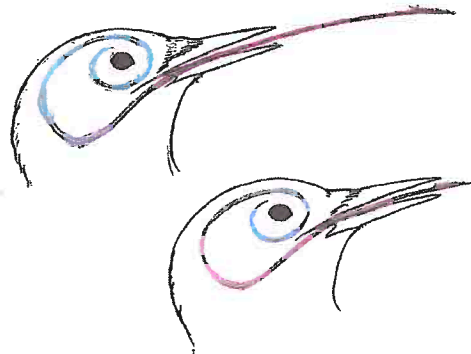
Woodpecker Features—from tongue to tail

Woodpecker tongues are barbed, sticky and long considering the size of their heads. Length varies with foraging behavior. A Downy Woodpecker feeds mostly by excavating wood and feeding on insects with barbed and sticky tongue. Flickers, who probe crevices and surface feed have longer tongues relative to their head size. “In all birds, the tongue contains a set of bones, known collectively as the hyoid apparatus that provides support, structure, and an attachment point for muscles that allow the birds to move their tongues and manipulate food. The hyoid apparatus ends in two elongated horns that attach off the back of the tongue and wrap under the jaw bone and around the skull in connective tissue sheaths. When a bird wants to stick its tongue out, the hyoid horns slide forward in their sheathing and the whole tongue forward. In woodpeckers—and hummingbirds, too—extreme tongue extension is possible because of exceptionally long hyoid horns which wrap completely around the skull and are anchored near the nostril or around the eye, depending on the species.

On the other end of woodpeckers there is a tail and it is also important in the whole process of excavating wood. A woodpecker uses its tail for support as it moves up and down tree trunks. It is a brace as it forages for food or excavates a nest. The tail feathers are stiff and supported by large muscles that allow fine manipulation. The two central feathers are pointed and reinforced by longitudinal ridges. They have barbs that curve inward toward the tree, creating a concave structure that increases the tail’s strength. These two feathers are usually not molted until all the other tail feathers have grown in, which is unusual. (The tail and tongue information is from a Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior)



Woodpecker tail. A woodpecker uses its tail as a brace while the bird clings to a tree. The central tail feathers (shown in side view at the left) are curved and stiffened with rigid points that flex when the tail is pressed against the trunk (shown at right). Even the molt pattern of the tail is adapted to maintain the climbing function: The all-important central feathers are not dropped until all the other feathers have grown to full length; then the outer feathers can support the bird during climbing while the central feathers regrow. The Downy Woodpecker is shown.



Woodpecker tongue and hyoid bone. The long, extensible tongue of woodpeckers, like that of hummingbirds, is made possible by the greatly elongated hyoid apparatus, a set of bones and muscles that controls tongue movements. In the Hairy Woodpecker (shown here), this hyoid apparatus wraps around the entire skull and coils around the right eye. When extended, the tongue can reach up to 5 inches (13 cm) in some species. The tip of the tongue is shaped differently in different species but is usually barbed and sticky to help the birds capture insect prey from deep inside wood crevices and tunnels.

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July and August events

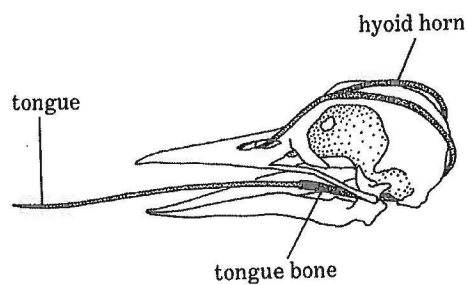
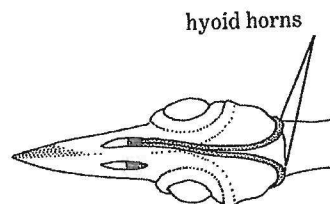
Full moon August 5

Time to enjoy the fruits of summer

Good berry picking time

Most nesting completed

Southern bird movement increasing



WOODPECKER FAMILY

To support the extension of their remarkably long tongues, woodpeckers have a hyoid apparatus consisting of a tongue bone that branches into 2 cartilaginous hyoid bones, or "horns." The horns curve upward along the skull, over the forehead, and attach inside the right nostril.