



# Chequamegon Chirps

## Newsletter of the Chequamegon Bird Club

Medford, Wisconsin

February 2009

Volume 28 Number 2

### **NEXT MEETING:**

**Date:** Monday, February 16, 2009

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Location:** Medford Public Library

**Program:** **Projects Update & Discussion:**

- Bluebird Trails
- Birding Hotspots

**Refreshments:** Gayle Davis, Jim Bragg

*Please bring your own mug for beverages.*



## **Bird Club Projects**

The Chequamegon Bird Club has undertaken two projects. One, which is being funded by a grant from Mid-Wisconsin Bank, is the establishment of Bluebird Trails. Students from Medford Area High School woodworking classes are building the birdhouses and those from the Science Club will be helping to install the houses. While several locations are being considered for the trails, final locations are yet to be decided. We will be needing volunteers to help with installation and to monitor and maintain the bluebird houses on a regular basis. Monitoring offers a chance to see baby birds up close and to observe bird parenting behavior.

The other project is a guide to bird watching sites in the bird club area. The club is seeking funding for the project, including from the USDA Forest Service. It is expected that the guide will take the form of both a booklet and a web site. Some of the sites include Medford Riverwalk, Sportsman's Lake, Pershing Wildlife Area, McMillan Marsh, and locations on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Please bring

## ~ ~ ~ REMINDERS ~ ~ ~



### **>Membership Dues**

Membership dues were payable in January. If you haven't yet paid, you can pay at the meeting or mail your check to the treasurer:

Cam Scott  
N3566 Grover Drive  
Withee WI 54498

Dues are \$18 for single or family membership at one address. Make check payable to *Chequamegon Bird Club*.

We'd like to update our records, so please include name (or names - if family membership), address, phone number, and e-mail address if you have one. Also indicate if you would like the Chirps emailed to you or if you prefer a paper copy – or both.

### **>Great Backyard Bird Count**

February 13-16, 2009

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your list of favorite birding places in our area to the next meeting. You may also contact Claire Romanak if you have suggestions of birding sites. This is a great opportunity to get more involved by helping to gather site information and to work on the guide.

## Yellow-billed Oxpeckers - Doug Pledger

During our recent African excursion, we came upon a somewhat unusual bird. We were in a game reserve, observing some eland, the largest African antelopes. There was an older bull (these can exceed a ton in weight) which had a number of starling-sized birds perched on its back and sides. They proved to be Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, (sometimes called tickbirds,) one of two African species of the starling family that spend most of their lives perched on large animals. They have a symbiotic relationship with their hosts, in which they consume large numbers of ticks, flies, and larvae. An adult bird can eat over a hundred blood-engorged ticks or thousands of fly larvae in the course of a day. This has obvious benefits for the animal involved. Unfortunately, the birds do not stop at this – they are wont to open sores and wounds and take blood directly (which of course also attracts more flies...) This is all tolerated by the host, one postulated reason being that the birds nominally serve as an early warning system, reacting noisily to any intrusion.

They spend most of their time clinging to host animals with their sharp claws. They sleep and carry out their breeding activities in the same locale. They nest in holes in trees lined with animal hair (surprise...) and lay 2-3 eggs.

This species and a closely related cousin, the Red-billed Oxpecker, inhabit the African sub-Saharan savanna from Senegal across the continent to Somalia. As the game herds were greatly reduced in the last century or so the birds adapted to use domestic cattle. In recent years the use of tick control agents has rendered most of the latter non-viable hosts. This has reduced bird populations significantly. For some reason, the Yellow-billed have suffered the greatest population reductions, and now are found principally in national parks and reserves. We were fortunate, therefore, to observe those shown in the picture. It should be noted that although we approached to quite a short distance, the birds paid essentially no attention to us. Seems they were not holding up their side of the bargain.



Yellow-bellied Oxpeckers

Doug Pledger



### F u n d r a i s e r

#### Sunflower Seed Sale

**\$14.00 for 50#**  
(tax exempt)

*Compare & save – remember that most stores are now selling sunflower seed in 40# bags*

- locally grown
- order for friends & relatives
- pick up at February Bird Club meeting

**Call Connie by Monday noon to order.**  
**654- 5819**

*Bird Club makes \$2/bag.*



## Bird Reports (December 2008 – January 2009)

Checklist observers: *Rhoda Barber* , *Connie Decker* , *Ken Luepke* , *Cathy Mauer* ,  
*Gordy Ruesch* , *Doug and Willa Pledger* , *Claire Romanak* , *Larry Ruhde* , *Greg and Cam Scott*

Total Number of Species Observed this month is: 53

- Canada Goose, Mallard, Common Merganser
- Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey
- Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk (Mauer / Ruesch / Scott), Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Golden Eagle (Decker / Luepke), American Kestrel
- Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove
- Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl
- Red-headed Woodpecker (Decker / Luepke ), Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Black-backed Woodpecker \* (Decker , Luepke ), Northern Flicker (Barber), Pileated Woodpecker
- Northern Shrike, Gray Jay (Decker / Luepke), Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark
- Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet
- American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Lapland Longspur (Decker , Luepke ), Snow Bunting, Northern Cardinal
- Red-winged Blackbird (Luepke)
- Pine Grosbeak (Multiple observers), Purple Finch, House Finch, White-winged Crossbill (Multiple observers), Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

## Christmas Bird Count Overview

Audubon Christmas Bird Counts are held annually in the same time period of December 14 through January 5. The counts that had Chequamegon Bird Club members participate in them are on the enclosed summary. They totaled sixty species found on count days, and together had a total of nearly thirty thousand (29,548) birds counted.

Clam Lake, the most northern of these counts, had two new species (American Robin and Snow Bunting) for the count, plus an additional four species ( Wild Turkey , Black-backed Woodpecker, Red Crossbill , and Common Redpoll ) that set new high numbers. Also Clam Lake set a new high number of species at thirty-two, previous high was 31 in 2006 / 2007.

Gilman set new highs for five species including a remarkable two Golden Eagles. Also high were Downy Woodpecker, Bald Eagle, Snow Bunting and American Goldfinch.

Owen had new highs for three species (Ring-necked Pheasant, Horned Lark, and Dark-eyed Junco). Owen also had the highest species total (43) of the local counts.

Spencer had one new species (Sandhill Crane)

plus high counts for two more (Golden-crowned Kinglet and Dark-eyed Junco) and tied for another high (American Kestrel). The Sandhill is a new bird for the entire Central Wisconsin area, and one of the very few ever found on Wisconsin counts. It was first spotted by Pam Stange, and this was her first Christmas Count! The fact that she and Connie were the only ones in that party could make this bird observation questionable ☺ !

Willard, the farthest south count, had high count for two new species (Common Raven and Snow Bunting).

Although bird numbers appeared low before the counts started, once the results were in most numbers came out near average. A few species appeared to be above average. Among them were the Golden Eagle (3), Dark-eyed Junco (774), Snow Bunting (4266) , White-winged Crossbill (344) and Common Redpoll (1470). Among the ones on the low end were the owls, especially the Great Horned Owl, with only two individuals recorded for all the counts.

A summary of the results is enclosed.

Thanks again to the Chequamegon Bird Club for its contributions.

Editor, Chequamegon Chirps  
N4416 Crane Dr.  
Medford WI 54451-9376



### Club Officers 2008-2009

*President* – Claire Romanak

*Vice-president* – Connie Decker

*Secretary* – Hildegard Kuse

*Treasurer* – Cam Scott

### Other Club Contacts

Web site: www.chequamegonbirdclub.org

Email: info@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Newsletter Email: newsletter@chequamegonbirdclub.org

Bird sightings: Connie Decker

### February – March Outdoors

- Full moon – March 10
- Canada Geese begin arriving
- Bobcats, mink, snowshoe hares begin mating
- Maple sap starts flowing
- Bald eagles start migrating
- Sandhill cranes, robins, bluebirds, and red-winged blackbirds arrive
- Tom turkeys start gobbling
- Chipmunks emerge



### Birder's Bookshelf

#### The Burgess Bird Book for Children

By Thornton Burgess

Best known as the author of *The Adventures of Peter Cottontail*, Burgess wrote many other animal books for children, including this wonderful bird book illustrated by Louis Agassiz Fuertes, one of my favorite bird artists. In this book Peter Rabbit visits many birds, and children learn about the birds through Peter's eyes.

The book was first published in 1919, but several reproductions are available. Beware, however, that at least some of the reproductions may not include Fuertes' color illustrations. The book can also be read on-line at many free book websites, including this one that has a scan of an actual book, including the color illustrations:

<http://www.archive.org/stream/burgessbirdbookf00burgiala>