We will welcome the first month of the year 2019 with our January meeting on Monday, January 21st at the Medford Library. Ron Dreger will conduct the meeting and give a presentation about sparrow identification.

Other parts of the meeting will include some details and highlights of the recently completed Audubon Christmas Bird Counts. Next month’s Chirps should have a complete rundown of all the data collected. Other topics ripe for meeting discussion is our odd winter weather and lack of snow. How is it impacting birds? Feeder activity? Relative absence of some of our usual birds in the area? Unusual birds?

Speaking of unusual birds, the Medford Christmas Count came up with another dandy this year. Last year Evening Grosbeaks made an appearance. This year, another grosbeak was documented and provides an interesting discussion. The last I heard it was identified as a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. This a great winter discovery. But wait, could it possibly be a Black-headed Grosbeak or a hybrid? (This would be a good time to pull out a bird book to study details of these two species and their usual territories.) Aside from coloration—which can get kind of dicey on immature or worn plumage, their bills are different in that Rose-breasted Grosbeaks have conspicuous white bills while Black-headed Grosbeaks have a bi-colored bill with the top being darker. One picture of the bird on the Medford count, taken on a sunny day, showed a darker upper bill. Whatever the final resolution, it is another example of how Christmas Counts can produce amazing surprises. Who knows what might show up at your feeders or what you might spot as you are out and about regardless of the time of year?

Bird species in Wisconsin reported by club members for 2018

The following data is from field checklists collected at our monthly meetings and material submitted by members. Any additions and/or corrections can still be presented and will be in the February Chirps. **Geese**—Greater White-fronted, Snow, Ross’s, Cackling, Canada. **Swans**—Trumpeter, Mute, Tundra. **Ducks**—Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Widgeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Black Scoter,

**The Billion-Bird Question**

A third of the birds that winter in the mainland United States never make it to spring migration. Why doesn’t the math add up?

**BY PURBITA SAHA**

**AN AMERICAN ROBIN TAKES OFF FROM ITS SUMMER home in Montreal, Canada, putting everything on the line to fly 1,660 miles to spend the holidays in West Palm Beach, Florida. Even more grueling is the journey of a Scarlet Tanager that wings 2,700 miles from Dartmouth, Massachusetts, to Cali, Colombia.**

Each fall, billions of birds like the robin and tanager make their way to the Lower 48 or to the tropics. But a big slice of them never flies back—casualties of natural causes like weather and predation, and unnatural causes like oil pits, feral cats, and glass collisions. Now scientists from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York, have put a first-ever estimate on those missing travelers. By tracking migratory night flights from 2015 to 2017 on weather radar maps, measuring the magnitude, and plugging the numbers into a cloud-computing service, they tallied how many land birds were—or weren’t—traversing the country. Their findings (at right) show a titanic drop-off of 2.6 billion birds between fall and spring migrations. What’s more, though species that winter in the United States have shorter fall flights, they suffered the bulk of the losses, indicating that northern populations face greater threats than those in the tropics.

It’s a narrative that’s bound to change, says lead researcher and migration expert Adrian Dokter. As development in Latin America continues to climb, there will be fewer pristine habitats, which means some birds might not venture as far south. Drier, hotter conditions under climate change could make the trek even more costly for migrants that try to stick it out near the equator. It’s a future we need to plan for, Dokter says. By both protecting tropical wilderness and reducing domestic dangers, we can boost the survival of billions of birds before they fly off the radar.

**4 billion**

Land birds migrate to the U.S. mainland for winter

**4.7 billion**

Land birds migrate to the tropics for winter

**Average migration distance**

860 miles

1,960 miles

**23% mortality during winter**

**35% mortality during winter**

60 new birds for every 100 individuals

36 new birds for every 100 individuals

**Going the distance has its perks.**

The tropics offer milder climates and richer resources. So even if the trip there is sapping, a spell in paradise can restore a bird and prepare it for the vital breeding season.

**Short migrations mean lower survivorship.**

Species that spend less time in transit face fewer flight risks. But in exchange for their quick trip, they endure harsher winter conditions, which drive up mortality rates. Widespread urbanization and other human impacts in the contiguous United States also pose potential hardships that take a big bite out of the population.

**Life compensates death.**

To make up for low survival rates on their stateside wintering grounds, northern breeding species generally crank out more chicks. Most of the young recruits won’t survive fall migration, but their high numbers still give the population a boost before the grind begins anew.

**Land birds that migrate to the U.S. mainland**

**Land birds that migrate to the tropics**
 CLUB CONTACTS

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January and February events

Full moons Jan 21 Wolf Moon Feb 19 Snow Moon
Horned Larks to soon return
Bear cubs being born
Deer shedding antlers
Great Horned Owls soon to lay eggs