

Chequamegon Chirps



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The November meeting is scheduled for Monday, the 20th 7:00 p.m. at the Medford Library. The zoom session is available at 314 090 6270. In addition to some committee reports, we will discuss planning for the annual Christmas party, Christmas Bird Counts, and for upcoming bird club scholarships. A couple short videos will be shown to compliment topics discussed. Local birding hotspots will be among those topics, such as how to find our own club hotspots via our website and how to contribute to eBird hotspots.

Audubon Christmas counts will be held in the Willard, Spencer and Gilman areas with Ken Luepke and Connie Decker the people to contact at 715-659-3910 or 715-654-5819. Owen count will be organized by Gayle Davis who can be reached at 715-678-2330 or 715-255-2348. Joe Scott will take care of the Medford count and his number is 715-965-3498. All counts are one day each where all birds seen or heard within a 15 mile diameter circle are counted. It looks as if there will be gatherings at the end of the counts since Covid isn't the issue it was the last couple years. Counts will be scheduled between December 15th and January 1st. The data collected on these counts is summarized on state, country and world-wide levels and is used in numerous studies and research projects. This tradition started at Christmas, 1900 as an alternative to the practice of groups gathering to see how many birds they could shoot. Please contact Ken, Connie, Gayle or Joe as soon as possible or by the November meeting so they have the information necessary to choose when their count will be and how many territories to organize. Friends, relatives and innocent by-standers as well as club members are encouraged to participate, but you need to let the person in charge know in advance. Personally, this is one of my favorite activities of the year to get together in the evening with friends after a long day of birding to admire the numbers and species that were found within each particular circle. If you are a participant, you know what I'm talking about. If you haven't, why don't you try it this year as a Christmas present to yourself.

Speaking of holidays, last year at the last minute I invited a neighborhood turkey to Thanksgiving, but it declined, saying he was already stuffed. That was rude.

Are You Ready For Winter?

In nearly mid-November we are having weather that is quite un-winter like. That doesn't delay preparations for experienced Wisconsinites who heat with wood, put up holiday decorations, harvest, can and freeze summer bounty plus winterizing our homes. Cold weather, snow and blustery winds will pounce upon us one of these days, often unexpectedly. What do you do if you are a bird who weighs less than a half ounce when blizzards, ice, and Artic Fronts barrel through? You go to cached deposits of feed and seeds in addition to whatever you scrounge from daily searching. Do that or die. The following information is from University of Illinois research.

Black-capped chickadees forage for food and instead of eating it all, they store, or cache some of it for later. There seems to be a steady stream of them coming to the sunflower seeder as I type these lines. They can't possibly be eating all that food. It is estimated that chickadees cache as many as one hundred thousand food item per year, usually individually, across a widespread territory and they do not reuse cache sites. They demonstrate a remarkable memory for the location of cached items for periods ranging from hours to weeks. It has been shown in numerous laboratory and field experiments that chickadees use remembered visuo-spatial cues to recall the location of food caches. Certain clues are more important than others. Proximal cues such as the configuration of pine needles, branches or other items immediately surrounding the cache are not as important to recovery as more distal cues such as the arrangement of trees and other items in the vicinity of the cache site. Removal of proximal cues does not reduce the probability of food recovery nearly as much as removal of more distal cues.

An elegant experiment by Brodbeck-1994 showed that chickadees search for remembered food locations first in places suggested by landmarks like the location within an aviary, second in locations suggested by the proximal features immediately surrounding the food cache. It appears that chickadees use a complex hierarchical system of memories for visuo-spatial cues to recover the cached food items.

As I sit here at a keyboard on a sunny morning watching chickadees along with other birds coming to the feeder to grab black sunflower seeds and dart away, I'm struck by the thought that these flyweight wonders are demonstrating amazing brain power in action to a degree that I can't match—only enjoy and marvel at.

Names, Names, Names

Names are important for humans. Birds, much less so or not at all. I would assume they don't care either. Stellar's jay, Cooper's hawk, Wilson's warbler, Anna's hummingbird, Gambrel's quail, Lewis's woodpecker, Bewick's wren, Bullock's oriole are all species where the bird's name has part of a human name, too. It seems that is going to change. Around 2025 the American Ornithological Society will change all English names of birds named after people. This will involve some 70 to 80 species in the United States and Canada. Their scientific names will stay the same. There may be a push to make some of those name more politically correct, but the reason is the powers that be want to have names be more descriptive of birds.

For example, we have ruby-throated humming birds here. That does tell us something as do others named black-chinned, blue-throated, broad billed, broad tailed, buff-bellied, violet-crowned or white-eared hummingbirds. Anna's, Allen's, and Costa's don't give us a descriptive clue as to what the bird may look like.

I would expect the whole renaming process to be confusing, contradictory, frustrating, disagreeable and aggravating at time, but once in place and after a few decades, will seem natural. It might cause a surge in field-book sales, too. Don't see how it will impact mating rituals, migration or bird behavior one iota, though.

If a bird species were to be connected to you, what name would you choose or prefer? Bald eagle is so much more appropriate than Bragg's eagle—and even though in this case, descriptive for both. On the other hand, if you could choose a species to include your first or last name, which one would it be?

Roger Tory Peterson

A giant in the area of ornithological learning and research development, he has an interesting local connection. His hearing was once tested by a Harvard researcher who found, "The Birdman's hearing the sharpest he had ever tested." In some article I came across somewhere, Mr. Peterson stated, "Yes, he had really good hearing, but Chandler Robbins was just a bit better." Chandler, Sam's older brother, was one of the authors of *Birds of North America* which the premier field guide when released in 1966. He was also a onetime guest at a Chequamegon bird club meeting. Sam, not one to brag, once mentioned his bird sound identification skills were a smidge better than his brother. Rare company indeed.

editor

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Club contacts

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November and December events

Full moons: Beaver moon November 27

Cold moon December 26

Winter Solstice

Deer season starts November 18

Plan for Christmas counts

