Our October session will be at the Stetsonville Centennial Hall with a 5:30 social hour, 6:30 meal and speaker at 7:30. The food—which includes chicken of course—will be family style which will allow for some last minute additions, if necessary. I expect everyone has already purchased their tickets, but we also don’t want to turn someone away who is able to attend at the last minute. Our speaker is Linda Parker who brings 30 years of bird knowledge and experience in the Chequamegon-Nicolet Forest to share with us. She is known as an accomplished and entertaining speaker.

**Chicken, Chicken and More Chicken Info**

The following mish mash of information isn’t meant to leave a bad taste in your mouth, even if chicken is not one of your favorite foods. The chicken industry isn’t a big business—it is huge. Americans eat almost 100 pounds of chicken a year which includes mostly thighs, breasts, wings, drumsticks and whatever else you like to chew on. Some more odds and ends are handy to throw into soup or some other specialty dish.

This is far from the end of usable products from chickens. Everything except maybe the cluck gets put to use in some way or another. The variety and volume of some of these products is astounding. It is believed jungle fowl were first domesticated for food some 5,400 years ago. Cock fighting may have started as much as 4,000 to 5,000 years before that. Chickens came to South America from Polynesia and slowly moved north. Ships started bringing chickens with earliest settlers in the 1500 and 1600s to North America. Since then continued selective breeding has added great variety to what is available for egg and meat consumption.

Backyard chickens have become more and more popular to the point where many towns now have ordinances to limit chicken numbers to two or three per house with no roosters allowed. Two of our granddaughters have a fancy coop—probably not as luxurious as the one Mike built for Connie—but still pretty fancy. Since they don’t live in a town, their 20 to 30 banties, including roosters are legal—at least no neighbor has complained. Each bird has a name and they lay tiny and colorful eggs, some get taken to a county fair and they die of
old age. They are in no danger of being invited to the dinner table. Being a chicken can be a good gig.

Have you ever tried chicken feet? Not surprising if you haven’t, but they are a favorite treat in many parts of the world. Korea, the Philippines, Viet Nam and China all have their own way of preparing this delicacy. How popular are they? Well, the market is screwed up right now, but in more normal times, the United States shipped 400,000 metric tons a year to China. That’s a billion dollar purchase. It is about 20,000 semi loads. To me, those are crazy numbers to comprehend. “Currently America is awash with chicken feet. Most American chicken feet are now rendered for animal feed. The value of paws—the term used for chicken feet—is just a fraction of the value of a paw sold to China.”

American chicken feet are particularly popular in China because of their large size. According to Kristi Allen in a Gastro Obscura report, “Different regions of China all have their own local dishes. One popular dish is a Cantonese dim sum standard in both China and the United States. The feet are fried to make the skins puffy, then simmered for several hours. Finally, they’re slathered with a sauce made from fermented red bean paste and steamed. Most recipes combine two or more cooking methods to fully tenderize the tough skin and tendons. Chicken feet can be served hot or cold, spicy or mild, in soups and stews or on their own. They’re sold as snacks in corner stores, often shrink wrapped in plastic for convenience.”

“In addition to their tastiness, Chinese people are also fans of chicken feet for their health benefits. The collagen-rich snack is said to be good for the skin. Since they are often served cold, demand rises sharply in the warmer months of the year. Chicken feet are eaten so frequently that they are often more expensive than actual chicken meat.” That is in contrast to a one dollar chicken sandwich I order sometimes when I’m on the road and don’t want a heavy meal. Cheap for a buck, it doesn’t taste that bad, but I probably really don’t want to know what chicken parts and ingredients go into it and certainly not the manufacturing process. Still tastes Okay.

**By-products including Feathers**

Poultry by-product meal is one of the most important sources of animal protein used to feed domestic animals, along with meat and bone meal, blood meal and feather meal. Another significant chicken by-product is feathers. These can range from very specialized bred chickens whose sole purpose is to produce specific feathers which are sold at exorbitant prices for costumes or fishing flies. A much larger market is the manufacturing of different products which have feathers as a significant factor. Feathers can be a part of pillow stuffing,
diapers, paper, plastics, insulation, upholstery stuffing and feed grade meal as a few of the possibilities that feathers can find use for. The keratin in feathers in provides more surface area than wool which improves absorption. All in all, there is a myriad of possibilities for these products that continue to be researched and developed. That is a good thing because two to three billion pounds of feathers are produced each year.

These figures were gleaned from different Google sources and if you know they are inaccurate or misleading, please let me know and I’ll print a retraction along with the more correct data in a future Chirps.

**Wisconsin Atlas II data completed**

Atlas Two information has been collected and will be compiled into book form which may take a couple years. Highlights are: All 1,283 Atlas Blocks surveyed

166,000 bird check lists reported

243 species found

2.2 million observations submitted

Thirteen additional breeding species were recorded in Atlas II that weren’t documented in Atlas I. They are King Rail, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Whooping Crane, Glossy Ibis, Mississippi Kite, Eurasian Collared-dove, Great Tit, White-eyed Vireo, Kirkland’s Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and European Goldfinch. A special thank you for all the volunteer effort including Cathy Mauer and Rory Cameron plus all others who helped them.

**US and Canada lose three billion birds in 50 years**

Dr. Ken Rosenberg, lead researcher of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the American Bird Conservancy, was the first to, “run the numbers” on bird populations. The team’s calculations were based on bringing together all the bird monitoring in North America for the past 50 years—every major survey carried out across the continent since 1970.”

“The North America study revealed how many birds were being lost across every type of habitat—from grasslands to coasts to deserts. While it did not directly assess what was driving this, the scientists concluded that, among multiple causes, the major factor was habitat loss driven by human activity.”
From The Cuckoo’s Haiku

gravity’s jester
the nuthatch orbits a branch
worlds away, but here

October and November events

Full moons October 13 and November 12
Enjoy the color while it lasts
Be aware of extra deer traffic
Birds in Art exhibit open through November