October is Fall Banquet Time

Social hour is at 6:00 p.m. followed by the meal at 6:30
215 South 8th Street is the site (west side of Hwy 13 by the middle stoplight)
Meal catered by Marilyn’s of Medford
Speaker is Steve Petznik whose topic will be about binoculars—selection and use
He will be available to evaluate and offer suggestions for your bird watching equipment
If you have not yet ordered your meal ticket, contact Cam at 715-785-7614 before Oct 8
Raffle tickets will be available before a drawing for several door prizes

Ryan Brady, DNR specialist in the Ashland area recently sent out this news blurb. "Birdwatchers will be happy with this year’s winter finch forecast. Poor cone, birch seed and mountain ash crops in the Canadian boreal forest are expected to push various species south in above average numbers this winter including Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Bohemian Waxwings and more. Large numbers of purple Finches and Red-breasted Nuthatches are already on the move. It could be an exciting winter for feeder watching from Wisconsin eastward."

Since the official time of summer is only a few days ago on the calendar, it does seem a tad early to be talking about winter birds, but I did have one Red-breasted Nuthatch and a couple Purple Finches stop for a brief visit to my feeders a few days ago. Winter visitors have always been among my favorites. They seem to be more trusting and the color they bring to a white landscape brightens up the coldest days. In addition to Black-capped Chickadees, Redpolls, Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches are trusting enough of us seed providers to eat from our hands—always a special treat regardless of the weather or temperature. A steaming cup of coffee or tea with a cookie with the recent memory of a bird landing on my hand will warm my soul on the coldest day of the year.
Speaking of cold, how do birds manage to stay warm in winter? We pile on layers, snuggle up to a stove or turn up the heat in the house to stay comfortable. I wonder if comfort is a concept with birds and other animals or is it just about survival? For myself, now that I don’t work outdoors, comfort is much more of a factor and my cold tolerance has declined noticeably. Also the combination of ice and gravity has definitely become more of a concern in the aging process. Southern migration has more practical appeal.

Even larger birds don’t have all that much body mass to downright tiny things that weigh only a fraction of an ounce. Just think of the wind chill factors they encounter as they fly from one place to another on a bitterly cold, windy day. Their insulation has to hold in the heat their internal furnace/metabolism produces. What an amazing combination to keep them alive. It is something to contemplate as we sit in a warm house watching birds come to nearby feeders.

Deer as bird predators

This is the time of year when deer become more common news items with car collisions and hunting seasons. However there is another time of year when deer can have an impact on birds. Really. To what degree isn’t known, but there is documentation of deer eating eggs, nestlings, injured adults and birds caught in bander’s mist nets. The first time I heard about this I thought this particular individual was testing my gullibility. So I checked with Ken Luepke. He said, “Yes, he had several instances where he had deer poach birds out of mist nets I had set up.” Then I became a believer of this odd phenomenon. There is the theory that deer crave more calcium in their diet when antlers are developing or later stages of gestation. These times are when nestlings and eggs are more available. That seems logical. But does logic have to explain everything? Consider people. If we can put something between two slices of bread, we’ll eat it. Go to a county fair and if we find anything deep fried and on a stick we will eat it. I rest my case. Back to deer and birds. Bird nests have all kinds of predators. Raiders include Crows, Blue Jays, Grackles, weasels, mink, raccoons, skunks, opossums, snakes and squirrels among others. Makes you wonder how any birds fledge. How much of total predation is the result of deer? Maybe not that much at all or maybe more than any documentation that currently exists. There is probably significant variation in different areas depending on acquired tastes of different individuals, deer concentrations, available nests, plant growth and unknown X-factors. X-factors are always helpful to throw in when the writer is just blabbing away and not real sure of what to write any more as he (or she) comes to the end of the page. All in all, don’t start a campaign to stop the situation, but it is a little known occurrence that may or may not impact some species in local situations.
What’s in a name?

Bird names can cause frustration—especially when they don’t seem to match the bird or when a familiar name gets changed to something else. For example, why is a Red-bellied Woodpecker called that when there is scant red on their belly? Purple Finches are more of a raspberry color than purple. Kestrels were once known as Sparrow Hawks before an official name change took place.

Some name changes are more lighthearted than others. Longtime club member Bill Armbrust liked to refer to Pigeons as “Silo Ducks.” Early European and American scientists encountered situations where the same bird could have many different local or regional names in different languages and dialects. This caused problems. Were they talking about the same bird? Another wrinkle could be different birds having the same name.

In 1758 Carolus Linneaus proposed a two part or binomial naming system that is still in use. Today, all living organisms have a unique two-part name. Most of these are words made up of compound words using segments derived from Greek and Latin roots, prefixes and suffixes. Taxonomists, or people who study, classify and name organisms sort, split and group species by their common characteristics. The species name is unique to a particular type of organism in that genus. That seems all neat and organized, but really, it isn’t quite like that. New species are discovered, new species added and errors corrected. Change happens.

Looking at scientific names of birds, you can, depending on your comfort level with Greek or Latin, figure out some descriptive details about the bird whose name you are looking at. For example leuco means white or colorless. A White-crowned Sparrow is scientifically known as Zonotrichia leucophrys. Now when I look at a bird and try to ID it, I’m not trying to think of the scientific name, that is saved for when I’m piddling through a bird book on a winter day. Personally, I don’t claim to grasp the organization layout of the Linneaus System, but do find it fun to pick up an occasional scrap of information that adds a bit of information of interest about a particular bird. I’ve always wondered if the scientific name of Sturnus vulgaris for European Starling has a deeper scientific meaning or if the namer just didn’t like Starlings.

Sometimes people even have fun with scientific names. Terry Erwin of the Smithsonian Institution named two species of ground beetles Agradation and Agradaphobia. Nuff said.

The majority of this information came from an article in a November/December 2016 Bird Watcher’s Digest. The information there is much more complete in that article written by Donna Recktenwalt.
October and November highlights

Full moons 10-24 and 11-23
Fall color soon to arrive
Early harvests continue when weather permits
No frost yet (9-25) mosquitoes still plentiful
Southern migration (with arrivals) continues
Trip to REGI and LYW Birds in Art exhibit?

Charter Chequamegon Bird Club member Gordon Ruesch died this morning, Sept. 26 after a short illness. A true outdoorsman, his quiet input and gentle smile brightened many of our lives. Please remember Gordy and Cathy Mauer and their families in your quiet time of thought or prayer as you bird or wander in your favorite patch of woods.