

The Lake Flyer

Newsletter of Winnebago Audubon

Nov-Dec 2020

All programs and activities are open to the public.

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Editor: Janet Wissink • 920-216-1172 • winnebagoaudubon@gmail.com

Check our website for up-to-date information: www.winaudubon.org

Planning Your Planting: Thinking of Planting Natives, But Don't Know How to Start?

Thursday, November 19, 2020

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Where: Live on Facebook

Winter is a great time for planning your planting. Does your yard need more seed or cover for your favorite birds? Or perhaps an older planting has some bare patches yearning for new color? Join Shannon Davis-Foust for an interactive live streaming event to learn various methods of starting and maintaining small- or large-scale native plantings. It's not as hard as you think, and there are infinite benefits. Provide your own beverages and cyber-smiles!

The link to the live program will be posted on the [Winnebago Audubon Facebook Page](#) a couple days in advance. (You do not have to be a Facebook member to join this program.) We hope to "see" you there!

This virtual presentation is brought to you jointly by Wild Ones Fox Valley Area and Winnebago Audubon. 🐦



2020 Wrap-up & Appeal

2020 will not go down in history as one of those really good years. Multiple major negatives have cast 2020 as a "I can't wait until it ends" year. All of us have had to meet challenges we never expected to see in our lifetime.

The Board of Directors of Winnebago Audubon Society have racked our brains to answer the question of "What is fair for our members?" With all school and public programs and the annual meeting cancelled, it left few options for WAS to stay active.

In April, the Board approved donations of \$300 to Project SOAR (Snowy Owl Airport Rescue) and \$450 to Oshkosh Zoological Society to support the new Bald Eagle exhibit. In May, \$521.85 was approved to purchase a GPS transmitter to be used in Purple Martin research.

On August 26, the Board met at South Park. There was lengthy discussion on "What can we do to address our mission?" Two requests were approved. A \$200 donation was sent to UW-Oshkosh SIRI (Sustainable Institute for Regional Transformation) to support the Peregrine Falcon project at UW-Oshkosh. The SIRI donation was given in memory of Don Meton, a past Director and long-time member.

At the same meeting, another \$300 was approved for Project SOAR. Project SOAR has gained momentum to the point where requests to trap and relocate birds are outstripping resources. As a Board we feel Project SOAR is a priority.

All of the donations have local, state, and even international implications. Somewhere in South America there are Purple Martins flying around sending GPS signals.

As a Board, we will continue to strive to take action that is effective, and member based. Your continued support of our local chapter has and will always be greatly appreciated.

Typically, we mail out our annual appeal this time of year, but we have decided not to do so this year. Of course, if you would like to make a donation to our chapter, we would be very grateful. Please see the instructions on the enclosed form on page 5.

We wish all of you a safe and healthy Holiday Season! May the new year bring us new hope for a return to normalcy in our lives. 🐦

Do you like birdwatching? Being outside? Need an excuse? Participant in the Christmas Bird Count

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) began over a century ago and has been conducted every year since 1964 in Winnebago County thanks to Tom Ziebell. For the CBC, observers record all birds seen or heard in Winnebago County on one day (24 hour period) in December. The final results are submitted on ebird.

This years CBC might be a little different than usual, just as 2020 has been different for everyone. The CBC dates are tentatively December 19 or 20. Due to new CBC guidelines, because of Covid-19, commitment to count and a count date have to be determined after November 15. Stay tuned for more information at the end of November. Follow Winnebago Audubon on [Facebook](#) or check on updates on <http://oshkoshbirdclub.blogspot.com/>.

Anyone may participate in the count. The amount of time that you wish to commit is up to you. You may watch your feeders/yard for an hour or all day. You may walk, bike, or boat a certain area. For the more dedicated birder, surveying one of 30 areas is also an option. Make plans with family or friends. Enjoy the outdoors. Be safe.

As a volunteer you will be required to record the number of each species seen or heard; time spent watching; distance travelled and document unusual species and numbers.

If you are interested in participating PLEASE contact Tom Ziebell for more information and to discuss the area you intend to cover to reduce duplication of birds counted: ctiebell@new.rr.com or 920-312-1976. 🐦

September Bird Count Results

September 13, 2020

Observers: Brad Bahls, Kelli Bahls, Margot Brand, Anita Carpenter*, Dave Clabault*, Dolly Clabault*, Shannon Foust, Bettie Harriman*, Holly Hoitink, Cathy Kaspar*, Rachel Krubsack*, Crystal McGrath, Steve Mullen, Connie Phelps, James Rudolph, Joy Schwarz*, Char Ziebell*, Tom Ziebell (*Feeder/yard watchers).

Field Parties: 7

Sky: AM: Cloudy, PM: Mostly cloudy becoming fair.

Wind: AM: W 9-14 mph. PM: NW 6-12 mph.

Temperature:

+55 to +70 F.

Hours:

05:00 to 20:00

Total Party Hours:

94.5 (10.5 car,
25.5 foot,
2.0 owling,
56.5 feeder/yard)

Total Party Miles:

154.5 (133.0 car,
21.0 foot, 0.5
owling)

Total Individuals:

8,531

Total Species:

117



Meet our Board Member: Kelli Bahls

I contacted Winnebago Audubon in early 2016 in the hopes of attending a board meeting as part of a college course assignment. After sitting through that first meeting, I immediately found myself wanting to learn more. I expressed interest in attending more meetings. When I joined the board of directors in 2017, I developed a serious passion for birding. I worked to improve my identification skills through the use of eBird, field guides, and online birding groups. Refining these skills allowed me to contribute observations to WI Breeding Bird Atlas II, lead bird walks at Oshkosh BirdFest, and coordinate surveying efforts at Bohn Farms Habitat Restoration Area. As a board member of Winnebago Audubon, the most rewarding part of my role is using my experience to help introduce others to the wonders of the natural world. 🐦

Winnebago Audubon Society
*extends a sincere **thank you** for your support which allows us to continue to provide positive experiences in nature for our community.*

Grant Beckfield

Mary Slavik

Arlene Prickett

Ted & Marilyn Wojahn

From the Quiz Master:

I'm a five-inch-long, heavily-streaked, winter-visiting brown bird with faint yellow wing bars. I'm often seen in flocks. I have a rhyming scientific name. Whoooo am I?

(Look closely to find the answer in this newsletter.)

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facebook 



Song of the Swan

A November cold front is passing through with steadily blowing northwest winds. The chilled air is refreshing and invigorating. Leaves dance along the trail. The sky is the beautiful vivid blue of winter dotted with fluffy white clouds. I love these days.

Then I hear the distant soft sounds: coo-coo-coo. I stop immediately and look up to scan the sky. I locate the birds and watch their approach. On steady wingbeats, the V-shaped flock quickly arrives and passes overhead. My heart races for this is one of my favorite sights—migrating tundra swans. Silhouetted against the blue sky, these snowy white birds with the long necks and no black on their wings are stunning in the sunlight. Their soft cooing soothes my soul.

As quickly as the swans appear, they disappear heading east-southeast. I thank them for this special moment. I wish them a safe journey.

And what a journey it is! As they migrate over Wisconsin in November, they are escaping winter's onset to spend warmer days in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay area. They still have hundreds of miles to fly. When spring arrives, they reverse course and begin the long return trip to their nesting grounds in the arctic tundra of northern Canada and Alaska.

From late March into April, they pass through Wisconsin, hopscotching along the route following the retreating snow and ice line. They are heading mostly west. After another 200 miles or so, the swans swing north bound for the tundra. Last spring, good-sized flocks lingered in our area until something told them it was time to move on. When they layover, it's a special treat for us. Some years, if migration conditions are ideal, they may just keep right on flying, declining to pay us an extended visit.

The tundra swan, *Cygnus columbianus*, was originally called the whistling swan. Its scientific name, *columbianus*, has an interesting history. The swan was first noted by

Lewis and Clark along the Columbia River on their historic Voyage of Discovery. The likened the swan's call to whistling and named the bird the whistling swan. That name persisted until the 1980's when it was changed to reflect the swans' tundra nesting area.

The masthead of this newsletter, *The Lake Flyer*, has a stylized silhouette of a tundra swan. It was chosen to recognize that the Lake Winnebago area is a special and important stopover in the migration of these beautiful, graceful birds.

Being able to witness migrating tundra swans twice a year is truly a gift. Their migration corridor is fairly narrow, perhaps a hundred miles wide, and we live in the heart of it.

Keep your eyes on the sky and always listen to what is happening around you. Often you will hear the swans before you see them. Passing cold fronts and favorable winds escort them on their way east. I hope you all have the pleasure of hearing and seeing these spectacular birds and that it touches your soul like it does mine. 🦢



Tundra Swans.

Photo: Jerry Black/Audubon Photography Awards

Project FeederWatch

No Feeder? No Problem!

Keep track of your winter birds and contribute to science

The need to stick close to home because of COVID-19 has fueled a tremendous surge in birdwatching. Whether you're new to the hobby or have been watching birds for decades, [Project FeederWatch](#) will keep you going through the winter months. You don't even need a feeder to participate in this long-running bird-counting program. FeederWatch collects your observations online, puts them to work for science, and gives you tools to learn more about the birds in your own neighborhood. FeederWatch reports are expanding the long-term database used to detect shifts in the numbers and distributions of birds in the United States and Canada.

The 2020-21 season begins Saturday, November 14.

"Typically participants do watch birds at feeders," says FeederWatch leader Emma Greig. "But it's OK if you don't have one. Just choose a defined area where you can easily monitor birds. There may be a pond, or maybe you've deliberately planted shrubs to attract birds. Whatever you have done to create a space for birds is appropriate for FeederWatching. Feeders or natural areas at schools and nature centers work, too!"

FeederWatch participants make periodic two-day counts from November through early April. You can spend as much or as little time as you like collecting data. Even counting birds once or twice all winter has value.

To learn more and join tens of thousands of other FeederWatch participants, sign up online at [FeederWatch.org](#). The participation fee is \$18 in the US. 🦢

Bluebirds at Utica Golf Club 2020

By Dave Misterek, Trail Monitor

My wife, Christine, and I are glad to report on another year of successful bluebird monitoring at Utica Golf Course. With the virus going around, we are happy to be able to get out into fresh air and enjoy the open spaces of our favorite golf course. For those of you who are not familiar with this effort, a brief background summary is in order. This bluebird trail is sponsored by Winnebago Audubon and the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW). Following guidelines of BRAW, Christine and I monitor the trail weekly and report the results to BRAW annually when nesting is complete. We initiated this trail several years ago at Utica Golf Club with the approval of the golf club owner, Greg Johnson. I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation for the support that is given by Greg, his wife and his staff in providing a safe environment for the bluebird houses at this location. We have found Utica Golf Club to be a great option to attract bluebirds and other native cavity nesting songbirds who depend on bird houses for safe nesting sites. Without the assistance of native bird enthusiasts who install and monitor bluebird houses on appropriate habitat, these beautiful birds would be dependent on natural tree cavities for nest sites. Unfortunately, natural cavities are declining due to changing land uses and deadly competition from aggressive non-native birds such as starlings and house sparrows (English sparrows). The semi-open grass habitat found at golf courses provides ample volumes of insect larva and insects for food and is a good example of that preferred by bluebirds.

This year we were able to increase the number of bird houses at Utica from 32 to 38. Three additional houses are located in our yard and 2 more at my daughter Jennifer and her husband, Mark's property. This bluebird trail may also be called a bluebird/tree swallow trail because of the large number of tree swallows that are found in eastern Wisconsin and the favorable birdhouse nest sites provided for them on our trail. The competition between bluebirds and tree swallows for nest sites is a friendly one as the two species do not harm one another and are both beautiful song birds that are important members of our environment. This year we have continued with the experiment of placing some birdhouses in pairs 20 feet apart to see if bluebirds and tree swallows will nest close to each other. If they do, it may increase the total production of both species. In our continuing experiment we have installed 13 pairs of bluebird houses and found that several pairs of houses did produce successful bluebird and tree swallow nests at the same time. Evidently, the male bluebirds will accept the presence of tree swallows in their nest territory even though they do not allow other bluebirds to nest within their territory. Next year, we intend to continue our experiment with paired bird houses to further explore this alternative.

This year we again enjoyed watching and recording the nesting success of these wonderful song birds. Even though the nesting season is now ended, the bluebirds are still very evident on the golf course as they continue their fall migration to southern states to spend the winter. We have kept record of the nesting activity and can happily report that our total results of the song bird nesting this year includes the production of 73 young bluebirds, and



144 young tree swallows. There are usually more tree swallow young produced simply because the population of tree swallows in Winnebago County is greater than that of bluebirds. The overall nesting success was greater this year than last year due to the greater number of bird houses and more favorable weather than we had in the previous spring. We are always glad to see the continued success of tree swallow nesting even though we place our emphasis on bluebirds. Tree swallows are beautiful native birds that have a tremendous positive impact by helping to keep a natural control on nuisance insect species such as mosquitos. They do not compete with bluebirds for food supplies and therefore do not seem to harm bluebird production. We reported this successful production to BRAW. They in turn accumulate this data from other bluebird monitors state wide and are able to announce at a later date a total production for the entire state. As a result, Wisconsin is always among the top producers of bluebirds in the U.S.

With predator guards installed on the birdhouse posts we are able to reduce most raccoon and other mammal predation. This year we noted almost no loss of bird eggs or young due to these predators. We do have a few houses that were initially occupied by house sparrows that are present at nearby farms. These non-native birds are a main avian predator of bluebirds and are known to kill adult and young bluebirds and tree swallows on their nests. Fortunately, we are able to control these predators by placing birdhouses far from farm buildings and through the use of VanErt sparrow traps placed in bird houses at any sign of house sparrow nesting. Another main avian predator of bluebirds is the starling. This non-native bird is always controlled through the use of the bluebird house entrance hole that is designed to be too small for starlings but the right size for bluebirds and tree swallows.

As a side note to those of you who may be interested in placing one or more bluebird houses in your back yard or other appropriate habitat, we strongly encourage you to do so to promote bluebirds and other cavity nesting native song birds. I advise you to follow guidelines provided by BRAW at www.braw.org. This guidance includes birdhouse plans, birdhouse placement guidance and monitoring recommendations. Please also consider joining BRAW to receive additional guidance in promoting this important songbird. So, for now, so long and good luck in your bluebird monitoring experience and we hope to report to you again next year. 🐦



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**PO Box 184
Oshkosh, WI 54903**

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Enclosed is my gift of:

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If you wish to renew or become a member at this time, please check a box below.

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2020

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2020 Siskin Symposium

By Kelli Bahls

In the flurry of fall migration, some of the most memorable sightings of the year can often be associated with our very own backyards.

It takes several months for all manner of bird species to reach their wintering grounds. Shorebirds are among the first to leave for warmer climes. When the majority of warblers and thrushes vacate Wisconsin's fields and forests, waterfowl arrive in search of open water on marshes and lakes.

At any point in time during the migration phenomenon, keen observers might locate vagrants – birds that have strayed far from their typical range – accompanying southbound flocks. Vagrants can be one-day wonders or long-term visitors at a particular location. As I write this article in late October, observers have reported a BRANT in Kewaunee Harbor and a MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD at Horicon Marsh. Both vagrants lingered at their respective locations for a few days before making a timely departure.

Sometimes it's hard to know when to chase vagrants or just stay home, particularly in these strange times. Yet the decision to stay home is not always a total loss for the avid birdwatcher, as there are often other marvels to observe close to home during fall migration. Making such observations can be as easy as looking out the window.

The first reports surfaced and circulated online for almost two weeks before I detected them at my feeders. It was as if someone decided to host a major convention in town without advertising or telling anyone. I stood at the window with my binoculars in hand, trying to make up my mind if it was just the wind blowing leaves across the ground. Upon closer inspection, I found more than twenty PINE SISKINS rummaging beneath my feeders for seed. These diminutive, heavily streaked finches sport a dash of yellow across both wings. They exhibit feisty behavior, jousting for feeder space amongst themselves while remaining amiable with the much larger HOUSE FINCHES.



Pine Siskins at the feeder. Photo by Kelli Bahls.

PINE SISKINS are considered an irruptive species and join the ranks of CEDAR WAXWINGS, BOHEMIAN WAXWINGS, and RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES. Diurnal and nocturnal raptors, such as SNOWY OWLS and NORTHERN GOSHAWKS, are also classified as irruptive. For observers, an irruption year indicates the potential for a significant influx of a given species within a given area. Not all species will demonstrate irruptive behavior during the same season. However, if cone-dependent species experience a good hatch year or the Canadian cone crop is poor, cone-dependent species may venture south in search of supportive habitat. This presents a wonderful opportunity for backyard birders to witness the dynamic changes in regional bird populations right from the comfort of their own homes and nearby natural areas.

There are rumors of an EVENING GROSBEAK irruption, but I'm not so sure that I'll see any this year. As long as the siskin symposium sticks around, I'm hoping to keep the feeders filled until long after Northeast Wisconsin receives its first blanket of snow. 🐦

Pine siskin, Siskin



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Winnebago Audubon Society, Inc.
PO Box 184, Oshkosh, WI 54903

OFFICERS

President: Janet Wissink, 920-216-1172
winnebagoaudubon@gmail.com
Vice President: Bettie Harriman
920-233-1973 / bettievh40@gmail.com
Secretary: Zaiga Freivalds
920-233-5914 / zaigam@charter.net
Treasurer: Mike Brandel
920-233-5914 / mbrandel49@gmail.com

DIRECTORS

Kelli Bahls
920-573-2121 / kabahls@outlook.com
Anita Carpenter, 920-233-6677
Dana Hartel
920-410-7659 / raptorssp2016@gmail.com
Evelyn Meuret
920-573-7828 / evelynmeuret57@att.net
Dave Moon
920-235-4429 / djmoon@northnet.net

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Our Mission:

Winnebago Audubon encourages people to enjoy and protect birds, other wildlife, and their habitats through recreation, education, conservation, and restoration of the natural environment.

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Word of the Day: Fiddlehead

The coiled young frond (leaf) of various ferns.

Welcome to Winnebago Audubon

You are invited to participate in activities of your local Winnebago Audubon chapter. It's a great way to meet like-minded people and to enjoy what nature has to offer. A special thank you to all those who are renewing again this year as well.

- Carson Evich
- Janice Martin
- Judith Mugerauer
- Fran Russell
- Rob Ryf
- Dennis Smith
- Joseph Yurek

If you are a new member of National or the Chapter and haven't seen your name here in the last couple of issues, please contact **Membership Chair** at winnebagoaudubon@gmail.com or 920-216-1172