

The Lake Flyer

Newsletter of Winnebago Audubon

Feb-Mar 2021

All programs and activities are open to the public.

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



Bohn Farms Habitat Restoration Area

Snowshoe or Hike at Bohn Farms Habitat Restoration Area

Sunday, February 14, at 1:00 p.m.

We invite you to join us Sunday, February 14 on a visit to the Bohn Farms Habitat Restoration Area. Located just west of Winneconne, this 80-acre public property is open to various wintertime recreational activities. The varied landscape includes an extensive prairie, marsh, and flooded woodlands. We will explore the terrain for mammal tracks, winter birds, and scenic views.

This area was acquired by the Wisconsin DNR in 2018. With the guidance of Stantec Consulting they hope to dramatically improve the quality of habitat at the site. To assist with measuring the effects of the restoration efforts, Winnebago Audubon volunteered to survey the site for birds and amphibians for five years.

Please bring your snowshoes or your winter hiking boots. Binoculars are recommended but not required. If there is limited snow cover, the terrain will be muddy. We will engage in mask-wearing and social distancing. Hope to see you there! Free and open to the public.

Directions from Oshkosh: Take Highway 45 north to Hwy 116 west through Winneconne. Turn right onto County Road D just outside Winneconne. Follow County Road D for approximately 7 miles. Turn right onto County Road B. Limited parking is available on the right side of the road adjacent to Welsch Rd. If this lot is full, please turn left on Welsch and park along the road where it is safe to do so. 🐦

Winter Birding at Jefferson Park & Heckrodt Wetland Reserve Saturday, March 6 at 9:00 a.m.

Join us on Saturday, March 6 as we return to two popular Menasha area hotspots to search for overwintering birds. We will start at Jefferson Park at 9:00 a.m. to look for eagles and waterfowl. Then we will check the feeder stations at Heckrodt Wetland Reserve for nuthatches, finches, and woodpeckers.

Please dress for the weather and bring your binoculars. We will engage in mask-wearing and social distancing. This outing is free and open to the public.

Directions to Jefferson Park: From Highway 41, take Highway 10 East/Highway 441. Take the Racine Street exit to the right and follow Racine Street south for approximately 1 mile. Turn left on Broad Street. Take a slight right onto Kargus Drive. We will gather along the riverwalk south of the park shelter. Additional parking can be found east of Jefferson Elementary School near the south end of Konemac Street.

Directions to Heckrodt Wetland Reserve from Jefferson Park: From Kargus Blvd, turn left onto 3rd Street. Turn right onto Konemac Street. Cross the railroad tracks and turn right on Hwy 114 (Plank Road). Continue approximately a half mile. The reserve will be on the right side. 🐦



Downy Woodpecker

Photos by Kelli Bahls.

From the Quiz Master:

I'm a winter-visiting sparrow. I have a reddish-brown crown, brown wings and a gray head and underparts. My dark central breast spot is my defining feature.

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

A New Year, New Adventures - Chapter Activities Return

Winnebago Audubon has made plans for some outdoor activities this year. We look forward to seeing all of you again! Check out the Calendar of Events below. More adventures may be added as we go. All activities are free and open to the public. Because of COVID-19, we will engage in mask-wearing and social distancing; only share binoculars within your family group. Please join us on our adventures in nature.



Calendar of Events

- Feb 12-15Great Backyard Bird Count
- Feb 14Snowshoe or Hike Bohn Farms
Habitat Restoration Area, Winneconne
(See page 1)
- Mar 6Winter Birding at Jefferson Park &
Heckrodt Nature Reserve, Menasha
(See page 1)
- Apr 17Midwest Crane Count
- May 1.....Oshkosh Bird Fest
- May 8 or 9May Bird Count
- May 26.....Frogs & Birds on Mascoutin Trail
- Summer? Picnic, Prairie Walk . . . Stay Tuned!
- Sep 4 or 11Monarch Tagging
- Sep 11 or 12 ..September Bird Count
- Nov 18.....Program: Sustainable and Environmentally
Friendly UWO Campus Grounds
- Dec 18 or 19 ..Christmas Bird Count

Great Backyard Bird Count Feb. 12-15, 2021

Connect to birds, to nature, and with each other

Each year people from around the world come together to watch, learn about, count, and celebrate birds. Join us, February 12-15, 2021.

We invite you to participate! For at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see. You can count from any location for as long as you wish!

How to Participate

Participating is easy, fun to do alone, or with others, and can be done anywhere you find birds.

Choose the easiest way for you to share your birds:

1. Identify birds with [Merlin Bird ID](#) app and add sightings to your list.
2. Use the [eBird Mobile](#) app.
3. Enter your bird list on the [eBird website](#) from your desktop/laptop.

All you need is a free Cornell Lab account to participate. This account is shared with Merlin, eBird, Project FeederWatch and other projects at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. If you already have an account please use the same username and password for submitting your bird list for the Great Backyard Bird Count.

We recommend observing birds for at least fifteen minutes.

It's That Easy!

Submit one or more lists over the four days of counting and you become a contributing citizen scientist. All eBird entries and saved Merlin IDs over the four days contribute

to the Great Backyard Bird Count.

During the count, you can explore what others are seeing in your area or around the world. Share your bird photos by entering the photo contest, or enjoy images pouring in from across the globe. You can even add photos and sounds to your checklist. [Read more.](#)

Your help is needed every year to make the GBBC successful!

Why Count Birds?

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document and understand the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

Scientists use information from the Great Backyard Bird Count, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the [Christmas Bird Count](#), [Project FeederWatch](#), and [eBird](#), to get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate far-reaching questions, like, How will the weather and climate change influence bird populations? How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years? 🐦

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Birds Canada and many international partners.



A “Rough” Start to the New Year

New Year’s Day would not be complete without the traditional New Year’s Day bird ride for January 1 marks the start of the yearly Wisconsin bird list.

The focus of this trip is to find winter visitors—those birds from the north that may or may not show up to spend winter with us. Common redpolls, pine siskins, tree sparrows, snowy owls, snow buntings, Lapland longspurs, rough-legged hawks and northern shrikes are on the radar.

The destination is west of Winneconne on County D to Borth and beyond. This area is open country of wetlands and grasslands dotted with trees, a habitat that may resemble the open expanse of the far north.

From a distance, a big black bird that initially appears to be a crow, is perched atop a tall tree. Upon drawing nearer, the silhouette isn’t right for a crow but rather the profile of a hawk. I’m thrilled because this rare velvety black bird is one of the sought-after winter visitors—a rough-legged hawk.

Rough-legged hawks are birds of open country. These 21” birds often perch on tree tops which is a great clue for identification. Rough-legs have smaller talons than other hawks of comparable size such as the 22” red-tailed hawks, therefore they can only grip smaller branches.

Once you identify the bird as a hawk, what are the field marks to look for to confirm your rough-legged hawk identification? One prominent feature is a fairly broad black belly band on a white front. Another clue is a broad, dark subterminal band on the tail. Less obvious is the smallish bill and a slightly hunched (not upright) posture when perched.

If the bird takes flight, look for broad, rounded wings and a short fanned tail. Rough-legs, *Buteo lagopus*, often soar as do other members of the buteo hawk family. Then the subterminal tail band should be visible as well as the white base of the tail. If you see the whitish underwings, a big, squarish black patch is conspicuously visible in the bend (wrist) of the leading edge of the wing. This is a bold



field mark. However, sometimes the underwings from the wrist to the body may also show black.

Considerable plumage variations exist among individuals. Brownish light-phase (morph) rough-legs are the most common with color grading from a dark belly band to a not-so-dark band. Sometimes the head appears darker brown compared to the whitish breast. The amount of black on the underwings may vary. An entirely black bird (dark morph), which I saw, is the rarest phase. When this bird took flight, the underwing pattern of black wing edges, white inner wings and black wrists was stunning against the black body.

Rough-legged hawks frequently hover while hunting for rodents which is another easy clue for identification. The more common red-tailed hawks do not hover. American kestrels also hover but they are much smaller birds with pointed wings.

Rough-legged hawks are always a treat to see. Some winters they may be fairly numerous while other winters they are scarce or absent.

This bird ride was successful with five rough-legged hawks seen with each one sporting a slightly different plumage. Overall it was a good hawk day with two bald eagles, two cooper’s hawks, three kestrels, three red-tailed hawks and five rough-legged hawks sighted. The only other winter visitors observed were several tree sparrows flushed from the roadside.

Venture into open country including farm fields. All perched or soaring hawks in winter should be given a second look. Do not assume they are all red-tails for it just might be one of our winter-visiting rough-legged hawks. Happy searching! 🦅



Left: Rough-legged Hawk (light morph). Photo: Joel Adams, Macauley Library. Above: Rough-legged Hawk (dark morph). Photo: Patricia and Richard Williams, Macauley Library.

A Robin Story



Personal Observations
by Dale Rezabek, Audubon Member

May 2020

I can recall during the late spring of 2018 when I noticed a robin in the grass beneath one of our backyard bird feeders. At first it did not seem unusual, we often see robins out on the lawn and under our birdfeeders looking for worms. But then I noticed that this robin was actually not looking for worms, he (could be a she, but for this story I will say he, since "he" was kind of small, so likely a male) was walking around the base of the feeder and eating small pieces of suet that had fallen down when our numerous woodpeckers (hairy, downy, and red-bellied) had eaten and pecked away at the suet. Well, I thought, that is novel, he has discovered a new source of food, how clever of him! Over the rest of that summer I began to see him more frequently walking around down there, picking up the old fallen suet in the grass.

Later that summer I started to notice more and more that there was this same robin (apparently) hanging around underneath the suet feeder while a woodpecker was eating the suet. As the pieces fell, the robin would dash about, eating the suet up as soon as it hit the ground. Still later, I noticed that when a woodpecker came to the suet feeder, the robin must have been waiting and watching, because he would swoop in from a nearby tree and start eating the falling suet pieces. It was as if he now learned how and when the suet would start showing up on the ground!

The next summer (2019), I saw the same thing happening. Here comes a woodpecker, and then there is that robin showing up again! But then I saw something new. I would see the robin standing underneath the suet feeder (when the woodpeckers were not around) and he would fly up and grab pieces of suet from the bottom of the suet holder! He was not very successful at first, but over the summer he would just get enough height by flapping

his wings, and over time he got better and better at it. By the end of the summer of 2019, I saw him getting his suet by any of three ways: eating pieces that had fallen to the ground from woodpeckers, eating suet pieces that were actively falling while the woodpecker was eating, and also when he flew up from the ground and grabbed some for himself!

So now here it is, May 2020, when I started writing this story. I felt compelled to write this down because once again, I am seeing this robin hanging around the suet feeder. And I am seeing several new behaviors! Mr. Robin is flying directly to the suet feeder, perching on the top, and eating the suet. He looks sort of awkward as if it is difficult for him to hang onto the wire and reach down with his beak. There is a lot of flapping going on, but sometimes he is successful in grabbing some suet. This awkwardness is because thrushes (such as the robin) are better at walking on flat ground or perching on branches, so trying to perch on a swinging wire suet feeder is a challenge. Woodpeckers can land on the feeder, on the side or hanging on the bottom, even upside down to feed, since they are used to climbing vertically up and down tree trunks, and they use their tail for stability. Woodpeckers can even take off while hanging upside down, twisting and flipping around as they fly off. But this robin was struggling. He does not have those tools or abilities, but with a lot of effort he has developed a way to eat at the suet feeder.

But wait, a new trick in 2020! I see this robin hanging on the side of the wire feeder, completely vertical, and flapping his wings frantically and constantly to maintain his position so he can balance sideways, sometimes from the bottom, upside down! I also saw him hovering over the suet feeder before he lands near the bottom of it, especially when the suet supply is low.

I started thinking, these behaviors seem to be evolving over a period of several years. Is this the same robin doing all these behaviors and all this learning? The average age of a robin according to (www.journeynorth.org) is about two years, with a common age of five to six years (if it survives past year one), and the longest known banded robin lived to be 13 years, 11 months. Since this is the third year of these observations, is this really just one robin (or is it several robins) doing these new behaviors and will this robin(s) teach other robins how to eat suet from a feeder? I wonder what new method this robin will come up with in 2021! Last year I also noticed that I am seeing more and more robins eating worms on the streets after rain events. That makes sense, since earthworms show up on sidewalks and streets in their search to find mates. Have the robins been doing this all along and I just never noticed, or is that another new behavior? This is fascinating, and in 2020 we have had so many more opportunities to make these observations while working at home. Let's see what we can find out in 2021! 🐦

Word of the Day:

Lichen

A plant forming a crust-like growth on rocks and trees consisting of a fungus in combination with a green or blue-green alga.

American Tree Sparrow, *Spizella arborea*



Taking on a Territory for the Christmas Bird Count

By Kelli Bahls

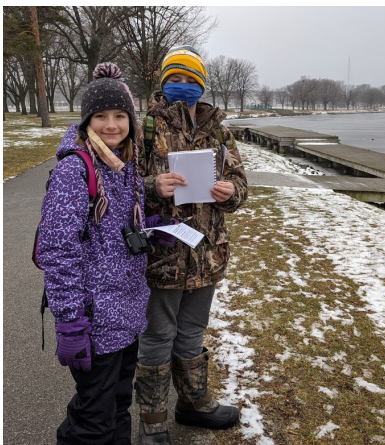
I walk up to the docks at the 24th Street boat launch and look across the ice-covered expanse of Lake Winnebago. Thick fog covers most of the lake. A small flock of CANADA GEESE stands on the ice not far from shore. I watch through my binoculars as a trio of MALLARDS soar clockwise and land beside the geese. More ducks descend from the sky in twos and threes. Within minutes there are more than twenty birds loafing on the ice. I complete my scan of the area and regroup at the truck with my dad. We compare notes, tally the numbers, and head to the next location.

The 24th Street boat launch was one of several locations within my Christmas Bird Count (CBC) territory. Count volunteers have the option of counting birds from their backyards or surveying a designated territory. Oshkosh's count area includes a mix of urban neighborhoods and parks, agricultural fields, and open water. Territories are divided by roadways and natural boundaries. Not all territories will include city parks or DNR managed land. Once a territory has been assigned, it's the volunteer's responsibility to do their research ahead of time and determine the best way to survey their territory.

The Oshkosh count has been taking place every year since 1964, and there are some volunteers who have surveyed the same territory for many years. Their well-traveled routes allow them to locate a number of species with minimal difficulty. They may have relatives, friends, or acquaintances within their territory that will allow them to survey locations that might otherwise be inaccessible.

It takes time to learn and explore a territory. After two years of covering the same territory, I still have a lot to learn. The CBC prompts me to survey locations that might be overlooked at other times of the year. Back roads, boat launches, and even gas stations provide an opportunity to walk around and listen for birds. HOUSE SPARROWS and AMERICAN CROWS by the nearby Kwik Trip? Odds are good. EUROPEAN STARLINGS on highway billboards within sight of the airport? Of course. AMERICAN KESTRELS on powerlines near dairy farms with hundreds of ROCK PIGEONS strutting on silos? Anything's possible.

The 2021 Oshkosh area CBC is eleven months away, but it's never too late to add "participate in a fun and well-established citizen science project" to your list of New Year resolutions. Every volunteer is a contributor, and every bird counts. 🐦



From the field:

This sister and brother along with their mother, joined Janet Wissink for the CBC count. This was their first count and they came dressed for the weather with notebooks in hand to keep the tally of birds they saw. It was a slow day, but counting 146 Canada geese in Menominee Park made their day! And they made mine. Thank you!

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	Michael Norkofski
Joe & Kim Bednarowski	Rommelfanger Family Fund of the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation
Mike Brandel	
Louise Coumbe	Mary Beth Petesch
Daryl & Rainy Davis	<i>In Memory of Jim Lemberger</i>
Linda DeNell	Laura Ramseier
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Dave & Christine Misterek	Jane Zuern
Marie Murphy	<i>In Memory of Frank Zuern</i>
Bob & Carol Niendorf	Bill Zimar & Sue Neitzel

Christmas Bird Count Results 12-19-2020

Observers: Brad Bahls, Kelli Bahls, Paul Bruce, Hajira Buser*, Rosie Buser*, Anita Carpenter, Jerry Carpenter*, Dave Clabault*, Dolly Clabault*, Christine Cross*, Scott Cross*, Shannon Foust, Dennis Geier*, Bettie Harriman, Holly Hoitink, Cathy Kaspar*, Liam Krubsack*, Rachel Krubsack*, Steve Mullen, John Nichols*, Pat Nichols*, Connie Phelps, James Rudolph, Joy Schwarz*, Jessica Sutton, Lillyana Sutton, Will Sutton, Janet Wissink, Todd Wolbers*, Char Ziebell*, Tom Ziebell (*Feeder/yard watchers).

Field Parties: 10

Location: Fifteen-mile diameter area, center at Hwy 21 & Leonard Point Rd., Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Sky: AM: Cloudy, fog/mist. PM: Cloudy, fog/mist.

Wind: AM: S 6-7 mph. PM: NW 3-7 mph.

Temperature: +33 to +35 °F.

Ground: 0-1 inch of snow.

Water: Lakes, rivers and streams frozen with a few open spots.

Hours: 04:45 to 18:00.

Total Party Hours: 112.0 (29.75 car, 12.5 foot, 3.75 owling, 66.0 feeder/yard)

Total Party Miles: 422.3 (377.0 car, 10.3 foot, 35.0 owling)



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If you are a member of National Audubon which automatically makes you a member of our local Chapter, NATL will appear with the expiration date. You will receive renewal notices from National or you may renew by using the form below.
If you are receiving a complimentary newsletter, COMP will appear with an expiration date. Please consider joining our Chapter or National (Dual) by using the application below.

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.

AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please choose one:

- \$20.00 — Local Winnebago Audubon Chapter Membership.** You receive the Winnebago Audubon Chapter newsletter.
- \$35.00 — Dual Membership (Local Winnebago Audubon Chapter AND National Audubon Membership)** You receive Winnebago Audubon Chapter newsletter and National Audubon magazine.

Make check payable to Winnebago Audubon.

Name: _____

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Chapter Code: **Z12**

Mail this form with payment to:
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PO Box 184, Oshkosh, WI 54903

*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.

- Dave Hempel
- Benjamin Joas
- Laura Ann Day
- Jody Loker
- Eugene Miller
- Marie Murphy
- Michael Norkofski
- Darlene O'Neill
- Barbara Sullivan

*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*