

# The Lake Flyer

## Winnebago Audubon Society, Inc.

Nov-Dec 2019

All programs and activities are open to the public

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Check our website for up-to-date information: [www.winaudubon.org](http://www.winaudubon.org)



### Flying Jewels in the Garden

**Thursday, November 21**

**6:30 pm Social; 7:00 pm Program**

Evergreen Retirement Community  
1130 N. Westfield St., Oshkosh—Lower Level

Mickey O'Connor, Avian Zookeeper at the Milwaukee County Zoo, will discuss Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and their natural history. She will relate her own experiences banding them, as well as provide information on how to attract these beautiful birds to your home environment.

Hundreds of kinds of hummingbirds nest in the American tropics, and more than a dozen in the western U.S., but east of the Great Plains there is only the Ruby-throat. There it is fairly common in summer in open woods and gardens. Hovering in front of a flower to sip nectar, it beats its wings more than 50 times per second. Impressive migrants despite their small size, some Ruby-throats may travel from Canada to Costa Rica.

Join us at 6:30 pm for refreshments and social time. The program will begin at 7:00 pm.

This program is free and open to the public. It is co-hosted by Winnebago Audubon and Wild Ones Fox Valley Area. 🐦

Photo by Paul Cannon/VIREO

### A 119-Year-Old Holiday Tradition: The Christmas Bird Count

**Saturday, December 21**

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the fledgling Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

Since the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) began over a century ago, it has relied on the dedication and commitment of volunteers. Please keep reading to learn more about the modern-day Christmas Bird Count and how you can participate.

The Oshkosh Christmas Bird Count has been conducted every year since 1964. This year our local count will take place on Saturday, December 21.

There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and all participants must make arrangements to participate in advance with the circle compiler within an established circle, but anyone can participate. Each count takes place in an established 15-mile diameter circle, and is organized by our circle compiler, Tom Ziebell, of Oshkosh Bird Club. There are 13 areas within the designated 15-mile diameter

*Continued on next page*

### From the Quiz Master:

I'm a big, 21-inch gray owl with no ear tufts but I have the most beautiful, chocolate brown eyes. I prefer thick woods along river bottoms. My 8 note song ends with "you-all". Whoooo am I?

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



## Passenger Pigeon Award Presented to One of Our Own

The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (WSO) recently presented the Bronze Passenger Pigeon Award to local naturalist and Winnebago Audubon Director, Anita Carpenter, at their annual convention. Anita was one of four recipients to receive the 2019 award.

The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology is a statewide organization devoted to promoting the enjoyment and conservation of birds. WSO presents Passenger Pigeon Awards to recognize individuals and organizations for outstanding achievements in advancing bird conservation, promoting the field of ornithology and contributing to the Society.

The Bronze Passenger Pigeon Award is presented to individuals who have made outstanding contributions in their local communities or in the state to promote the field of ornithology.

The plaque Anita received reads: For your outstanding contributions in your local community and across the state to promote the study and enjoyment of birds.

Anyone who has met this woman knows that her enthusiasm for birds and all critters is contagious. To take a walk in the woods or through a prairie with her is an eye-opener when it comes to discovering the tiniest insects and finding the birds flitting about in the tree tops. She readily shares her wealth of knowledge and curiosity about the natural world.

Anita has been a member of WSO for many years. Locally, she has been a Winnebago Audubon member since it was formed in 1981, serving as Vice-president, President and a Director, a position she currently holds.

She is author of both "Flight Feathers", a bimonthly column in WSO's *The Badger Birder*, and "Badger Tracks" column that has appeared in the Winnebago Audubon newsletter *The Lake Flyer* for 38 years. In addition, she authored numerous articles in the DNR's Natural Resources Magazine for many years.

Naturally, she is a member of the group that promoted that the City of Oshkosh become a Bird City and has served on the steering committee for Oshkosh Bird Fest for the past 9 years.

Currently, you will find her volunteering on the campus of UW Oshkosh, working with the grounds supervisor on natural landscaping and numerous ways to make the campus much more bird- and insect-friendly. 🐦

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### Christmas Bird Count Continued

circle, with volunteers counting every bird they see or hear all day (or for as long as they want). It's not just a species tally—all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day.

If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle, then you can stay at home and report the birds that visit your feeder on count day as long as you have made prior arrangements with Tom. The amount of time you wish to commit is up to you.

You will be required to:

- Record the number of each species seen or heard
- Record time spent watching (yard, walking, car, etc.)
- Record distance travelled (walking, car, etc.)
- Record names of all observers
- Document unusual species and numbers

For more information or to be assigned an area, contact our circle compiler, Tom Ziebell at [cziebell@new.rr.com](mailto:cziebell@new.rr.com) or 920-312-1976.

If you are a beginning birder, and are interested in participating with an experienced birdwatcher, please contact Janet Wissink at [winnebagoaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:winnebagoaudubon@gmail.com) or 920-216-1172.

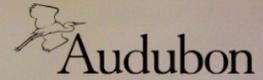
The CBC is a long-standing program of the National

Audubon Society, with over 100 years of community science involvement. It is an early-winter bird census, where thousands of volunteers across the U.S., Canada, and many countries in the Western Hemisphere go out over a 24-hour period on one calendar day to count birds.

Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action. The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The long-term perspective is vital for conservationists. It is used in developing strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

We hope you will consider joining us for this holiday tradition. Take a break from the hectic season and enjoy a day outside for the birds. 🐦





Two-thirds of North American birds are at risk of extinction from climate change

## Hot off the press: Audubon's new climate report

We are facing a bird emergency.

*Birds are telling us it's time to take action on climate change.*

Over the last five years, Audubon has used the latest climate models and more than 140 million bird records—including data collected from bird lovers like you—to assemble **Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink**, a new, ground-breaking report forecasting the survival of North American birds through the end of the century in extraordinary detail.

Our science shows that 65% of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change. Even common birds like the American Robin, Northern Flicker, and even our Baltimore Oriole will experience declining populations and radically different ranges in the near future.

But as the threat of climate change grows, so does Audubon's work.

This report not only illustrates how our warming planet will impact the birds we all love but also shows us that if we act, there is still time to create a brighter future for birds and people. And we already have a lot of the tools we need to reduce the effects of global warming.

Read the report to learn what birds have been telling us for years: it is time to act.

[Click here to read the report.](https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees)

<https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees>

[Click here to read the press release.](https://www.audubon.org/news/new-audubon-science-two-thirds-north-american-birds-risk-extinction-due-climate)

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### Monarch Tagging:

An enthusiast and adept group of children and adults netted, tagged and released 59 monarch butterflies at our event at the Davis-Foust family prairie on Sept. 7. We all had a wonderful time.



### Calendar of Events

- Nov 21..... Flying Jewels in the Garden
- Dec 21 ..... Christmas Bird Count

# Bluebirds at Utica 2019

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. 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 Society and the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW). It is composed of a total of 37 bluebird houses, a majority of which were installed at Utica Golf Club several years ago 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 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 song birds 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 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.



Our bluebird trail is composed of 32 bird houses at Utica Golf Club, 3 additional ones located in my yard and 2 more at my daughter Jennifer and her husband, Mark's property. Following guidelines of BRAW, we monitor and record the nesting activity of bluebirds and other song birds weekly and send the monitoring report to BRAW at the end of the nesting season. 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 bird house 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 bluebird houses 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 8 pairs of bluebird houses and found that a majority of each pair of houses did produce

successful bluebird and tree swallow nests at the same time. Evidently, the bluebird pairs will potentially 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 monitored the trail weekly and 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 records of the nesting activity and can happily report that the total results of the song bird nesting on this trail this year includes the production of 47 young bluebirds, and 133 young tree swallows. The bluebird success was significantly reduced this year similar to last year even though we cannot blame the reduction on a large spring snow storm as we saw last spring. In my opinion, the decrease in bluebird nesting this year may have been impacted by the decreased bluebird production last year or the earlier arrival of tree swallows as compared to that of bluebirds. 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.

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 bird house 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](http://www.braw.org). This guidance includes bird house plans, bird house placement guidance and monitoring recommendations. Please also consider joining BRAW to receive additional guidance in promoting this important song bird. So, for now, so long and good luck in your bluebird monitoring experience and we hope to report to you again next year. 🐦



## A Grasshopper Tale

Not all nature observations are as uplifting and delightful as watching charming chickadees or beautiful blazing star. Occasionally an observation presents the “yuck” factor but that doesn’t mean it is any less exciting or interesting. This is an essay about a grasshopper. Read on if you’re curious.

I was on my hands and knees weeding a prairie in late September when a 1-1/2 inch grasshopper caught my attention at eye level just in front of me. It was a chilly morning and the grasshopper was inactive, resting on a leaf. I noticed a white curly thing near the insect. I thought, “that’s odd”, and took a closer look.

My goodness! It’s a live worm moving and coming out the grasshopper’s abdomen. As I watched, it retreated back inside. The pearly white organism was the diameter of a fine silk thread. It partially emerged again, twisted and coiled as if sensing its environment. I had to know what I was watching.

I took a blade of grass, hoping this mystery critter would coil around it so I could get a closer look but I had no success. Then I wondered what would happen if I pulled on the worm. I clasped it and slowly and gently pulled and pulled and pulled. To my surprise, out popped a slender, 2-1/2 inch long round worm. I placed it on the palm of my hand where it immediately coiled up to half the size of a split pea.

I looked back at the grasshopper. Another white worm was extending from its abdomen. I removed that one. Then another appeared. I eventually extracted seven worms before the grasshopper jumped deeper into the prairie and disappeared. How did all these worms fit inside one grasshopper?

What did I just witness? These slender, threadlike, unsegmented round worms were nematodes. Thousands of nematode species exist in the world mostly as microscopic organisms in the soil. Some, like the hookworm, are parasitic which attach themselves to the intestinal walls of various hosts including man.



This particular nematode species with the genus *Mermis*, in the family Merimithidae, is found only in grasshoppers. It’s life cycle is interesting. I happened to chance upon the stage when immature nematodes leave the grasshopper’s abdomen to take up residence in the soil. They will spend the next 1-1/2 years in the soil, growing, maturing and mating. Triggered by spring rains in the second year, female nematodes leave the soil and climb up grass blades upon which they lay their microscopic eggs. As the grasshopper munches on grass, it ingests the eggs which then hatch inside the grasshopper and partially grow. The life cycle continues.

I have several unanswered questions. Where do the nematodes get their food while growing inside the grasshopper? Do they feed on the grasshopper? Does the presence of nematodes weaken the grasshopper or interfere with the grasshopper’s reproduction or eventually kill the unsuspecting host? “My” grasshopper seemed perfectly normal as it jumped away but I don’t know what, if anything, was happening inside its body.

This unexpected grasshopper encounter was over in ten minutes. The chances of witnessing something like this are infinitesimal. I was fortunate to have had my head in the prairie at the right time. I watched and learned something fascinating today. 🐦



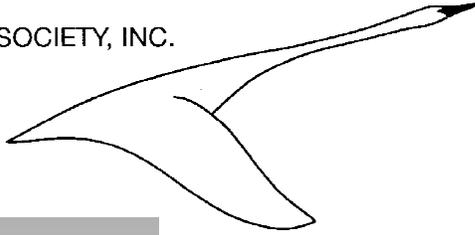
### **Incredible Insects:**

*On July 13 we looked for insects at Sheldon Nature Area in the prairies and in the pond. Using nets the kids swept the water and plants to see what insects they might catch. Then we took a closer look with magnifying glasses to identify them. Insects close-up are very interesting critters!*

*Tadpoles and crayfish were a big hit, too!*

Barred Owl, *Strix varia*

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**Winnebago Audubon Society Mission Statement:** Advance the mission of the National Audubon Society to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity through grassroots efforts of community outreach and advocacy.

**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.**

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**Word of the Day: Orthoptera**

Insect order to which grasshoppers and crickets belong.

*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.

Lisa Albrecht	Barbara Schrock
Alfred Ganther	Judi Strohmeier
Ann Hester	Roberta Stuemke
Joan Kaeding	Lori Welch
Gary Mitchell	Deborah Zeratsky
Barbara McPhee	Susan Zuber Sheffer

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