

COULEE *Birder*

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2012

Meetings

Monthly meetings are held in the Lower Level of the Ho Chunk Nation Headquarters at 724 Main Street, La Crosse and begin at 7:00 p.m. They are free and open to the public.

Wednesday, September 19

Trash to Treasure

When you think of trash, do you think of hiking trails and wildlife habitat? You should! The La Crosse County Landfill was awarded Green Tier Level 1 status by the DNR in 2011.

Join us as Hank Koch, P.E., Director and Nick Nichols, Sustainability Coordinator of La Crosse County Solid Waste Department explains how our solid waste is managed in an ecologically friendly way. A sign up for a tour of the landfill site will be offered on Saturday, September 22 for those who wish to experience the site first hand – bring your binoculars for wildlife viewing!

Wednesday, October 17

The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagle with Ty Smedes

Iowa author Ty Smedes will be speaking about the return of the bald eagle in Iowa through his fantastic photography. Ty's photos have been published by many major magazines and book publishers. He is a regular contributor to Iowa Natural Heritage Magazine, The Iowan Magazine, Our Iowa Magazine, and is a feature writer for the Iowa DNR's Iowa Outdoors magazine. His photos have appeared in

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President's report

by Dan Jackson

It is hard to believe that it is September. I am not sure what happened to the summer. It seems like it was only yesterday when I was getting excited about the spring migration and the start of the butterfly and dragonfly flight season and now the fall migration is already into its third month (yes, the fall migration really does start in July with the return of adult shorebirds) and the majority of the dragonfly and damselfly species are done flying for the year.



Dan Jackson

If you haven't had a chance to see some of the neotropical migrants that grace our area in the spring, summer and fall, you had better look soon. Many birds that come to our area to nest have already left or will leave very soon and warblers from up north are moving through right now. This is also a big year for shore birds in the Myrick Marsh. I was out in late August and found well over 100 individuals of at least 7 species. The low water level in the marsh has created perfect habitat for them. Unfortunately, they can be quite a ways out from the trail. However, if you have the time, a walk in the marsh is a great activity right now.

This year's early spring had a huge impact on my bug chasing. Butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies all emerged as much as 3 weeks early this year and that made it difficult to plan trips in search of these creatures. Butterfly enthusiasts from around the state reported early sighting records of dozens of species of butterflies.

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We welcome contributions of material for the newsletter. Please send suggestions for articles, news of events and other things birders need to know. Deadline for copy for the November-December newsletter is Nov. 1. Send information to: gskol@earthlink.net.

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The early spring had a huge effect on dragonflies and damselflies. In addition to record-early emergence of many species, it also brought many migrants into the state in larger numbers than normal. This was especially true for both Red and Black Saddlebag dragonflies in our area. In a normal year, I see a few Red Saddlebags. This year, I saw them almost every time I was out chasing dragonflies from the beginning of June until the middle of August.

This year was also a big year for rare dragonflies in Minnesota and Wisconsin. I was lucky to find Striped Saddlebags, a species that is considered a tropical species with a normal range from northern Argentina to southern Texas, in our area. This species does

occasionally wander north and this year I spotted 12 individuals in 2 Minnesota counties and 4 Wisconsin counties. This included the first records of this species for each state. Two other southern species were also found in Wisconsin for the first time this year and a couple of species that haven't been found in Wisconsin in many years were also seen this summer.

The end of summer is bittersweet. Although the dragonflies, damselflies, and butterflies will soon be gone for the year, the beginning of the Audubon program year is just around the corner. I hope to see you at our meetings this year. Sue Fletcher has been working hard to line up speakers for the new program year and it will be a great year!!

Feeders key for hummers because of drought

MADISON – (DNR News) The avian parade continues with hummingbirds, warblers and vireos the next species to begin their migration south, providing Wisconsin birders some great viewing opportunities and experts more insight into how the early spring and drought has affected Wisconsin's winged travelers.

"The next three weeks will be the peak of fall migration for land birds that migrate to central and south America," says Andy Paulios, a Department of Natural Resources biologist. "We're past peak for orioles, but birders should expect to see good numbers of hummingbirds, warblers, vireos, thrushes and other migrants in their local migration hotspots or even in their backyard if they have good natural cover."

What exactly will turn up and when on the landscape and at birdfeeders, however, is uncharted territory given the warm, early spring, record heat and the drought experienced in much of the state, says Kim Grveles, an avian biologist with DNR's Endangered Resources Bureau.

"It's hard to know exactly what we'll see with migrations this fall," Grveles says. "Warm weather definitely brought the short-distance (overwinter in southern U.S.) migrants up north earlier than usual and some long-distance



Hummingbirds are among the next wave of winged migrants to head south.

Ryan Brady Photo for DNR

migrants as well. But they do not seem to be leaving for wintering grounds sooner."

Paulios suspects that migration through drought-stricken areas of Wisconsin will be more stressful this year. "My guess is that there will be less food for insect eaters in dry years as many insects have moisture-dependent abundances...but birds are very adaptable and may be able to move or adjust along their routes."

"Homeowners can always help by providing a water source and by providing native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants that produce lots of bugs and fruit for birds to eat and shelter during migration," he says.

Gveles says that the hummingbirds she's seen in the Madison area are struggling to find food because the blossoms just aren't there because of the drought. "So the feeders become really important," she says. "There is less seed available because of things not flowering due to the drought for gold finches and even for migratory birds that depend on seeds, like towhees, finches and grosbeaks.

Every spring and fall, tens of millions of migrating birds sweep through Wisconsin and other Great Lakes states and stop at a variety of sites on their way to breeding grounds as far north as Greenland and the Arctic Ocean and wintering grounds as far south as Argentina's Tierra del Fuego. These stopover sites provide birds with critical food and shelter en route, a function described in "Respite for Migratory Birds," in the August 2011 Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.

They also provide bird watchers a unique opportunity.

"The beauty of migration is you don't have to go to the world's best birding place to see these beautiful birds," Paulios says. "On some days, these things will be in your backyard. So explore your local parks and natural areas."

Paulios says the general rule of thumb for finding fall migrants is to look

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Sierra, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Smithsonian, and other publications. He specializes in photos of landscapes, wildlife, and prairie wildflowers, and he also loves to photograph and market photos of Iowa people and cultural events. Ty has taught nature photography classes and is as an experienced Photo-Tour leader, having led nature photography tours to Yellowstone and Teton parks, as well as the

Eastern Sierras, during the fall season. He was also co-leader of a nature photography tour to Brazil in 1996 and has led nature photography tours to East Africa in 2005, 2008, and 2010, as well as Botswana in 2006. He is the author of two books, "Capturing Iowa's Seasons" and "The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagle". Books will be available for purchase after the program.

November 14, 2012

(Note date change because of the Thanksgiving holiday)

Eileen Kirsch – Wisconsin's Sandhill Cranes

Eileen is research wildlife biologist with USGS' Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center here. One of her key areas of work is the importance of the Upper Mississippi River forest corridor to neotropical migratory birds.

Experts cite bird strategies for dealing with heat

Audubon News

As temperatures bake much of the United States and the nationwide drought continues, crops wither and fish die. But they aren't the only ones suffering from the blazing summer. Birds are also trying to keep their cool. But they don't sweat like humans, or even pant like dogs; instead, they have a variety of unique adaptations to help beat the heat.

In a study conducted on marsh sparrows in 2011, scientists found that bill size correlates to outside temperatures. Marsh sparrows with larger bills live in warmer climates, for example. The study noted that the tropical toucan also possesses a large bill, and has the ability to increase or decrease blood flow to its beak to either promote or prevent heat loss.

Laura Erickson of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, however, points out that the size of a bird's bill isn't the only factor that keeps it cool.

"In the case of the raven, the further north you go the bigger their bills are," says Erickson. "But they need the bigger bill to chip into frozen carcasses in the winter." Instead, some birds rely on a variety of behavioral adaptations in

order to regulate their body temperatures.

Some birds, will open up their wings on a hot day, allowing air to circulate across their bodies and sweep away the excess heat.

"We've watched the adults move their bodies to shade the chicks," says Erickson. Great blue herons will also "droop" their wings in addition to opening them to protect their nestlings from the sun. But researchers can tell that the posture does more than just keep chicks cool, because the birds also do it when they're off the nest.

These are only a couple of behaviors that birds use. When it's hot, some species will also resort to gular fluttering. The bird will open its mouth and "flutter" its neck muscles, promoting heat loss (think of it as the avian version of panting). "If you think about a dog panting, their tongue isn't only allowing evaporation, but is losing a lot of body fluid. Birds are much more efficient about water and water loss," Erickson said.

Even so, birds still need to replenish fluids on a hot day. Installing a birdbath can provide feathered friends with a place to cool their heels in the summer, and get a drink.


Almost as important as water is shade. Temperatures can be far cooler under trees or bushes, and birds often seek out these microclimates. Since a bird's body temperature is much higher than that of humans—a golden crowned kinglet was once found to have a body temperature of 111 degrees Fahrenheit—it's doubly important for them to cool off in a hurry. Proteins that shuttle vital information to a bird's organs begin to break apart at temperatures that are only slightly higher.

Climate change is expected to make droughts more frequent and extreme temperatures more common. And some bird populations are already being affected by the consequences of global warming. A study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences reported that tree swallows laid their eggs up to nine days earlier because of warmer temperatures in the spring. Several populations of birds, most notably warblers, have also shifted their home ranges northward, and migration patterns are changing to accommodate the change in climate.

Together, these shifts indicate that birds are learning how to adapt to springs that feel like summers, and summers that feel like scorchers.

Coulee Region Audubon Society
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for shrubby, woody edges with morning sun. These places tend to have the right mix of fruit and bugs, especially if they get morning sun. Native bushes and trees with fruit like black cherry trees, viburnum or

dogwoods are a draw for many bird species.

Nationally and in Wisconsin, birdwatching is big and growing. Earlier this month, federal officials released [national results of their](#)

[recreation survey](#) and showed that 46.7 million Americans 16 and older watched birds in 2011; 33 million adults fished and 13.7 million hunted in 2011.

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