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From the Editor

Welcome to the fifth edition of the WBCI newsletter. This newsletter is a project of the Outreach Committee and it is our intention to use it to provide updates on WBCI related activities and bird conservation in general for the benefit of our partners and the public. We invite you to submit articles, photos, upcoming events, and suggestions on how we can improve future issues to **Andy Paulios** (Andy.Paulios@wisconsin.gov), Editor. For more information about WBCI, please visit our website at: <http://www.wisconsinbirds.org>



FAA Agrees to Study Lighting Requirements for Bird-Killing Towers

From the American Bird Conservancy Newsletter

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has announced plans to conduct a study that will examine whether steady-burning sidelights on tall communications towers, which attract birds and cause them to [collide with the towers](#) during night migration, can be safely eliminated without endangering air traffic. Unlike many waterfowl and birds of prey, most songbirds migrate during the night, with up to several billion birds having to navigate a landscape littered with as many as 100,000 lighted towers each spring and fall. American Bird Conservancy and its conservation partners have been working together with the communications industry in seeking this important study, which will help determine whether the safety of pilots can be maintained while also reducing the impact of lights on migrating birds.

Currently, the Federal Communications Commission is engaged in a [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) that is examining “the extent of any effect of communications towers on migratory birds.” The Notice seeks to examine a number of issues in connection with [avian-tower impacts](#), including tower lighting.

FAA guidelines on towers over 200 feet tall, currently require towers utilizing red or dual-type lighting systems to use steady-burning sidelights mounted at various intermediate levels depending on the height of the tower. These requirements date back more than three decades, and may no longer be applicable based on current lighting technology. It has also since been shown that blinking lights cause far fewer bird deaths. It is also noteworthy that traffic signals on major roads often have white strobes in addition to red lights to

notify drivers, indicating that many motor vehicle departments consider strobe lights to be more obvious to people than steady lights.

The FAA will study the difference to pilots of steady-burning lights compared to blinking lights, and of red lights compared to white lights, and whether adequate safety is maintained if side marker lights are extinguished or operated at a reduced flash rate. This study will begin in early 2009, with a report and recommendations expected to be made public by the end of the year.

“Should the FAA determine the use of side-mounted steady red lights can be eliminated for communications towers without harm to air safety, American Bird Conservancy will push for the FAA to amend their guidelines to reduce [avian fatalities](#) while still preserving air safety,” said Darin Schroeder, American Bird Conservancy’s Vice President of Conservation Advocacy.

White-winged Crossbills Invade Wisconsin!

submitted by Andy Paulios, WBCI Coordinator

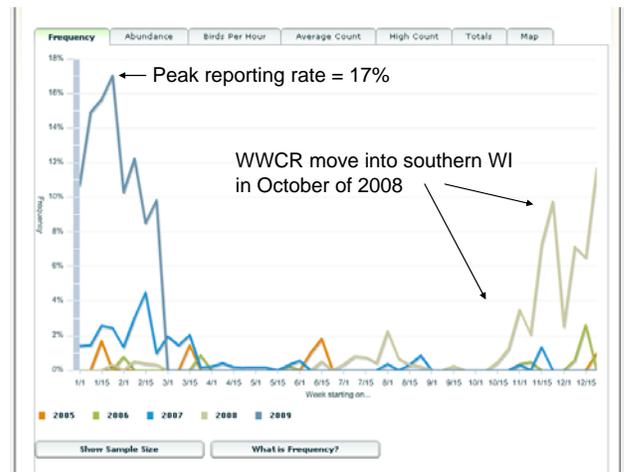
The winter of 2008-2009 has turned out to be an unprecedented one for winter finches throughout the state of Wisconsin. Birders are reporting huge numbers of goldfinches, repolls and siskins throughout the state. However; the biggest surprise has been the incredible numbers of White-winged Crossbills reported from nearly every county in Wisconsin.



Photo by Ryan Brady, WI-DNR

White-winged Crossbills first began showing up in late June in northern Wisconsin and continued in good numbers throughout the summer. Things really started picking up in Fall 2008 as the Hawk Ridge counters were reporting daily totals in excess of 500 to 1000 individuals on peak days!

Early results from the Christmas Bird Counts indicate that this might be the best year ever for this winter finch with individual count circles tallying more crossbills than the entire state count from many years! To date, eBird data (see below) shows at least a 3x increase in the reporting rate for this species statewide in the winter of 2008-2009.



Data from eBird Wisconsin website (March 1, 2009) – Peak reporting rate (17%) in January 2009.

What environmental factors contributed to this unprecedented irruption? Did the boreal forest produce a bumper crop of birds that ate themselves out of available cones? Or did our own bumper crop of spruce cones south of the tension zone in urban/suburban plantings simply hold more birds than usual? My suspicion is that this year’s irruption was the result of a huge crop of birds across the boreal forest as eBird data indicates the irruption has occurred across a wide swath of the northern half of the US. However; I also suspect that we are holding more birds than usual due to the large cone crops in Wisconsin in cemeteries, gardens, backyards and other ornamental plantings.

As I sit and write this from my Dane County bedroom window watching a half a dozen crossbills hop lazily along the ground, I can’t help but wonder if these birds are destined to wander north into areas of wilderness or if they will stay somewhere in Wisconsin and continue to take advantage of our accidental bounty.

Coordinator's Corner

submitted by Andy Paulios, WBCI Coordinator

It's late February and those of us who cut our teeth as underpaid bird monitoring technicians are getting anxious to hit the field and "count stuff". The recent arrival of robins, blackbirds and migrant waterfowl will only serve to exacerbate this annual obsession that so many of us in Wisconsin participate in and enjoy. WBCI has been busy over the past two years helping to feed this obsession through the creation of new bird monitoring programs and a coordinated bird monitoring plan for Wisconsin. The goal for the coordinated bird monitoring plan is two-fold: (1) fill in the gaps that exist within existing surveillance monitoring program to gain a better understand of the status and trends for all of Wisconsin's bird species (2) highlight the important short-term questions that need to be answered in order to improve our conservation delivery efforts.

WBCI's research and monitoring committee has identified a number of gaps within our existing surveillance monitoring programs. These include some of the rarer species not well monitored by the Federal BBS, nocturnal species, early spring breeders, and species that nest in habitats not bisected by roads like Boreal Chickadee or secretive marshbirds. To address this deficit WBCI has coordinated with local, state, and regional partners to establish three new monitoring programs in Wisconsin: (1) Western Great Lakes Owl Survey (2) Wisconsin Nightjar Survey (3) Federal Marshbird Monitoring Program. Each of these programs is being coordinated in conjunction with regional and federal partners to ensure that our work has a solid scientific foundation and that the programs will eventually be expandable to all portions of the species' range. For updates and overviews of these surveys see the story below on the new WBCI monitoring website.

Bird conservation efforts within WBCI and within the larger bird conservation community are becoming increasingly more strategic. This strategic focus puts a greater emphasis on the need for good bird science. The ornithological world is fortunate that we have an army of volunteers ready and willing to pitch in and "count for conservation". In 2008 alone the three surveys mentioned above relied upon well over 100 volunteers! What's even more amazing is that they were actively recruited simply through e-mail! As we move forward WBCI will continue to work towards a coordinated vision for bird monitoring where

important questions are addressed, quality data is collected, and the resulting information is actively used to improve conservation efforts for the species that we love. I encourage WBCI partners to contact myself or Ryan Brady (WBCI Monitoring Coordinator) to help figure out how your organization can contribute to this vision. In the meantime, enjoy the spring migration!

Bird Protection Fund 2008: A Big Success!

submitted by Andy Paulios, WBCI Coordinator

Last year WBCI entered into an agreement with the Natural Resources Foundation (NRF) to raise funds for important bird conservation projects. Year one was an unqualified success as NRF was able to raise over \$93,000 through a combination of grants and giving. Funding went to important projects identified by WBCI and the WI-DNR including: migratory bird stopover conservation, Important Bird Areas, Whooping Cranes, Osprey and Trumpeter Swan monitoring and subsequent de-listing efforts, the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail, and conservation efforts for Golden-winged Warblers in Columbia (see picture below)!

WBCI and NRF hope to build on this success in 2009 through a renewed set of high priority projects that will help WBCI partners to take action now so that we can enjoy birds always! Stay tuned to the WBCI website (www.wisconsinbirds.org), WBCIing listserve, and the Bird Protection Fund website (<http://www.wisconservation.org/index.php?page=bird-conservation-campaign-2>) for more information on how your organization can get involved in these important bird conservation endeavors.



Photo by Pro Aves: Golden-winged Warbler costume used in Columbian school group presentations

WBCI Partner Profile

contributed by Zach Wilson, North Lakeland Discovery Center

North Lakeland Discover Center: Discover a Jewel in the Northern Landscape!

North Lakeland Discovery Center is a community-based environmental learning center that promotes stewardship of the region's natural and cultural resources. The center is located in the heart of northern Wisconsin's tranquil Lakeland region and surrounded by the Northern Highland – American Legion State Forest, a playground of more than 223,000 acres containing numerous lakes, forests, streams and trails.

The Discovery Center is the home of the Discovery Center Bird Club (DCBC). The Club welcomes all birdwatchers, whatever one's specific interest or skill level – be it the beginner, expert, or casual observer. The Club goals are to meet, share, have fun, and improve birding skills; to draw attention to the richness of bird life in the Northwoods; and to participate in projects aimed at bird conservation, research and habitat improvement efforts.

Guests and prospective members are welcome to attend monthly meetings which are held the first Monday of the month at the Discovery Center. We begin by sharing sightings, stories and updates, announcing upcoming field trips, and discussing and planning future outings. The meetings also entail an informative presentation by volunteer members and guest speakers.

In addition to meetings, newsletters, and social gatherings, the Club enjoys several researched outings each week April – September and at least one outing per month October – March. Members and guest volunteers organize and lead outings, which may be held locally or statewide. The Discovery Center Bird Club is very active in bird conservation and is involved in a variety of citizen science projects. These include; shoreline habitat restoration project - focusing on plantings for birds, shoreline breeding bird surveys in conjunction with the Wisconsin DNR, breeding bird point count surveys, two annual Christmas Bird Count plots in Manitowish Waters and Minocqua, the Annual Midwest Crane Count survey in Iron and Vilas counties, Project Feeder Watch, Great Backyard Bird Count, bird banding projects, and they are working on the creation of a birding interpretive trail. The

highlight of the year is the planning and attending of the Annual Birding Festival. This year's dates are May 15-16th, held at the North Lakeland Discovery Center in Manitowish Waters, WI.

The North Lakeland Discovery Center is also a featured spot along the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail -- and with good reason! The Center offers a variety of self-guided trails ideal for bird walks, as well as a number of public programs related to birds. For more information, please contact the Discovery Center at discoverycenter.net or give them a call at 1-715-543-2085.



Photo by Ryan Brady (WI-DNR) of an unusually beautiful Pine Grosbeak from NE Minnesota.

All Bird Plan Species Profile: Golden-winged Warbler

submitted by Andy Paulios, WBCI Coordinator

Why are we concerned?

The Golden-winged Warbler (GWWA) is a species of continental priority as populations have significantly declined range wide and it is now threatened with extirpation from the eastern and north-eastern portions of its range. In addition, Golden-winged Warblers have apparently declined at accelerated rates even in the heart of their range (MN and WI) during the last decade. The Golden-winged Warbler is one of Wisconsin's highest priority birds for conservation as one quarter of the global population breeds in the central and northern portions of the state. No other songbird has a higher percentage of its range wide population breeding within our state borders.

Golden-wings are a conservation challenge for many reasons. (1) They are a long-distance migrant risking life and limb by migrating to central and northern South America each year and back. (2) They are an early-successional forest species, dependent on shrubby wetlands and large catastrophic disturbances that regenerate young, open, brushy forests. (3) They are currently under threat from hybridization with a closely related species, the Blue-winged Warbler, which is increasing across the range of Golden-winged Warblers. Recent genetic research has indicated that Golden-winged Warblers once thought to be pure from a genetic standpoint show much more genetic introgression with Blue-winged Warblers than was hypothesized, even in areas seemingly devoid of territorial Blue-winged Warblers.

Biology in Wisconsin

Golden-winged Warblers arrive each year in Wisconsin in early May and typically attempt a single brood during June and July. They leave Wisconsin by mid-September and arrive on wintering grounds from Belize southwards to Columbia in mid-late October.

Golden-winged Warbler territories consist of a mix of dense deciduous shrubs, scattered song trees, and grasses and forbs for nest building. They are commonly found in and around the edges of shrub-carr, alder thickets, aspen regeneration treatments, and other early seral deciduous forest sites. Recent research in Wisconsin suggests that densities are highest on wet shrub and more mesic shrub sites than

densities on drier soil sites. Golden-wings construct their nests out of grasses and forbs at the base of a sturdy forb (goldenrod) or shrub.

Conservation Action

Partners in Flight (PIF) and Region 3 of the USFWS have made the Golden-winged Warbler a focal species of continental priority that requires immediate action. Region 3 is currently coordinating a strategic planning effort that will guide regional conservation efforts including setting population and habitat objectives, conservation design, and outlining research and monitoring priorities.

Management for this species should focus on providing high stem densities of shrubs with scattered song perches (reserve trees) within forested landscapes that have high amounts of shrub wetlands or other early seral deciduous habitat types. Current and future research priorities include evaluating how GWWA vital rates are impacted by natural and anthropogenic management regimes like those listed above. In addition, local GWWA populations in Wisconsin are being genetically evaluated to determine whether pure populations exist within our state borders.

For further information

Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative All Bird Conservation Plan – Species Account

<http://wisconsinbirds.org/plan/species/gwwa.htm>

Golden-winged Warbler Abundance Models: Upper Mississippi Sciences Center:

http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/terrestrial/migratory_birds/species_of_concern.html



Golden-winged Warbler
© 2006 Dennis E. Malueg

Photo by Dennis E. Malueg

Announcements

WBCI Launches New Bird Monitoring Website

Contributed by Ryan Brady, Wisconsin DNR, WBCI Monitoring Coordinator

WBCI is excited to announce a new website devoted to select bird monitoring projects in Wisconsin. Housed within WDNR's Aquatic and Terrestrial Resource Inventory (ATRI), the Wisconsin Bird Monitoring home page can be reached at <http://wiatri.net/projects/birdroutes/index.htm>.

The website's primary focus is to serve as a clearinghouse for information on volunteer bird monitoring opportunities in Wisconsin. It allows budding citizen scientists to better understand the survey opportunities available in their local area and provides survey coordinators more efficient tools for recruiting and delivering information to them. Prospective volunteers can read background and history on each survey, view route maps and availability, sign up online to participate, read and download survey protocols and datasheets, and discover resources for becoming better citizen bird monitors.

The site's current focus is on three volunteer-based bird monitoring efforts initiated by WBCI in the past few years, including the Western Great Lakes Owl Survey, Wisconsin Nightjar Survey (Whip-poor-wills and nighthawks), and Wisconsin Marshbird Survey. However, visitors to the site will also find a wealth of information on other bird monitoring opportunities available in the state, such as the federal Breeding Bird Survey, Christmas Bird Counts, and surveys for Common Loons, Sandhill Cranes, Golden Eagles, and more.

With owl survey season knocking on our door, now is a great time to check out the new site. If you have questions, comments, or a citizen-based bird monitoring opportunity that you'd like to see added, contact Ryan Brady, WDNR Research Scientist, at 715.685.2933 or ryan.brady@wisconsin.gov.

State Natural Area Breeding Bird Survey data summary for 1990-2007 now available online

Contributed by R. Chris Welch, Wisconsin DNR

The WDNR Science Services bureau has recently posted summaries of the 1990-2007 State Natural Area (SNA) Breeding Bird Survey data on their web site at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/wildlife/snabbs/>. This summary will be of interest to SNA bird surveyors, and to other bird enthusiasts, professional and amateur.

The data summaries are presented in tabular format, and include information on the number of times a SNA has been surveyed and the average number of species and individuals seen on each route, the survey effort by year, a list of the number of years and areas a species has been observed on, and a list of species seen on SNAs that have been surveyed more than 5 years.

The summary was initiated by Dave Sample and Brian Dhuey, due to both declining participation in the survey and questions about how the SNA survey contributes to statewide bird monitoring needs. Paul Rasmussen conducted the data summary, and Chris Welch posted the information on the WDNR web site. Tim Fenske, Jessica Kitchell, Daniel Schneider and others entered the data into a computer database.



Eastern Screech Owls
red & gray phase
© 2007, Dennis E. Malueg

Photo by Dennis Malueg: Eastern Screech Owls

Black Tern Survey Opportunity

Sumner Matteson is happy to announce that David Shealer, Associate Professor of Biology from Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, will be coordinating a statewide survey of Black Terns in Wisconsin in 2009. This survey repeats the roadside transect surveys that occurred in the state during 1980-82 and 1995-97. Volunteers interested in participating should contact Professor Shealer. These surveys are made possible through the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid-In-Wildlife Restoration Act. His contact information is:

Telephone (563) 588-7678

Email: david.shealer@loras.edu

International Migratory Bird Day

submitted by Terry Rich, Partners in Flight Coordinator

2009 - The IMBD 2009 Theme, "Celebrating Birds in Culture," offers new and creative education opportunities. Over the next several months, Partners in Flight will be providing information about activities and ideas that you may incorporate into your programs, even if you aren't hosting a formal event. We send these as part of our monthly newsletter, but information is always up on the web as well (www.birdday.org). Let me know if you would like to be added to the mailing list or sign-up at <http://www.birdday.org/signup.php>.

New Land Manager Guide Available

submitted by Vicki Piaskowski, Milwaukee Zoological Society

The Birds Without Borders – Aves Sin Fronteras® staff is proud to announce the publication of our new manual for Wisconsin and eastern United States landowners: "Recommendations for Landowners: How to Manage Your Land to Help Birds (Wisconsin, Midwest and Eastern United States edition)." A PDF is available for free download on our Web site (www.zoosociety.org/wilandowner).

A grant from the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act covered the majority of printing costs. The print manual is being distributed free of charge at educational outreach talks. For a schedule of the talks, go to www.zoosociety.org and click on Events. If there are no talks scheduled near your location, please send your contact information to kariw@zoosociety.org to request a copy of the

manual. Once the talks are completed, we will mail you the manual in March 2009 if we have printed copies remaining.

New Resident Game Bird Plans

submitted by Terry Rich, Partners in Flight Coordinator

A number of conservation plans have been completed recently by game bird enthusiasts. These include:

Spruce Grouse Management Plan
<http://www.foolhen.org/>

Woodcock Conservation Plan
<http://www.timberdoodle.org/>

Western Quail Management Plan
<http://www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org/>

Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
<http://www.wildlifemanagementinstitute.org/>

A Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse (2007)
http://www.grousepartners.org/Conservation_Plan-2007.htm

Ruffed Grouse Conservation Plan
<http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/>

North American Wild Turkey Management Plan
<http://www.nwtf.org/NAWTMP/>

The Bird Education Alliance for Conservation will be mining these plans for additional bird conservation threats/issues that have not been identified by other plans to date. PIF will also be cross-walking the population estimates and objectives found in these plans with those that we have made to date for these species. Finally, we expect that this planning will be helpful in the conservation design phase within JVs.

Upcoming Events**Prairie Chicken Festival "Celebration of Grasslands" April 17-19, 2009**

Activities for all ages throughout Central Wisconsin! Featuring Greater Prairie-Chicken viewing, birding tours, children's crafts, wildlife talks and demonstrations, nature art and book sales, and Saturday's Wisconsin Literary Bash.

Reservations required for Greater Prairie-Chicken viewing and birding tours. A nominal wristband fee grants entry to all featured locations.

715/343-6215

www.prairiechickenfestival.org

Presented by: Golden Sands Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. and Wisconsin Center for the Book

Horicon Marsh Bird Festival – May 8-11, 2009

The annual Horicon Marsh Bird Festival is a great event with activities throughout the weekend. Activities include bird hikes, bird banding, educational programs, bird photography, nocturnal wildlife tours, managing bluebirds, birds of prey, a big sit, bird art show, boat tours and many more!

For more information including a program schedule and registration information see the Horicon Marsh Bird Club website at:
<http://www.horiconmarshbirdclub.com/welcome.cfm>

5th Annual North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Festival – May 15-16, 2009

The 5th Annual Bird Festival will feature a number of programs on birds, bird field trips, bird banding, canoe trips and many more! There will be a special trip on Friday May 15th focusing on nocturnal birds and a keynote talk on the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative's efforts to conserve birds on their breeding and wintering grounds.

For information and registration details see:
<http://www.discoverycenter.net/events.htm>

Chequamegon Bay Birding and Nature Festival – May 15-17, 2009

Come join us for a weekend of birding and nature activities on Wisconsin's south shore of Lake Superior at the peak of spring migration. See <http://www.birdandnaturefest.com/> for more information on the program and online registration. Last year 177 species of birds were seen and a great time was had by all!

WBCI Contact Info

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Newsletter Submission Info

Winter/Spring Issue

NOV 1 Call for submissions
JAN 1 Submission deadline
FEB 1 Newsletter release

Summer/Fall Issue

MAY 1 Call for submissions
JUL 1 Submission deadline
AUG 1 Newsletter release

Steering Committee Members

The Nature Conservancy

Aldo Leopold Foundation

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

WI Audubon Council

WI County Forests Association

WI Department of Natural Resources

WI Society for Ornithology

Natural Resources Consulting, Inc.