

21st Annual



NORTHWOODS BIRD & WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

May 9, 2026

FESTIVAL GUIDE

 **NORTH LAKELAND
DISCOVERY CENTER**

inspire - discover - connect



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ABOUT THE FESTIVAL

The 21st Annual Northwoods Bird & Wildlife Festival celebrates two decades of connecting people with the rich natural heritage of the Northwoods. This event offers a diverse array of activities, including guided hikes, birdwatching expeditions, bird-banding demonstrations, interactive workshops, and informative presentations by field experts. The festival coincides with World Migratory Bird Day, emphasizing the importance of migratory bird conservation.



WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Every Bird Counts
Your Observations Matter!

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Purchase raffle tickets at the registration table for your chance to win prizes like high quality bird houses, feeders, artwork, gift baskets, and much more! **Drawing will be held on Saturday at 2pm.** Must be present to win. All proceeds will go towards supporting the Discovery Center Bird Club.



FESTIVAL AGENDA

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2026

5:00-7:00am – Breakfast & Registration

Early bird gets the worm! Join us for breakfast & coffee after you check in at the front desk, and don't forget to purchase your raffle tickets! Breakfast will be available until the field trips depart.

Location: Discovery Hall Lodge



5:30-6:30am – Sunrise Warbler Walk



Greet the day the Northwoods way - on foot, in the quiet glow of sunrise, surrounded by birdsong. This early-morning hike invites you to experience the forest surrounding the Discovery Center when birds are most active. We'll move at an easy pace along woodland trails, listening and watching for warblers, thrushes, woodpeckers, and other Northwoods favorites while learning tips for identifying birds by sight and sound.

Location: NLDC Trails

6:00-11:00am – Bird Banding Demonstration

Drop in at the Bird Habitat Enclosure at any point during the morning to witness techniques for live bird banding with Bruce Bacon. See birds up close and learn about how banding data and research is important for survival, productivity, migration, and distribution of birds. You may even have an opportunity to release a bird once it's been banded!

Location: Otter Cabin/Bird Habitat Enclosure



FIELD TRIPS

Space is limited for certain field trips, so be sure to register online in advance. All field trips will be departing from NLDC no later than 7:00am, so please be on time! Transportation will not be delayed for late arrivals.

7:00-11:00am – Iron County Hotspots

Head deep into the wilds of Iron County to visit an amazing diversity of forest types from old growth hemlock hardwoods to tamarack keg swamps to early succession aspen stands. You'll be led on the hunt for gray jays, spruce grouse, northern goshawk, and more!



Leaders: Zach Wilson, Abby Vogt

Physical Activity: Easy, 1-2 miles over uneven terrain

Transportation: Carpool in NLDC Vehicle

7:00-11:00am - Fallison Trail (Boulder Junction)

This trail rolls through a mixed coniferous-deciduous forest, bogs on the southwest and northeast sides, and a hemlock glade on the south side. Watch for signs of beaver activity along the trail and along the shore, as well as loons, osprey and eagles that can be seen on or around Fallison Lake.

Leaders: Colleen Matula, Jenna Richardson

Physical Activity: Advanced, 2-3 miles over steep, uneven terrain

Transportation: Carpool/caravan in your own vehicle

7:00-11:00am – Bearskin Trail (Minocqua)

This former railroad corridor is a trail suitable for all ability levels with several scenic spots that traverse an area known for dense forests and a proliferation of lakes. This variety of habitat offers a chance to see an incredible diversity of woodland, semi-aquatic, and aquatic species of birds.



Leaders: Frank Schroyer, Don Anderson

Physical Activity: Easy, 1-2 miles over flat terrain

Transportation: Carpool in NLDC van

7:00-11:00am – Deadhorse Trail (Mercer)

The Deadhorse Trail is located on a special property dedicated to intensive management for ruffed grouse. Winding through dense forests, wetland areas, and along the shores of pristine lakes, it offers a chance to see a variety of woodland and wetland species. This field trip is sponsored by the Mercer Chamber of Commerce.

Leaders: Casey Baye, Lydia Dobberstein, Hannah Thorpe

Physical Activity: Intermediate, 2-3 miles over rolling terrain

Transportation: Carpool/caravan in your own vehicle

11:00-11:45am – Lunch

Sit down with your fellow birders and talk about your festival excursions over a well-earned lunch. Check out the raffle prizes and purchase tickets if you haven't already!

Location: Discovery Hall Lodge

12:00-1:00pm - Birding in the Birdiest Country in the World with John Bates



With its diverse landscapes, Colombia is home to a great number of endemic species and offers the greatest bird diversity in the world. More than 2000 bird species have been recorded here, holding almost 20% of the world's bird diversity. Come enjoy John Bates discuss many of the birds seen and heard on his nine-day trip through the three spines of the Andes in western Colombia, from elevations of 1,000 feet to 13,000 feet.

Location: Discovery Hall Lodge

1:15pm-2:00pm – Concurrent Sessions

The Underworld

Salamanders, centipedes, and worms, oh my! This hands-on program covers the importance of life under the Earth's surface and the animals and fungi that help fuel the circle of life in the Northwoods. Attendees will be guided into the woods where we'll search for living things under logs and leaf litter. Who knows what we might find!

Leader: Hannah Thorpe

Location: Back Patio

Owl Pellet Dissection

Ever wonder what owls really eat? In this hands-on workshop, we'll dive into the fascinating world of owl ecology by dissecting real owl pellets. Participants will carefully examine and identify bones and other remains to reconstruct an owl's meal and learn how these incredible nocturnal hunters fit into the Northwoods ecosystem.

Leader: Licia Johnson

Location: Forest Room

Snakes of the Great Lakes

Discover the secret lives of snakes found in the Great Lakes region in this engaging program that explores their habitats, behaviors, and unique adaptations. Learn how to identify common species and gain a new appreciation for these often-misunderstood reptiles.

Leader: Jenna Richardson

Location: Water Room

2:00pm – Grand Species Tally & Raffle Drawing

Gather back in the main lodge for the raffle drawing and to find out the total species number encountered during the festival!



LEADER BIOGRAPHIES

DON ANDERSON, NLDC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Don joined NLDC in June 2024, bringing over 20 years of education experience as both a teacher and principal. Originally from UP Michigan, Don has always had a deep connection to the outdoors and interest in waterfowl, drawn to their incredible migrations and peaceful moments they bring while out on the water.

BRUCE BACON, MASTER BIRD BANDER

Bruce worked 34 years for the Wisconsin DNR in Wildlife Management & Research. He first banded birds in 1976 for the DNR and is currently a Master Bander having banded over 130 species and 45,000 birds in Wisconsin.

JOHN BATES, AUTHOR & NATURALIST

John is the author of 10 books and a contributor to 7 others, all of which focus on the natural history of the Northwoods. He's worked as a naturalist in Wisconsin's Northwoods for 32 years, leading an array of trips and giving talks all designed to help people further understand the remarkable diversity and beauty of nature and our place within it.

CASEY BAYE, TFF PROPERTY MANAGER

Casey has been with the WDNR since September of 2024 as the property manager for the Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Waters Area. He graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a degree in Natural Resource Management. One of his favorite aspects of his job is educating people about our natural resources and is passionate about silent sports and birding.

LYDIA DOBBERSTEIN, NLDC AIS COORDINATOR

Lydia joined NLDC in August 2025 and holds a BS in Wildlife Ecology and Management from UW-Stevens Point. Through her variety of conservation experience and passion for travel, she has developed a strong interest in the interconnectedness of wildlife species within their unique communities.

LICIA JOHNSON, NLDC EDUCATION DIRECTOR & NATURALIST

Licia joined the NLDC team in 2007, and has since led countless hikes, canoe trips, snowshoe excursions, and wildlife expeditions. Licia graduated from Carroll College with a BS degree in Natural Resource Conservation and Geography. She has a passion for all flying creatures, especially bats!

COLLEEN MATULA, RETIRED FOREST ECOLOGIST

Colleen grew up Michigan's UP, which instilled a deep love for the Northwoods. After receiving a BS and MS in Natural Resources, she worked for the US Forest Service and the WDNR as a Forest Ecologist/Silviculturist. She spends much of her time outdoors making maple syrup in the spring, birding, botany and fishing in the summer, hunting in the fall, and skiing in the winter.

JENNA RICHARDSON, NLDC NATURALIST

Jenna joined the NLDC team in May of 2023, and first became interested in birding while living and working in Yellowstone National Park in 2015. Jenna received a BS in Communications from Ohio University. She loves looking in the woods and at the sky in search of birds and mammal species throughout the region.

HANNAH THORPE, NATURALIST & RESIDENTIAL COORDINATOR

Hannah has been at NLDC since April of 2022. She graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management, and her education and experience are rooted in Wisconsin. She has always been drawn to water and all the creatures that live in and around it, especially reptiles and amphibians.

FRANK SCHROYER, LAND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATE

Frank works for the Northwoods Land Trust and has been birding since 2017. He discovered his passion while working as a technician for the Milwaukee County Parks where was tasked with conducting point count surveys throughout the parks system and was hooked when he discovered how exciting it can be to find uncommon species, like the Northern Shrike.

ABBY VOGT, NLDC WOODS AND WATER DIRECTOR

Abby started at NLDC in 2022 as a Lake Technician and returned in the summer of 2025 as the Woods and Water Director. She graduated from the University of Montana with degrees in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science & Practice. She loves exploring the lakes that the Northwoods has to offer.

ZACH WILSON, FOREST ECOLOGIST

Zach works for the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. He has been a part of many projects researching snow geese, survey work on residential development on forest and aquatic ecosystems, golden-wing warbler atlas surveys, and has organized bird surveys for the Lac Du Flambeau tribe.

SPONSORS

Thank you to our Festival Sponsors!

These generous sponsorships allow us to offer unique program opportunities, bring in adjunct educators from across the state to present at the festival, and provide unforgettable learning opportunities for everyone.



The North Lakeland Discovery Center (NLDC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit environmental education and nature center, with a mission to enrich lives and inspire others to be stewards of the earth. We offer programs to all ages that facilitate connections among people, nature, and community. We are funded through memberships, donations, programs, and grants, so we greatly appreciate your participation!



The Discovery Center Bird Club is celebrating its 21st anniversary as a club, providing a welcoming experience to anyone interested in learning more about birds. They offer programs, field outings, and informational signage for anyone to enjoy along the NLDC trail system!



We are proud to say that for the last decade, the town of Manitowish Waters has been recognized as a High Flyer community through Bird City Wisconsin!



*Forgot your binoculars? Don't worry!
You can check out a pair from us to
use during the Festival at no charge.*



*Visit our website to view
our upcoming programs,
find information about our
clubs, become a member,
and much more!*

 **NORTH LAKELAND
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