

# BIRD SONGS

Newsletter of the North Lakeland  
Discovery Center Bird Club

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## **Officers**

Frank Schroyer, President  
Debbie Simek, Secretary  
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## **President's Message**

*by Frank Schroyer*

Summer is in full swing here in the Northwoods, and the birds know it. After the flurry of migration that accompanies May things are now beginning to settle as many species have either passed through or are currently nesting or rearing young of the year. Detection can be difficult, as many species quiet down significantly once they begin the process of bringing up the next generation. Plus, other animal species tend to make their presence known more loudly, like the American Toad in the evenings, and the unofficial state bird, the much-loved mosquito. Despite all this, the summer months offer a unique experience for us as we are fortunate to have a relatively high abundance of breeding resident species. Common Loon chicks are hatching, eaglets are exploring the branches around the nest, and many of our warblers are busy feeding young.

Spring migration seemed typical by all accounts here in the Northwoods. A relatively cool and dry start to May might have suppressed the timeline slightly, but once the winds shifted and the warm weather arrived, we had a good showing through the middle of the month. Notable sightings in the region this spring have included two new species for Vilas County: Orchard Oriole and Western Meadowlark. Orchard Oriole has been increasing its northern range rapidly as our climate warms, with occurrences regularly being documented where there is suitable habitat north of the tension zone. Western Meadowlark is likely more common in the state than we realize, but given it can be difficult to distinguish from the Eastern Meadowlark, it probably goes undetected more often than not. Interestingly, we can expect to begin seeing birds heading *back* southward soon. Shorebirds in particular, especially the males of some species, tends to breed in the arctic tundra and immediately head back to the southern U.S. or South America. I always seem to pick up a Yellowlegs or two heading back in July. It is a fun reminder that migration is happening nearly year-round.

A few reminders for club members:

1. Remember to pay your dues (\$10/person) this year.
2. Upcoming free monthly programs are happening at NLDC on July 6<sup>th</sup>, and September 14<sup>th</sup>. Our speaker on the 6<sup>th</sup>, Steve Betchkal, will lead a free birding hike at Powell Marsh on the 7<sup>th</sup> through NLDC – see their website for registration.
3. The Annual Meeting and Social is on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, in Boulder Junction. Details will be sent out ahead of the date. Hope to see you there!

Thanks to you all for supporting the Club!

Happy Birding

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**Species Profile: Mourning Warbler**  
**(*Geothlypis philadelphia*)**  
**A Skulking Gem of the Northern Forest**  
*By Mary Jenks*

Recently, I was fortunate to see and hear a Mourning Warbler two weeks in a row. I was also able to compare it to a Nashville Warbler which happened to be in the same vicinity on a recent bird club outing. They are not as brightly colored as other warblers and I think they look a lot like Connecticut Warblers. It is a member of the wood warbler family *Parulidae* and because of its secretive nature

is “one of the premier skulkers”. During the breeding season, it is recognized by its gray head and neck, olive-green back, yellow underparts and distinctive black throat patch that reminds one of mourning attire giving the bird its name. Females and young birds are duller in color and lack the prominent black throat patch. Their coloration provides excellent camouflage. And since they spend so much time in low, dense vegetation close to the ground, they are really hard to spot. Physically, Mourning Warblers measure 4-5 inches and have a wingspan of 7-8 inches.



*Mourning Warbler photo by Dave Franzen*

During the breeding season, their rich, musical series of whistles sound like “teedle-teedle, turtle-turtle” with the last pair of notes lower. Females build cup-shaped nests on or near the ground in dense cover. A typical clutch size averages 3-5 creamy white eggs, speckled with reddish brown and black. Incubation lasts 12 days and is done primarily by the females, but both parents contribute to raising the young who fledge after 7-9 days. Both parents will use the “broken wing” technique to lure predators away from the nest. They are insectivores and feed mainly on beetles, caterpillars, spiders and larvae found in forest vegetation. During migration and winter, they will also eat small fruits and berries. When foraging, they hop on the ground unlike similar warblers that walk, e.g., Connecticut Warbler.

Their breeding range extends across parts of boreal Canada, i.e. the eastern Yukon and British Columbia to Newfoundland, northeastern United States and north central United States extending south into the Appalachian Mountains. These birds prefer young forests, shrubby clearings and dense overgrowth caused by disturbances like fire, storms and logging which create openings in the forest habitat. Preferred habitats include dense thickets of blackberries and

briars and wet woodlands with thick undergrowth. Protecting forests with healthy understory vegetation is important for maintaining suitable breeding areas.



*Photo from eBird*

One of the remarkable aspects of Mourning Warblers is their long-distance migration. They are one of the latest spring migrants to arrive and one of the earliest to depart in fall. After breeding season ends, they travel to wintering grounds in Central America and northern South America. Even though the journey requires tremendous energy and exposes them to many hazards along the way, the IUCN lists them as a species of least concern with a global population of around 7 million. Although there has been a 45% decline in numbers since 1966, they are resilient and are extremely adaptable to changing habitats. However, climate change might shift their preferred habitats northward.

In case you were wondering, a group of Mourning Warblers are collectively known as a “wake” of warblers.

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## **DC Bird Club Thursday Outing ‘Recaps’**

*By Donna Roche*

Over the years, the announcement for each week’s Thursday Outings also contained a ‘Recap’ of what went on at the previous week’s outing. For a couple of the most recent years those Recaps were written by a few of the volunteer leaders. This has now ‘taken flight’ with MANY of the Recaps being written by others than myself. Hurrah!! Please take note and enjoy the Recaps written in this issue of BIRD SONGS by Donna, Liz, Carne, Sarah, John and Linda.... so far. I

hope more Reaps will be written by others who lead the outings. I think the Recaps articles are so much more interesting from many voices!

Donna



***Recap of May 7, 2026 outing to Powell Marsh Vista:*** We usually have a big crowd for the first outing of the season at Powell Marsh, but not this day. Ten participants braved 33 degrees and very overcast skies for 2 hours of birding. It was worth it! We experienced a variety of weather changes and watched as the skies tried to clear in the west while a sharp wind from the south brought a brief, but significant snow squall! This is May? Regardless and maybe because of the weather there was a good amount of bird activity. We saw several duck species and loons on the water and in the air. We found sparrows, wrens and warblers along the dike trail and other species around the parking area. All and all, it was a very productive first outing. Many of us then moved on to more outdoor activities with Helping Hands at the NLDC grounds. Frank kept our eBird list... thank you!! **31 Species**



***Recap of May 14, 2026 outing to Ashland:*** 6 DC birders had a terrific day trip to Ashland on a picture-perfect May day in northern Wisconsin! The birds were loving it too. Be sure to take a look at the Day Trip Report that Donna put together for your easy reading. Colleen and her friend Tom led us around Bayview Park, the ore dock area including walks along the paved paths, Kwik-Trip (a great spot to view the Peregrines!), the beach, Prentice Park. On our own, we had lunch at Prentice and a walk at the NGLVC! Wow, 45+ species with great views of warblers and so many Orioles!!

*Liz S. kept ALL our ebird lists... thank you!!* **45 species in 6 checklists**



***Recap of May 21<sup>st</sup> to North Gresham Lake area written by Liz S:*** “ Twelve people attended the May 21 outing to the North Creek Bike Trail area, a new location for us, on a chilly but sunny and calm morning. It was great to see Mary J., Marsha J., and Jean H. and her guest Pat Z., along with our Thursday morning stalwarts. With leaves not yet fully out, we could both see and hear resident birds, as well as new neotropical arrivals. It is always fun to see or hear the unexpected... like when a Barred Owl flew across the Jag Lake boat landing in full daylight, or when a Northern House Wren sang at the Upper Gresham Lake boat landing, without a house in sight! The group was delighted to watch a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at work on a white pine tree, while a tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbird was at the same tree, feeding on the leaking sap.

*Submitted by Elizabeth Stone.”*

***Thank you Liz for doing so much with this great outing! Species 34***



***Recap of May 28 outing to Little Turtle Flowage written by Carne A:*** *“Ten members and a local guest met at 7 a.m. in Manitowish for over an hour to bird off the Hwy 182 bridge and to check out the Bates/Burns side yard feeders before moving on to Little Turtle Flowage. It was a gorgeous, clear, blue sky morning with temps in the mid-40’s with just enough breeze to keep the black flies and mosquitoes at bay until temps rose to the 70’s by 10 a.m. We were grateful to have John Bates join the group for the morning. John’s vast knowledge increased our awareness of some of the current environmental concerns in our area and beyond. One of which explained the placement of 3 orange plastic fence ex-closures in the flowage to keep the Trumpeter Swans from foraging heavily on both the young shoots and mature kernels of wild rice. Since local swan populations across the Midwest have successfully rebounded, they are threatening both the ecology and traditional harvests of the Great Lakes tribes. Research is being conducted to determine the best methods of controlling the population. This is of interest because our club along with the DNR participated in the banding of cygnets during the initial phase of the reintroduction from 1989 to 1997. Back to birding! 23 species were identified in Manitowish and 33 at Little Turtle Flowage on the bluebird and a loop of the Osprey Trails. Highlights at LTF were 8 species of warblers, an Osprey hovering above the lake, a Trumpeter Swan pair, Sandhill Cranes and resting, perched Eastern Kingbird. However, no Black Terns and waterfowl were scarce. All in all, a very enjoyable outing!”*

*Thank you Carne for keeping the lists in addition to leading the outing and writing the Recap!*

***23 species at Hwy 51&47/182 plus 33 species at LTF***



**Recap of June 7 outing Vandercook Road area written by Sarah B.:**

*Sixteen birders gathered at the north end of Big Arbor Vitae Lake on a beautiful Thursday morning for a Discovery Center Bird Club outing. The first stop was at an area on Vandercook Road that we've birded several years now. A very vocal Gray Catbird greeted us as we parked our cars. A male Rubythroated Hummingbird remained perched at the top of a pine tree even though we all had our binoculars focused on the little guy. Was he telling us all that this was his spot, thank you very much? It's gotten quieter now that many birds are on the nest but we all saw Cedar Waxwings, American Redstarts, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and fleeting glances of a Mourning Warbler. The Mourning Warbler kept moving stealthily just a few feet further away as we moved a few feet closer to get a better look. Besides seeing flashes of his bright yellow body as he flew from one side of the path to the other, his incessant singing allowed us to really dissect the part song. Unfortunately, we never heard nor saw a Golden-winged Warbler, a target species for this location. We moved about a half mile down the Road to Trilby Lake and found a Tree Swallow nest in a birch snag, saw more Cedar Waxwing and some caught a glimpse of a Great Blue Heron flying overhead. Our last stop was at the creek crossing under Buckhorn Road. We added Common Grackle to our morning's checklist and we were happy to see that the Bald Eagle nest was again successful this year with a rather large eaglet sitting in the nest. **33 species** were recorded for the outing.*

Thanks so much for leading, keeping the eBird lists and writing up the recap, Sarah.



**Thank you, John R. for leading at Pipke Park.** Here is John's Recap of the outing: It was a lovely Blue-sky morning freshened by recent rainfall. Ten club members participated, listening for songs and calls and working to spot birds in lush vegetation. While Merlin reported a number of birds that no one heard, there were some good looks for all, including a Northern Yellow Warbler and, especially, a Baltimore Oriole in bright sun. Carne A. kept the list, and, for the most part, numerous dragonflies took care of the mosquitoes. It was very pleasant to be out in the beauty of the park! **24 Total Species**



**Recap of June 8, 2026 outing Willow Flowage area. Leader, Linda D. wrote the following:** "Eight of us braved the morning cold. The Willow Flowage was nice especially after the previous rainy day. It started out cold, but the sun soon came out. The birds seem to agree. They were singing from the start. We heard a good variety of birds. Lots of Ovenbirds, Red-eyed Vireos and Black-and-white Warblers. A highlight was a peek into a Tree Swallow nest box. There were approximately 3

*very young ones inside. Too young to easily count. On the trail we heard a Broad-winged Hawk calling. (repeatedly!) **Total of 27 Species***  
*Judy C. brought chocolate cookies to celebrate her birthday and anniversary with Jon..... Sixty, 60 years together!! Congratulations you two!"*

***That's IT for now!***

***Look for the June 25<sup>th</sup> 'Bike and Hike' outing and others from July, August and September in the next issue of the 2026 BIRD SONGS!***

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## **Up North Hammerheads and the Great Wisconsin Birdathon**

*By Sarah Besadny*

*Photos and Captions by Donna Roche*

If you've read our Birdathon re-caps from year's past you may think I'm a broken record but I have to say it again, the Birdathon is one of my favorite days of the year! It's a blast to be out birding with friends, hitting our favorite hotspots in the Northwoods and trying to spot as many species as we can in one day.

The Up North Hammerheads (our team's name reflecting our Club's logo, the Pileated Woodpecker) has been participating in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon since 2016. The Great Wisconsin Birdathon is an event organized by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and is a fund-raiser for bird protection programs. Since we bird on behalf of the Discovery Center Bird Club half of the funds we raise comes back to the Club to be used for educational and/or conservation projects.

We picked May 18<sup>th</sup> as our birdathon day this year. Our team number fluctuated between 8 and 13 people during the course of the day, but we're happy to have everyone, even if it's only for a few hours – more eyes and ears means more birds! The team met at the Tribal entrance to Powell Marsh at 6:00 a.m. The weather forecast was iffy for the 18<sup>th</sup>, but it looked like maybe the recent rain would clear out by then so we went ahead and we're so glad we did. It didn't rain, it wasn't too windy, it wasn't too hot or too cold, the bugs weren't too bad in most places, the leaves hadn't fully popped yet and Spring Migration was in full swing. Every bird seen is a treat but some really stood out. At Powell Tribal there are always quite a few birds right where we park and this year we heard Virginia Rail "kiddicking" across the road. While walking the dike down to the bridge at Chewelah Lake to hopefully see Barn Swallows (which we did), Frank's keen ears picked up LeConte's Sparrow and Mark's keen eyes spotted a Bobolink. By the time we left our first spot we had already tallied 36 species. Next we

stopped at Sherman Lake, an amazingly birdy spot for the small area that we cover there. Of the 27 species we tallied, 10 were additions to our day's checklist including Magnolia Warbler and Cape May Warbler, both species offering us great looks.



*The Early Birds*

We moved on to Powell Vista and just driving down Powell Road at about 30 mph we recorded 15 species. We parked at Powell Vista and walked the dikes. Although the water levels were a bit high we did see several species of shorebirds including Short-billed Dowitcher and a pair of Wilson's Phalarope. The Phalaropes were spotted in flight, heading our way, and to our luck they decided to land right in front of us! As a side note, we discussed that the female is the brighter than the male. Other than thinking that this is backwards from most bird species, I hadn't really thought about why. When I got home I read that incubation and brooding are done by the male alone. Interesting! Ok, back to the Birdathon. We stopped at the Manitowish Waters Airport hoping to pick up an Eastern Bluebird but that wasn't the case this year.



*The Biggest Flock*

Next we stopped at the park in Winchester and added a Northern Rough-winged Swallow, a species we picked up there last year too. On to Presque Isle Ponds. What a terrific birding spot this is – it’s flat, grassy, has open views, has water and a variety of vegetation surrounding the ponds. When a Green Heron flew overhead and landed in a tree we all chimed in with an enthusiastic “Green Heron!” Amazingly we ended up seeing three Green Herons flying together at one point. Here we also added Spotted Sandpiper, a pretty reliable spot for this species, and Lesser Yellowlegs. Stomachs were rumbling so we sat at North Trout Lake and enjoyed our picnic lunches. I was leading our small caravan and accidentally turned one road too soon before Cathedral Point. I didn’t realize it and was amazed to see so many fire numbers on what I thought was State land. This should have immediately been the give-away that I had made a wrong turn, but hey, we added Swainson’s Thrush, Blackburnian Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo to our list on that mistake! Cathedral Point was a fruitful spot as always. We were listening to a Red-bellied Woodpecker when another woodpecker started calling too. The calls were just slightly different – to my ears the Red-bellied was more “chortily” and the other a more steady “querr” call. It turned out the “querr” was coming from a Red-headed Woodpecker. Yay! Another species on the list that we don’t have on Birdathon Day very often. As we were leaving Cathedral Point, Frank spotted an adult Red-headed Woodpecker up on a pine tree. We all piled out of our cars and got nice looks at this handsome bird.

We crossed the road and went to Allequash hoping for Black Terns but didn't see any. We did pick up Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Black-throated Blue Warbler however. We drove down Vandercook Road from the north end. We were able to hear our first-of-the-day Eastern Towhee among a gazillion singing Chestnut-sided Warblers. As we made our way down the road I spotted something in a puddle just ahead of the car. It was a Tennessee Warbler, taking a little bath! Unfortunately we couldn't get everyone on the bird since it flushed before folks from the back of the caravan were able to get up front. We walked a logging road that we often bird along Vandercook hoping for Golden-winged Warbler. We heard one at this spot but couldn't see it. All of a sudden Frank yelled out "look up, look up!" so that we could all see a flock of 9 American White Pelicans flying in formation right over our heads! Before we left Vandercook we ended up seeing a Golden-winged Warbler and had really great looks at a Mourning Warbler. Our stop at the Fish Hatchery off of Hwy J didn't produce any new species for the day so we quickly headed over to Minocqua. While stopped at a stoplight we added European Starlings to our list. Once in town we saw Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, a fly-by Wood Duck, picked up our "hoped for" House Finch and Chimney Swifts, missed our "hoped for" House Sparrow and ended the day when Mark pointed out an Indigo Bunting on the ground right in someone's yard! What a way to end our day of birding.



*The Evening Birds*

After finalizing our checklist we ended up seeing 114 species for the day. This sets a new best for our team! What's really amazing is that of those 114 only four weren't seen when we were together as a group. Our "rule" for counting birds on our Birdathon Day is any bird counts if it's seen/heard by one of the team

members at some point during the day. Interestingly we didn't see Downy Woodpecker when we were all together but several of us saw one once we got home. The other three species picked up before or after our day of birding were American Woodcock, Northern Cardinal and Common Merganser. Another interesting fact is that our 100<sup>th</sup> species for the day was a Pileated Woodpecker, what a fitting bird for the Up North Hammerheads. Thank you, Team, for an incredible and enjoyable day of birding.

Many thanks to everyone who donated to the Up North Hammerheads. We raised \$2,800! Wow, that's fantastic. The Great Wisconsin Birdathon, as of the time I am writing this article, has raised \$130,717. The Birdathon is such a fun way to raise funds for the birds that bring us all so much joy.

\*The Up North Hammerheads team in 2026 consisted of Donna Roche, Frank Schroyer, Linda Dunn, Mark Westphal, Liz Stone and Dick Theile, John Randolph, Jon and Judy Cassady, Debby Wilson, Carne Andrews, Katie Foley and Sarah Besadny, captain.

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## **Life List Quarterly: Second Quarter 2026**

*by Sarah Besadny*

Our birding year is off to a terrific start with relatively good weather, outings to diverse habitats, outing participants all engaging to spot birds ... and having lots of fun. The season starts out with high numbers of species to add to our annual list. Then at this time of year it's nice to look for evidence of breeding among the birds that we're spotting. Then later in the season it will be looking for fledglings, migrants making their way south and potentially welcoming back some species that spend their winters here in the Northwoods.

So far this season, the Bird Club has reported all of the woodpecker species that we'd expect to see in Wisconsin except for the two rare species, American Three-toed and Black-backed. An American Three-toed Woodpecker hasn't been seen in the Northwoods since 1984. This is a species that breeds primarily in Canada. The Black-backed Woodpecker has been seen by the Club on only two occasions and neither were right here in the Northwoods. Black-backed Woodpeckers were reported in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest this past winter along the Pine River/Giant Pine Road area. These birds feed on beetle larvae in dead trees. I have seen quite a few dead Balsam and Spruce trees in our area so maybe this species will be more common in the area in the coming years? Folks who have birded in this area for a long time say that it wasn't at all uncommon to

see a Black-backed. Another group of birds that the Club has done a good job on in terms of spotting most of the “expected” species is Warblers. The Club didn’t report three species that are only seen here during migration: Bay-breasted, Orange-crowned and Blackpoll. The Club also hasn’t reported a Canada Warbler yet this season, but since this species breeds in the Northwoods there’s still an opportunity.

Our Annual Life List currently stands at 126 species.

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## **Photo Journal**

*Photos and Captions by Mark Westphal*



*Bluebirds have been hanging around my field for over a month without any sign of nesting behavior ... until June 26<sup>th</sup>. They are now visiting a nest box previously occupied by Tree Swallows. It appears they are attempting to build their nest on top of the old swallow nest. The Tree Swallows have apparently just fledged. It will be interesting to see if the Bluebirds can be successful with this late season tactic.*



*I have had several nice views of Great Blue Herons at the Wisconsin River landing on Apperson Road. I wonder if there is a rockery nearby?*

*Spring is the time for new life. This family of Wood Ducks was observed foraging on the Vista Pond at Powell Marsh.*



*A pair of Trumpeter Swans have nested at Powell Marsh for numerous years with varying degrees of success. This year they have hatched 5 very active cygnets. I look forward to following their progress this summer as they face the challenges of growing up in the wild.*



*During the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in June I observed what appeared to be breeding behavior at this Osprey platform. That would be unusually late for this pair who arrived the 1<sup>st</sup> week in April. Prior to this, I had not observed any young birds that I assumed were still too small to be seen in the nest. Is this pair just getting a late start? Was there a nest failure? Are there actually young birds already in the nest and the male is just having a high testosterone moment? It is a mystery that can only be solved by more observations and more patience.*



*Rock Doves seem to solicit mixed feelings. A friend of mine who lives on a farm and enjoys watching birds, referred to them as “flying rats” because of the mess they made. Regardless of what you think of them, they can be beautiful and have certainly adapted to the urban and rural landscapes that we humans have provided.*