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Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club

The Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club was founded to increase knowledge and appreciation of birds through education, research, preservation and conservation, and to provide public awareness of birds and their role in the environment - all of which remains our goal and purpose to this day.

Unless otherwise noted, events are held Retzer Nature Center,, located about 4 miles west of Waukesha, near the end of Madison Street.
514 W28167 Madison St, Waukesha, WI



On Saturday, October 7 THE BIG SIT! will once again be hosted by the Goss Bird Club at Retzer Nature Center. Sponsored by Birdwatcher's Digest, The Big Sit! is an annual fall event in which participants from around the world spend a 24-hour period counting as many species as they can see from a single location.

Some people have called it a "tailgate party for birders", and it truly is! Find a good spot for bird watching, set up your 17" diame-

The Story of Peter, Charles, Tom & Fred

A Moment from the Archives from Club Historian Jennifer Tyskiewicz

Continued from last spring, we once again hear from reminiscences of Peter G. Weber, Charles Sontag and Tom Soulen, with the story's conclusion coming in the next couple of months.

Gradually, our parents began to forget about the overly-lengthy "Nocturnal Swallow-Banding Caper," and we were able to join Bob Adams again for many additional bird-banding experiences.

The four of us helped band bluebirds by the dozens, as there were not many rural roads around Waukesha that didn't have Bob's specially-designed bluebird houses on them. (Photo 1).

Another favorite place for us to band with Bob was Beaver Dam Lake, in southern Waukesha County. It was always an adventure to band from a canoe! We banded phoebes and barn swallows under the bridges, and grebes, bitterns, black terns, gallinules, and



Photo 1: Peter Weber banding bluebirds on Road DT in Waukesha County. July 1958.

yellow-headed and red-winged blackbirds out in the marshy areas of the lake.

Charles was much too smart to go mucking around in the unappetizing water in the marsh. So, he stayed safely ensconced in Bob's canoe, while I (Peter), on the other hand, walked around in mud

up to my waist with insects crawling everywhere, especially on the muskrat houses where I sought refuge to dry out! I felt a unique closeness to nature by banding "my way!" (Photo 2, page 2).

Bob actually gave us considerable leeway as to where to take his numerous bird-banding traps. So, one day in late winter, just us boys went birding out in the Kettle Moraine. We came across a huge flock of white-winged crossbills that were feeding on old sunflower heads. We approached the birds cautiously at first, but they gave no indication of flying off, and we were soon able to gently capture them by hand as they fed upside-down.

We set up some of Bob's traps as well, and couldn't keep the crossbills out of them. It was a bird-banding bonanza to be sure!

(continued on page 2.....)

THE BIG SIT! A BIRDING TAILGATE!

ter circle, and sit. That's it! Participants are allowed to come and go from the circle - especially for the purpose of bring food back into the circle - but birds are only counted if they're seen from inside the circle.

Our Big Sit will take place on 10/7 at Retzer on the south-facing hill, south of the main building. Early risers will arrive before dawn to listen for owls and other nocturnal species such as American Woodcock. A flurry of activity will take place just as the sun rises as

robins, bluebirds and waxwings head out to scour for breakfast. Throughout the day birds will continue to fly past our circle, including hawks and vultures who take advantage of the late-day thermals.

And as much as The Big Sit! is about birds, a full day of birding provides ample time for socialization with birders in our group and people visiting the nature center.

For our first annual Big Sit we tallied 37 species, and last year we found 39. This year we'll try for 40!

Please join us this year for the fun!

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE...) THE STORY OF PETER, CHARLES, TOM & FRED

Another “Bob” adventure that we will never forget, was the time that he took us up to the Hammerstrom’s rustic house near Plainfield, WI, in the middle of prairie chicken territory. Most birding visitors to the Hammerstrom’s property “camped out” on the floor in the house, but Bob had worked on a tepee as a project with his Boy Scout troop, and wanted to try it out. The cold of the April night did not go unnoticed by us boys, as we envied the other birders who were lucky enough to be in the house. Then, we clambered into a cold, clammy blind at 3:52 AM in total darkness after a night of no sleep. Bob tried to convince us that it was “good for the soul!”

There had been considerable rain before we arrived, but the male prairie chickens were so particular about their display territories, that they proceeded to splatter and carry on in the middle of huge puddles instead of moving the whole show just several feet away from the water!

When Christmas Count would roll around, the four of us were always assigned to

Bob’s Vernon Marsh area. Of course, it had the most walking of any of the areas....and we were “unsuspecting suckers” the first time that we were asked to accompany him! So, every year, we slogged through the marsh from every direction, all the while trying to keep up with Bob, who moved like a roadrunner over the frozen territory. We usually kicked up the short-eared owls that wintered there, as well as rough-legged hawks, and sometimes even a wintering yellow-rumped warbler. I would always get hungry on Christmas Counts, so I carried along a good supply of raw cranberries to snack on, but not even Bob wanted to share them with me!

Editor’s note: an interesting follow-up to this Vernon Marsh story is that, in 1994, Peter Weber and his wife returned to Waukesha for a visit (they were living in New York State at the time), and Bob Adams took them on a hike through the Vernon Marsh. Peter

shared that they saw something there that they had only dreamed of seeing as boys in the 1950’s. Can you guess what it was? (The answer is found elsewhere in this newsletter!).

Photo 2: Charles “Chuck” Sontag sketching a black tern nesting, perched on canoe gunwales.



**WISCONSIN BREEDING BIRD ATLAS II
YEAR 3 UPDATE
WAUKESHA COUNTY**

What started as a five year project in 2015 is more than half over. Three years are in the books with two more to go. And while 60% of our time is passed, there are still plenty areas of the state yet to cover. But not in Waukesha County!

That’s right, we are proud to announce that Waukesha County is the first in the state to complete all of their survey blocks. Thank you to those who took ownership of blocks or simply volunteered their time when they could. We truly couldn’t have done it without your help. 100 volunteers submitted over 1,700 checklists to the atlas eBird portal, and as a result, we can

safely say that Waukesha County has been sufficiently covered and we have an accurate picture of the birds that breed in our area.

As is the hope when such projects begin, some rather interesting species were confirmed as breeding in our county. Red-shouldered Hawks and Louisiana Waterthrush were confirmed in Monches Woods. Hooded Warblers, Vesper Sparrows, and Red-headed Woodpeckers in the South Kettle Moraine area. Ruddy Ducks in Paradise Valley, Trumpeter Swans and Least Bitterns in Vernon Marsh, and Bald Eagles along the Fox River.

All of this evidence makes it clear that we have great birds in Waukesha County! And having confirmed their breeding status, we can use this information to support habitat conservation measures.

State and local land managers can now use this data to make decisions about what properties to preserve and how to manage the vegetation on those properties for the benefit of our birds. And while the information we have is great, more is better. With the knowledge we have, we can now focus our efforts in gaining more information about species that are documented as confirmed or probable.



Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II

So continue to submit your sightings for the atlas. And if you haven’t done so yet, it’s not too late to start! And if you want to help the atlas project where the need is greatest, volunteer for a new block. Surrounding counties such as Walworth and Jefferson still need coverage and could really use our help!

THE GOSS HAWKS TAKE THE BIRDATHON BY STORM

The Great Wisconsin Birdathon is a fund-raising event sponsored by the Natural Resources Foundation. The purpose of the birdathon is to raise money for the Bird Protection Fund which provides aide to various conservation projects throughout the state.

This year the Goss Bird Club formed a team called The Goss Hawks to join those around the state in helping save Wisconsin's birds. As an added benefit, 50% of the money we raised came back to our club so we can support local conservation in the Waukesha area.

Similar to a walk/run-a-thon, in the spirit of the birdathon, participants lead field trips or participate in other birding events. Our group chose to "Walk the Wauk" on the Ice Age Trail. As a group,

we covered 38+ miles of the Ice Age Trail as it meanders through Waukesha County, attempting to find as many bird species as possible.

Except for the portions that were on roads, we covered the every mile of the trail, from the southern unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest to Monches Woods in the north. There were 21 participants and coincidentally we also found 21 warblers, and while a number of them were definitely migrants, many were on their breeding territory such as Hooded, Cerulean, Black-throated Green Warblers, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Other highlights include Acadian Flycatchers, Henslow's Sparrows, Bobolink, Orchard Oriole, Pine Siskin, White-rumped Sandpiper, Broad-winged Hawk, and many more.



Most importantly though, was the fundraising. Having never held an even such as this, we didn't know what to expect, so we set a modest goal of \$500. But our membership really came through in getting donations, and we surpassed \$1,300! And since 50% of that comes back to the local community, we now have \$650 to contribute to local projects.

Way to go Goss Hawks!

SPENCE SPEAKS

BLOWN AWAY BIRDS: BIRDS & HURRICANES

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."

There is the possibility for bird watchers in the southern coast states to see many unique displaced bird species from the recent Harvey and Irma hurricanes. Many will see "life birds" that may have been difficult if not near impossible to find. But in these severe weather events, many birds caught in this maelstrom, are fighting for their survival, and in some areas, hundreds of birds may be found that have been in a "fall-out" where the storms have literally worn them out to the point of exhaustion. When you hear of a storm that is 160 miles wide, or covering the entire width of the state of Florida, it gives one pause to ponder, besides human life, how will the bird life survive?

Some people believe that birds evidence that they "know" storms are coming and either fly away or find safe haven, and that they may go into a feeding mode to stock up energy for what's coming. There are many birds that are first-year birds on their first

migratory trips.

Once the storm is in play, birds may seek shelter to find protection in thick bushes and brush. These "microhabitats" can provide significant reduction in wind, if able to survive the wind and rise of water. Birds have some adaptations for holding onto the branches so that their toes hold in strong winds. Other birds particularly for those that are out at sea, find flight in the bands of wind and hopefully may find themselves circulated over some piece of land to seek safety, rest, and food. There are birds that seek the "eye" of the storm where there is calm, again, awaiting some aspect of shelter.

There is also the nature of these winds that other birds are driven further out to sea, and may not be able to survive. With the migration season occurring, birds have been flying, passing, and gathering along the gulf coast and the eastern seaboard. The assorted Caribbean islands were supposed to provide places to migrate to for the winter, provide stop-overs for others, and offer food and rest, but may have been so ravaged that there is little vegetation or places for birds to find

food, many foraging areas on the ground have been washed away or are submerged, and the insect population has been depleted. Some birds may have sensed the storms or started early enough to make it to the safety of their final winter destinations.

For birders, this may be one of the oddest times to see rare or once-in-a-life-time species that typically are not in found in these affected areas. Many of these birds from the hurricanes have been displaced far inland from the shore and gulf. The "fall-out" results at times in hundreds of species being found on the ground, exhausted, resting, and trying to recoup. There isn't a lot we can do to mitigate these events. Over time, planting flowering, fruiting, and secure plants helps, but for now, some calm weather would be helpful for all... birds, wildlife, and people. Wisconsin looks pretty good right now. Our hearts and prayers go to the people of these areas, as well as the bird wildlife.



Birding Wisdom

***A bad day of
birding is better
than a great day
at work!***

Bird is the Word!

Birding Jargon Explained

Every in-group uses jargon to convey specific ideas, and birding is no different. Here we will explain some unique and oft-confused terms from the world of birding

Life Bird - The first time a birder sees a species in their life, it's called a life bird, or lifer.

"Yes! That Northern Goshawk was a lifer for me! I'd never seen one before today."

Doc Shot - A photo that's not good enough to publish, but good enough to document the species. *"It's a grainy sasquatch photo, but good enough for a doc shot!"*

Sasquatch Photo - A photo so grainy the subject can barely be made out.

"Boy that photo is blurry! Is that a sasquatch? No, it's Uncle Bob wearing too much camo."

Twitcher - Borrowed from the Brits, a birder who gets the twitch to chase any rare or vagrant bird within reason. *"Is there a rare bird that George doesn't run after? What a twitcher!"*

Dip - To attempt to see a rare or vagrant bird without success.

"How was your weekend? Well we went to see the Ivory Gull but we dipped."

Fallout - The combination of inclement and migration that causes a large number of birds to cease migrating and land. Birders sometimes use "fallout" to describe a large number of birds in migration, but technically a fallout requires the involvement of inclement weather.

"Holy cow! There have to be 500 warblers, 200 thrushes and 100 flycatchers in this single acre of woods! That storm must have caused a fallout."

BENJAMIN F. GOSS BIRD CLUB 2017-2018 SCHEDULE

September 17: Club Meeting

Presenter - Tom Prestby

"Return of the Piping Plover to Green Bay
A Conservation Success Story"

October 8: The Big Sit!

At Retzer Nature Center
Pre-dawn to Sunset

October 15: Club Meeting

Presenter - TBA

November 19: Club Meeting

Presenter - Shawn Graff

"The American Bird Conservancy"

December 16: Christmas Bird Count

Compilation Dinner - 5:00 PM at The Chancery

January 21: Club Meeting

Presenter - TBA

February 18: Club Meeting

Presenter - Diane Robinson

"Wildlife Management in Wisconsin"

March 18: Club Meeting

Presenter - Ellen Censky

"Bio Blitz - A 24-hour Nature Party!"

April 15: Club Meeting

Presenter - TBA

May 12: May Count

Compilation Dinner - 5:00 PM at The Chancery