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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

The Story of Peter, Charles, Tom & Fred

The Final Installment of "The Four Boys" by Historian Jennifer Tyskiewicz

All good things must come to an end.

And, so it was for the four boys from 1950's Waukesha, who had formed an enduring friendship with each other, and with the members of the B. F. Goss Bird Club who had been their mentors and helped to cultivate a growing passion for birds and birding in the four boys.

The boys grew up, graduated from high school, and went their separate ways to various colleges. But, for each of the four boys.....good things did not come to an end, as they all had very bright futures and productive careers ahead of them.

Peter G. Weber completed a doctorate in Behavioral Biology at Michigan State. Charles Sontag earned a doctorate in Physiology at UW-Milwaukee. Tom Soulen

completed a doctorate in Biochemistry at UW-Milwaukee. And Fred Alyea earned a doctorate in Meteorology at Colorado State.

In looking back on the importance of the B.F. Goss Bird Club on his life, Peter G. Weber says, "It is clear to me that, reflecting back, members of the Goss Bird Club influenced me personally and professionally quite strongly. Birds are an important part of my professional life and of my everyday personal life."

Jennifer with the "boys," at Woodland Dunes Nature Center, Two Rivers, WI, May, 2017.
Left to right: Fred Alyea, Peter G. Weber, Chuck Sontag.

Charles Sontag shares, "Many childhood memories are of my interest in birds and the role that the B.F. Goss Bird Club played in shaping that interest. The boys were welcomed with respect and friendship, with members serving as our role models and mentors."

Before his passing several years ago, Tom Soulen had written, "B.F. Goss Bird Club nourished my beginning interest in birds, which became a lifelong activity that greatly enriched my life."
(continued on page 2)



Wally with fellow Goss Club members Christine and Don Reel at the WSO 1999 banquet.

THANK YOU WALLY!

Wally Hahn has organized both Christmas Bird Counts and May Counts for the bird club since the early 2000s. Bird counts are a great way for birders to enjoy the birds as well as each others' company while contributing to citizen science. Wally's contributions as coordinator have long reaching implications as many of us have become avid birders as a result of these counts. Thank you to Wally for his service to the club and the birding community and to the birds!



1992 Club Anniversary Party: Wally in center. To Right Charlie Nelson and Bob Adams. To Right Tom Soulen and Chuck Sontag, featured in The Four Boys series.

(Four Boys.....continued from page 1)

All of us boys benefited from the help and influence of club members. Some years later, when I brought my wife back to Waukesha for a bird club field trip, (we had been married less than a month), they welcomed Marillyn graciously, showing her the genuine warmth of their birding community."

The moving of the boys to various parts of the country to begin their respective careers did not stop the birding, however! The four "boys" continued to meet up at their homes around the country whenever possible, to share their love of birding wherever they were located and wherever they could travel to.

The most recent get-together of the three remaining friends took place at Charles and Marilyn Sontag's home in Manitowoc, WI last May. Peter and his wife came from Colorado, and Fred and his wife came from Georgia. The Sontag's most graciously invited us (Jennifer and Michael Tyskiewicz) to come up and meet the guests!

We were thrilled and honored to partici-

pate in the weekend, which involved the "Bird Breakfast" at Woodland Dunes Nature Center in Two Rivers, WI, where Charles is a very active member. We enjoyed the chance to visit with these three remarkable men, who we felt we already knew through their reminiscences, and witnessed the bestowing of a very special and much-deserved honor "ceremony" for Charles Sontag. A sign at the lakefront now designates the Manitowoc Impoundment in his name for his

many years of daily monitoring and reporting of the birds seen in that area.

I hope that everyone enjoyed this series of articles as much as I enjoyed sharing the "boys" stories with you. I can't thank them enough for putting their memories and reminiscences on paper and submitting them to the Archives of the B.F. Goss Bird Club.

Jim Knickelbine presents Chuck Sontag with the signage designating the Manitowoc Lakefront Impoundment in Chuck's name. May, 2017.



THANKS JASONN!

Thanks to club member and former vice president Jasonn Weber, the club has \$125 to use for bird related projects!

Jasonn became aware of a neighbor who enjoyed building bird houses that were of solid construction and were functionally sound. He took the initiative to use the bird houses to generate donations for the bird club. The bird houses were made available to club members at a great price and all of the profits went to the club's budget for local bird related initiatives. And the local birds are loving the houses too! Many young birds have fledged as a result of Jasonn's thoughtfulness!

THANKS JASONN!



REPORT - THE BIG SIT! SETTING SEDINARY RECORDS

It's been quite a streak - three years in a row we have been blessed with exquisite weather for our Big Sit. And not coincidentally we have been blessed with great bird sightings as well!

Launched in the early 2000s by Bird Watcher's Digest, the Big Sit is held around the world on the second weekend in October each year. The Goss Bird Club has held a Big Sit at Retzer Nature Center each of the previous two years, and while the weather on Saturday caused a bit of a rain delay, we were able to make it three years in a row this Sunday, October 8.

Calm peaceful nights are a key factor in successful owling, and when Paul arrived at 4:15, he had perfect conditions. As a result he was able to hear an Eastern Screech Owl in the distance, a new species for our Big Sit! The screech and a few Great Horned Owls were good omens, as the great sightings continued throughout the day.

Paul and Spence,
two of our early risers!

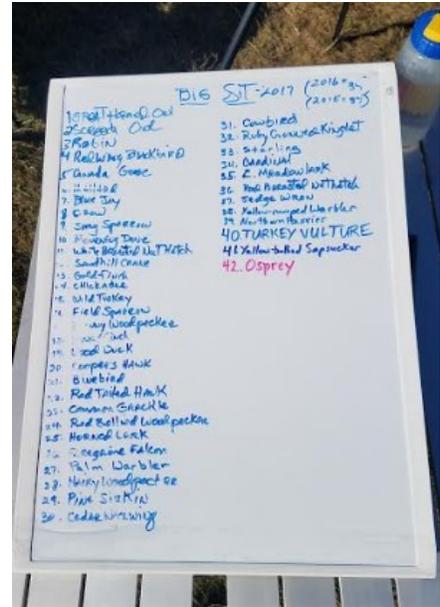


While the habitat at Retzer is not great for Horned Larks, we managed to locate one flying over our circle. A short time later, Ramona spotted a raptor darting out of the trees in hot pursuit of prey. The rest of us got our eyes on the bird, and just like that it was over the hill and out of sight. While it was a brief sighting, each of us got a solid impression of the bird, and we all agreed that the bird was a large falcon – a Peregrine!

Part of the Big Sit fun is attempting to find more birds than previous years, and this year our goal was 40 species. Our other two attempts in 2015 and 2016 we were able to find 37 and 39 species respectively. As the morning progressed, standard birds such as Field Sparrows, a Hairy Woodpecker and a lone Northern Cardinal helped increase our species total. To reach our goal, however, we would need some new additions to break records, and fortunately the luck we had in the morning would continue. Pine Siskins, Sedge Wrens, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, new additions to the historical count list, increased the day's species count into the high 30s so hopes were high.

As the sun continued to heat the day, the wind picked up, the raptors started soaring, and so did our hopes to surpass the 40-species mark. Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawks surveyed the landscape in decent numbers, and with a fly-by Northern Harrier, we tied our record of 39!

We discussed possible species that might be our fortieth.... Northern Flicker? White-crowned Sparrow? Turkey Vulture? Vultures were all but guaranteed to be soaring on warm, windy days like this, and just as we said its name a Turkey Vulture flew



The Big Sit Bird Board

directly over the nature center! WOO HOO! Number 40!

As it usually goes with birding, the afternoon was slow, but the weather was great, and it was fun picking through the soaring raptors trying to find a new bird. A search of the tree line looking for a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a success for the second year in a row, increasing the tally to 41. As the afternoon progressed, a few more birders joined the group. Just as we were resigning ourselves to leaving for the afternoon Paula spotted a large bird heading south. We all put our binocs up and saw the arcing wings of species number 42 - an Osprey!

With that, we called it a day. The Packers were definitely going to beat the Cowboys that afternoon, and we all wanted to witness it. Ending the count at 42 species leaves plenty of room to improve on our count next year.

Thanks to all the folks who showed up to the count circle, especially the early risers!

Birding Wisdom

"Birding is something we do for enjoyment. So, if you enjoy it, you're a good birder. If you enjoy it a lot, you're a great birder."

*-- Kenn Kaufman
(author of Kingbird Highway)*

CORRECTION

Apologies to Jennifer for not including the answer to the quiz question at the end of her article in September.

*The answer is
Sandhill Cranes*

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

ATLAS - A survey of an entire geographic area, covering the entire area evenly to obtain a complete picture of the status of breeding birds.

"The Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas gives a complete picture of the birds breed in our state."

STRINGER - A birder who reports an interesting bird, but never gives details of how, or where it was seen. "Joe reported an eider on the lake, but he never gives details or replies to my inquiries as to where he finds good birds. What a stringer!"

TRASH BIRD - A tongue-in-cheek term for a species that, while desirable, is so numerous that it jokingly becomes ignored throughout a birding excursion. "Wow! There are so many Great Egrets at Horicon! Everywhere I turn I see another big white thing. I never thought it would be a trash bird."

LISTER - A birder whose primary objective is to add species to their life list, year list, county liste, etc. "A Spotted Sandpiper in Oneida County? Tom's going to want to see that one. He's a huge county lister!"

UNIQUE BIRDS

SPENCE SPEAKS

For no particular reason, I was thinking about "unique" birds. Now there are lots of unique birds that I rarely if ever get to see... Lincoln's sparrow, Goss Hawk, black-backed woodpecker, etc.

But at this moment, I was thinking about the Great Tits around the lakefront, and the European Goldfinches not only around the lakefront, but starting to creep more and more into the inland areas.

These species were not from the Wisconsin or the Midwest area, but both appear to be invasive "releases" of birds either being brought here as exotic birds for singing or appearances, or as in the case of the Starlings, someone wanted to have the birds of Shakespeare here!

As noted during the winter time or Christmas bird counts, there are only a few of the annual species left. Can you blame them with the often wild winter weather we have... ice, snow, cold, wind... the reduction of food supplies. But, these "introduced" birds have been establishing a year-round presence in Wisconsin. So far, to the best of my knowledge, there haven't been any "Great Tits" seen in Waukesha County. This European cousin of the Black-capped Chickadee, has been spreading around the Sheboygan, and Port Washington areas. How birds branch out, what encourages them to seek a new area, is hard to say...competition, food supply, and reproduction options are there, but it seems possible that these birds could spread into our county area in the coming years.

As for the pretty colorful Eurasian Goldfinch, I've looked at them the easy way, going to the bird feeders by the bird seed store in Kenosha on Hwy 50. Again however, to the best of my knowing, they've been seen at least twice in Waukesha...over in the SW Kettle Moraine on Hwy Z, and up in Menomonee Falls. That said though, there've been sightings over the years of these brilliantly feathered birds around a good part of southern Wisconsin even up to Appleton, and other points west!

Because of the market for exotic birds, the introduction of these and other species will probably continue. The Pin-tailed Whydah, is on the verge of launching a new invasion into the U.S. On our east and west southern coasts, people have been seeing a bird that isn't in their bird guides.

The flashy whydah, *Vidua macroura*, is a native of sub-Saharan Africa. Males have a bright orange beak, a black and white pattern, and grow long black tails during breeding season. Their distinctive plumage has made them popular in the exotic pet trade, which is what brought them to Puerto Rico, Florida, and Orange County - CA.

While having a beautiful bird might not seem like much of a problem, the whydah is one of only about 100 parasitic birds in the world. Whydahs are "brood parasites", meaning they lay their eggs in another bird's nest and leave that species to raise the baby, like our buddies, the cowbirds. It's hard to say if these birds have the ability to adapt and expand into our Midwest, but then again, who'd a thunk that the Starling would ever go anywhere!?