



BENJAMIN F. GOSS BIRD CLUB

# THE GOSS HAWK

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## Waukesha Christmas Bird Count 2019

### 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.

Throughout North America, the Christmas season is a little busier for a unique group of people. Along with the family celebrations, Christmas services, and gift exchanges, bird watchers participate in another annual event - the Christmas Bird Count.

Sponsored and organized by the National Audubon Society, over 2,500 CBCs occur across the continent annually. Wisconsin hosts approximately 4% of these counts with over 100 count circles located within the state borders. And one of the oldest counts is our very own Waukesha CBC!

Over the years, Waukesha birders have conducted about 80 counts, finding at least 99 species. Considering the count is conducted the last Saturday before the winter solstice when fall migration is all but complete, that's a considerable number of species. Along with our usual winter residents, we've come across quite a few birds that were probably spending their last days in the county before heading south - a Chipping Sparrow was a first for the count in 2017, a Brown Thrasher stuck

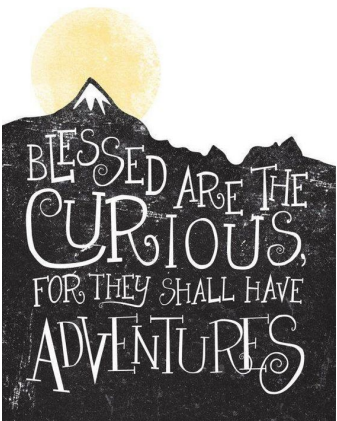
around for a while in 1968, and a Pied-billed Grebe each in 1993 and 2014 likely found abundant open water those years. And as many veteran birders will recall, it was often much easier to find Evening Grosbeaks in winter than it is now. In 1968 a whopping 190 grosbeaks were reported on count day! A similarly tough bird to find this far south, the Pine Grosbeak was found twice - 7 birds in 1993 and 10 birds in 1968.

2018 was by all means average. A lack of snow, meant few field birds made their way to plowed roads to feed and grit. Also the lack of open water on area lakes reduced the opportunities for waterfowl. But we still managed to find some interesting birds! The most rare or unusual bird reported was probably a Cackling Goose, which had not been previously reported on the count. Considering its taxonomic split from Canada Goose into its own species only happened about 10 years ago, it would have been tough to log a Cackling Goose into the records in the 20th century! Lesser Scaup and Northern Saw-whet Owl

were the next most unusual birds reported. And although Pileated Woodpeckers are most certainly residents within the count circle, they haven't always been detected on "count day". This year we found three!

Among the biggest "misses" were a couple winter regulars: Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk. While shrikes had been seen within the circle leading up to the count, they are a cryptic bird and can easily stay hidden as was the case on count day. Rough-legged Hawks on the other hand are usually seen wide out in the open, perched on the tips of trees or hunting over a field. Their overall absence from the area this winter season could explain why we did not see any on count day.

A big thank you to the 35 club members and friends who participated in the 119th annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. We tallied 51 different species with a total of 9,042 individual birds. And thanks to Don Reel for compiling the count!



## Moment from the Archives w/ Jennifer Tyskiewicz

# Archives Reveal Goss Club's Involvement in Bird-Related Issues Near and Far

Throughout our 90-year history, the Goss Bird Club has often stepped forward to take a stand on causes concerning bird and habitat protection.

Some of these concerns have been as close to home as Waukesha, while at least one has been half-way around the world!

Our involvement in an issue that was the most "far afield," occurred in 1959, and concerned Sand Island in the Midway Group, part of the Hawaiian Archipelago.

This island was claimed by the U.S. in 1867, at a time that it was home to the largest known breeding colony of albatross in the world.

As time went on, the government began to use Sand Island as an important link in the Navy's protection of the Pacific Arm of the Continental Defense Barrier, establishing a base there that hosted the landing and taking-off of numerous far-ranging planes.

Unfortunately, collisions between the planes and the albatross became increasingly frequent, and monitoring during the year 1957 – 1958 showed that nearly 40% of daylight flights experienced some sort of collision with an albatross, resulting in \$155,000 in damages to aircraft.

Luckily, no pilots were lost, but I'm certain that most of the birds involved were not as fortunate.

In a press release, the Department of the Navy declared that they were all about conserving wildlife, and would work on two recommendations to help resolve the problem:

\*Improve another island in the group, known as Green Island, to be of the type of habitat needed by the albatross.

\*Perform certain contour modifications on Sand Island to reduce the number of birds soaring over the runways, for which the Navy agreed to appropriate \$110,000.

Apparently, wildlife and conservation groups got wind of a third option, which was for the Navy to kill off a high percentage of the albatross population on the island!

Upon news of this reaching the Goss Bird Club, Secretary Charlotte McCombe fired off a series of letters to various politicians in Washington, stating the club's demand that they countermand any actions taken by the Navy to solve the issue with the slaughtering of birds.

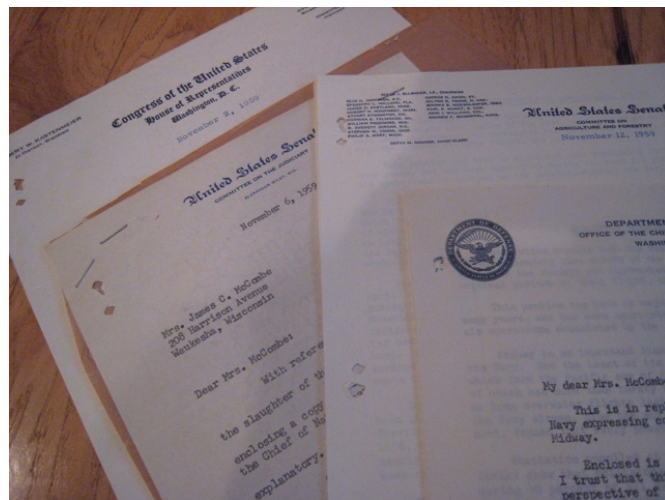
Older club members, (like me), will recognize the names of William Proxmire, Robert Kastenmeier, and Alexander Wiley as government officials who received letters from our club, and in turn, sent letters to us with assurances that the Navy was doing everything possible to preserve the albatross population, while ensuring the safety of the airmen. (Photo 1).

It is difficult to follow the exact resolution of the matter through Internet research, but as military needs changed, the Navy's presence on Sand Island was relinquished by 1978, and jurisdiction was transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This is-

land is now a National Wildlife Refuge, and in 2017, was the home and breeding area of 3 species of albatross

An opportunity to make an impact on bird habitat closer to home presented itself to our club in 1963. Club members had heard that the Waukesha County Park System was about to start a "build-up," and a letter was sent to the Park Commission by our club's Vice-President, Clarence Anthes, stating that the Goss Bird Club wanted to be involved in and could be very helpful in "improving conditions to benefit birds."

The club volunteered to plant, care for and maintain "bird cover" and food-bearing plants that would attract birds. The letter to the Park Commission also stated that the club was prepared to assist in winter feeding and providing boxes and houses for winter resting accommodations.



(1) Letters from legislators, addressed to club members.

A future perusing of the minutes from 1963 and beyond might reveal if the club did actually participate in any park system upgrades.

The year 1964 presented a very big challenge to supporters of wildlife in Wisconsin towns where the elm tree was a common landscape item. Waukesha was, of course, one of those areas.

Dutch Elm disease, spread by a beetle, was killing elms like a plague, and the Waukesha Parks and Recreation Department had instituted a tree-spraying program which misted the trees, (and surrounding areas), with a mixture of DDT and xylene.

The department claimed that the chemicals did not harm bird life and benefited the elm trees, (although records show that 446 elms had to be removed from Waukesha in a 2-year period).

The city posted "Danger" signs, (Photo 2), at numerous locations in each block where spraying was scheduled, warning residents to keep children and pets 300 feet away from the spray, and cars needed to be kept at the same distance to avoid damage to their finish.

A series of letters, (Photo 2), flew back and forth between our bird club and the Director of Waukesha Parks and Recreation, with

our club citing the already known detriments of DDT on birdlife, including the effects of unsuccessful nesting and the finding of birds in convulsive states.

Return correspondence has the Director pooh-pooing any danger to birds as verified by a state convention that he had attended, in which laboratory tests did not show any evidence of DDT present in dead birds. (Why were the birds dead?).

On his walks around the former Wisconsin School for the Boys' property, the Director states that he has seen "over 15 varieties of birds since spring," but is surprised to see the number of birds and small game that he says are killed for pleasure.....a mortality rate that he claims is much higher than all of the birds that DDT could kill in 10 – 20 years! (Yikes! We know how that all turned out! I wonder if the Director kept his job?).

The manager of the General Electric property in Pewaukee called on our bird club in 1989 to conduct a 12 – month survey of their acreage to determine the species of birds seen there, and to make recommendations as to improving bird habitat.

From November 1, 1989 through October 31, 1990, various club members met each month to conduct the survey. During this time, 107 species were tallied. The club recommended that a pond area that had heavy foot traffic be made inaccessible from May – August to allow birds attracted to that habitat to not become discouraged to nest due to too much human activity.

In 2002, the Goss Bird Club again stepped up with 43 other Wisconsin conservation and environmental organizations to support Sauk County's "Badger Reuse Plan."

The Badger Army Ammunition Plant was the world's largest manufacturing and testing facility for munitions in 1942. As the need for this type of facility gradually faded, this large acreage and numerous build-

ings lay vacant.

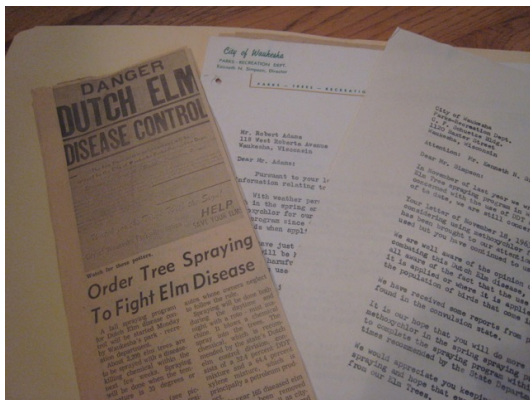
It was the hope of the Community Conservation Coalition for Sauk Prairie to restore the area to prairie landscape, and for the area to be used for education, recreation, research, and sustainable agriculture.

Goss Club President, Walter Hahn, sent off a "Declaration of Support" of the plan, joining such organizations as the Aldo Leopold Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and the WSO in convincing Governor Scott McCallum to implement this conservation-minded plan.

In recent years, a museum that showcases the change from ammunition plant to restored prairie, has opened. Though clean-up of the acreage is still ongoing, the area is now known as the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area.

In concluding this discussion, we know that our bird club continues to support causes that protect birds and preserve habitat, as evidenced by our more recent work with the SE Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's request that the Goss Bird Club survey a wooded property, (known as the Hardy/Rollo Woods), to determine if the intended route for the West Waukesha Bypass needed to be relocated due to any area-sensitive, threatened or endangered birds that were breeding there. This survey was completed by our club in 2014, and at this point in 2019, the woodland area surveyed has not yet been excavated for the road to go through.

For the future, there seems to be an upcoming project that involves the saving of an old chimney favored by Chimney Swifts in Okauchee. I'm certain that our Goss Bird Club will step up to meet the challenge!



(2) Letters from between club members and the county parks regarding Dutch elm disease



Want to go find owls, but don't know where to look or how to find them? Join with the Goss Bird Club on February 2nd for our second annual Owl Prowl!

We'll wait to hear reports of owls in the area before we decide exactly

where we'll go, so if you know of a place owls can reliably be found, please let us know!

Owls can be pretty picky about the weather, and if it's too nasty, they will stay quiet. If it's too windy or wintery, we may bump the date for this field trip back a week to February 9th. The decision to go or not go will depend on the forecast, so check the website or our Facebook page leading up to the event to see which date we'll head out in search of owls.

## The Great Backyard



Looking for something fun and easy to do in February the benefits the birds as well??

Participate in the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Great Backyard Bird Count!! February 15-18, 2019

Spend at least 15 minutes counting birds on one or more of the count days. Tally the number of each species you see and then go to e-bird to submit your report. It's that easy and you can count at any location - your yard, your favorite park or natural area.

The information you provide to the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab for Ornithology is valuable to scientists who track bird populations and bird movement. Way to go, Citizen Scientist!!

Go to [www.gbcb.birdcount.org](http://www.gbcb.birdcount.org) for more information.

If you need help entering your data, please contact Paula at: [paulastich13@gmail.com](mailto:paulastich13@gmail.com) or 262-844-9848.



## An invitation: Join Team Knowles-Nelson!

If you care about the future of Wisconsin's Stewardship Fund, please join Team Knowles-Nelson. It was organized by Gathering Waters, an umbrella organization for land trusts in Wisconsin. Gathering Waters provides land trusts with the tools they need to protect land through advocacy, education and other resources.

Last summer, Gathering Waters took the lead in forming a coalition with over 20 other organizations to focus on extending the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. WSO is an active participant in this effort. This coalition:

- **Hired** professional lobbyists to be our eyes and ears and get us the right meetings, with the right people, at the right times
- **Conducted** a statewide poll that verified land and water protection is very important to a vast majority of Republicans and Democrats
- **Hosted** six advocacy forums around the state to answer questions and get people involved
- **Established** the Team Knowles Nelson grassroots campaign.

A focused grassroots effort is needed to ensure that the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee includes a Stewardship Fund extension in the upcoming state budget bill. The Team Knowles-Nelson campaign will let you know: when to reach out; who to contact; how to connect; and what message to communicate



To join Team Knowles-Nelson, go to <https://gatheringwaters.org/team-knowles-nelson>