the almanac

Newsletter of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, Inc. September 2026

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society
presents



Makings of a Movement

Buddy Huffaker
speaker

Wednesday
Sept 16
7 p.m.

In person: Lincoln Center
1519 Water Street, Stevens Point
Zoom: https://tinyurl.com/ALAS2026Sept16

Upcoming Events

Sept 9	ALAS	*September board meeting*
Sept 25	ALAS field trip	*Birds in Art*
Oct 17	ALAS field trip	*Birding by Boat - Waupaca Chain*
Oct 21	ALAS program	*Panama: A Grand Birding Adventure*

Upcoming Events



ALAS Field Trip

Birds in Art

Friday, September 25

Please join us for a private tour (yep, just our group) of the fifty-first annual Birds in Art exhibit at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau. Birds inspire us is seemingly endless ways. We will experience all-new work by 120 artists and witness the many ways birds have inspired them.

Following our tour, Dexter Patterson, in collaboration with the Central Wisconsin Book Festival, will discuss his new guidebook, *Birds of the Great Lakes*, inclusive birding practices, and how to get started birding with sustainability and conservation at the forefront. Dexter is co-founder of the BIPOC birding Club and the Bird Joy Podcast. Copies of his book will be available for purchase.

Birds in Art tour is 4:30-5:30 Dexter's program is 6-7:30

During the break between the tour and Dexter's program (5:30-6) we can wander the sculpture park on the museum grounds and eat a snack. Please bring your own food if you like. We will provide some beverages.

For those who would like to carpool, we will meet at the SW corner of the Target parking lot downtown in Stevens Point at 3:30. Others are welcome to meet us at the museum. The museum is located at 700 N 12th St. in Wausau. The museum is barrier-free and accessible for people of all abilities. All ages welcome.

Stevens Point Weekly Bird Walk Schedule

Please visit https://www.aldoleopoldaudubon.org/weeklywalks

Need help identifying those confusing fall warblers?
Check this website: https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/beginners/birding-faq/which-warblers-are-passing-through-right-now-and-how-to-spot-them/

Dates are correct as of press time.
Always be sure to check the ALAS website before you leave!

The Makings of a Movement: Conservation's Past, Present, and Future



This presentation explores the roots, evolution, and future of the conservation movement, highlighting the enduring legacy of Aldo Leopold and his classic work, *A Sand County Almanac.* Leopold's vision of a Land Ethic—a sense of responsibility and connection to the natural world—continues to inspire conservation efforts today.

Buddy Huffaker, Executive Director of the Aldo Leopold Foundation, has dedicated decades to carrying Leopold's vision forward. Joining the foundation as a seasonal intern in 1996, Buddy became Executive Director in 1999 and has since helped expand the organization's conservation and educational work nationally and internationally.

Among his accomplishments are leading the construction of the LEED Platinum-certified Aldo Leopold Legacy Center, preserving the historic Leopold Shack & Farm, and overseeing stewardship of the surrounding 4,000-acre Leopold-Pines Conservation Area. Buddy also produced the Emmy Award-winning documentary GreenFire and supported international translations of *A Sand County Almanac.*

Join us for our first program of the 2026-27 season on Wednesday, September 16 at 7 pm, when Buddy will connect Leopold's timeless ideas with today's conservation challenges and opportunities, offering insight into how individuals and communities can strengthen their own land ethic and help carry the conservation movement into the future.

Programs will be held in-person at the Lincoln Center (1519 Water St., Stevens Point) and remotely live via Zoom. To view via Zoom, register here: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/q1240XK-S-GJaPIGE9Mimg

Find this link on our website under the Events-Presentation tab.

Aldo Leopold Audubon programs and field trips are free and open to the public.

Delightful Birds I Have Known

Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*)

Alan Haney



Yellow-breasted Chat. Photo courtesy allaboutbirds.org

Unexpected gifts are always the best, and if we pay attention, nature is generous with hers. It was midmorning, the twenty-third of July, with continuing hot and dry weather. I was on the phone trying to set up an appointment, absent-mindedly looking out the window of my study. A brilliant flash of yellow amidst branches of a scrubby red maple in my yard caught my attention. To my astonishment, a Yellow-breasted Chat momentarily landed on an outer branch, attempting to capture some insect or perhaps pluck off a caterpillar. It had been years since I last saw a chat, when I lived in western North Carolina, where they were common, although not so often seen. In nearly 40 years of birding in Wisconsin, I had never seen a chat.

How can you be sure it was a chat, with such a brief look, you might reasonably ask. The Yellow-breasted Chat is a spectacular bird, unusual in many respects. Similar to many warblers, with which it was once classified, it is a third larger, with a much heavier beak. The very prominent white spectacles, black lores and bill, and bright yellow throat and breast are diagnostic markings. But it was the flashy yellow breast and size, more similar to that of an oriole, that first alerted me to its identity.

The chat also exhibits distinctive behavior. It rarely ventures far from heavy, brushy cover. Even when moving around, it stays close to the ground and only fleetingly exposes itself, reminiscent of a catbird. Males are quite vocal in their attempts to attract a female to their chosen habitat, sometimes singing from an exposed perch, but once they are successful in attracting a mate, vocalizations are few. The chat's vocalizations, by the way, is another deviation from warbler similarity. It is a strange mix of gurgles, caws, whistles, rattles, and squawks, that remind me of those of a Brown Thrasher, not at all warbler-like.

Ornithologists have long debated how to classify the Yellow-breasted Chat, which many considered to be an odd wood warbler. DNA analysis, in fact, identifies it most closely with wood warblers. Within the last decade, however, it was decided that it should be placed in a separate family, Icteriidae.



Yellow-breasted Chat. Photo courtesy allaboutbirds.org

The female, which looks very similar to the male, builds her nest in heavy shrub cover, usually no more than six to eight feet above the ground. It is a bulky, wren-like nest of grass, bark, and stringy material of about any kind, including hair. Within the nest, she fashions a cup lined with fine grass or hair and perhaps some feathers. She will lay 3 to 6 eggs, which she broods overnight, but otherwise, shares incubation with the male. Incubation is typically 10-12 days. Chats are particularly secretive around their nest, often taking round-about approaches, even when bringing food to young. Cowbirds, nevertheless, often slip an egg into a chat nest, which frequently causes the chats to abandon the nest. Because chats are quick to abandon a nest if disturbed, it has been challenging to document their breeding range very accurately. They often will re-nest if the first attempt is disturbed early on, and sometimes will attempt a second brood, even when the first was successful, but this is thought to be uncommon.

Young chats are fed a great diversity of invertebrates, including spiders and nearly any insect, or soft-bodied caterpillar. They are ready to leave the nest about 10 days after hatching, and the adults will continue to provide some food for a few more days as the fledglings develop their foraging acumen. In addition to invertebrates, adult chats consume fruits of many varieties, including blueberries, raspberries, cherries, and grapes.

By August, Yellow-breasted Chats are ready to migrate, usually at night. Stopover habitat, and over-wintering habitat in Central America always have heavy shrub cover. Their foraging probably shifts more to fruits during migration and in the non-breeding season, but invertebrates remain on the menu. Chats return north in May.

Come next May, keep an ear out for what you might think is just another Brown Thrasher. If you're lucky, nature may bestow a gift on you, a fleeting look at a delightful Yellow-breasted Chat.

Avian Kids' Corner

Scott Reilly

Whoa, Fall is upon us! Have you noticed the cooler temperatures, a red maple leaf, less daylight? If you have, you are not alone! Over the coming weeks millions of birds will pass over Wisconsin on their annual migration. Most will pass silently, during the night, making their long journeys to their winter habitats.

But their journey is hard, and our lights can cause many problems for migrating birds. Collisions with buildings and disorientation are some of the negative effects of lights on migration.

What you can do: Lights out for Birds



- Turn off all outside lights around your home.
- Turn off all unnecessary lights inside or close blinds/drapes to keep light inside your house, especially in upper stories.

Why do some birds migrate at night?



Many species of birds migrate at night. At night, smaller birds avoid predators such as hawks. Lower temperatures also help to keep hard working muscles cooler. Also, the moon and stars help with migrating bird migration. By participating in *Lights Out for Birds* we can help birds while migrating and not getting confused with our buildings and human lights.

Birds vs Humans: Hoo has better vision?



Although humans and birds have similar eye anatomy, bird eyes are larger in comparison to their head. Some song birds have eyes that are the same size as their head!

Human eyes are spherical, bird eyes are "flatter" increasing size of the pupil and allowing more light to enter their eyes and more photoreceptors. Birds have up to 400,000 receptors, humans about 200,000! Birds also "see" ultraviolet light, where humans only get sunburned from UV light.

How can you improve your vision at night?

But all is not lost! You can improve your vision at night and see a whole lot more too. Try this out and see if you can improve your vision!

1. Go outside where there are no human lights or moon.
2. Wait about 25 minutes for your eyes to adjust and build up the natural chemical rhodopsin.
3. Practice "side-looking." Do not look directly at an object, but off to the side.
4. Keep all lights off, no flashlights or screens as these will ruin your vision.

Special Highlights from the Summer

Summer months are made for getting outdoors and appreciating life. We are committed to getting people outdoors learning, exploring and enjoying the company of fellow bird enthusiasts. We led several programs in May through August. Here we highlight a few.

Birding by Ear

Conor O'Keffe runs a support group for people with visual impairment. His group became interested in learning to bird by ear as a way to continue their life-long appreciation of birds. Conor contacted ALAS to inquire if we could help them further this interest. On May 20th Emily Ritter, Luke Trittelwitz and Karen Dostal met the group at Schmeekle Reserve to begin a new adventure. Memories of past bird sightings, familiar bird songs, and tricks for helping to recognize new bird calls were shared. A short hike along the wetlands to appreciate the calls of the numerous Common Yellow-throats and Red-Winged blackbirds brought more smiles. One of the best calls was from a Swainson's Thrush that stayed very near to where The next Birding by Ear outing is coming up on September 16 at 1 p.m. at Schmeekle Reserve and will be led by Emily Ritter.

What Was Up on that Bluff?

Bob Freckmann leads a trip called, What's Up on the Bluff, (Power's Bluff) nearly every year in May. Bob always plans the date of the trip to coincide with peak Trillium blooms and he did well again this year. However, we were also treated with many, many other ephemeral blossoms. Bob has a story, an identification tip, or other esoteric bit of knowledge for each plant observed which the crowd appreciated so much.

Bob was instrumental in getting the Powers Bluff Maple Woods State Natural Area preserved. He says it is still one of the largest tracts of land in the state free of invasive plants. Bob went on to tell of the history of the land. Explaining it was originally home to Potawatomi, Ho Chunk, Ojibwe and Menominee people who called the bluff Tah-qua-kik or Skunk Hill. These people gathered there to hold ceremonies, collect medicinal plants, make maple sugar and to bury loved ones. They lived on the land until the 1930s when the land was taken from them.

Bob will lead another trip to the Bluff in May of 2027. Don't miss it! See the website for this and other field trips!

The Leopold Shack and International Crane Foundation

Susan Schuller organized a trip to both the Leopold Shack and the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in July.

A tour of the Shack was led by an employee of the Leopold Foundation

Center. We had many youngsters among us. They told the history of Aldo Leopold and his family on this piece of land along the lower Wisconsin River. The land helped shape Aldo Leopold's philosophy and environmental ethic. Leopold wrote many of his essays at the shack and it has become a cherished place to many. At the end of the tour, one boy asked where he could get *A Sand County Almanac* book. He was excited to read it.

Following the tour of the Leopold shack, the group headed over to the ICF to learn about cranes and the work the ICF does to save and preserve cranes around the world. This is the only place on earth where you can observe every species of cranes in the world all in one place, and it is right here in Wisconsin.

It was an absolutely wonderful day and funded by Great Lakes Audubon! We appreciate the partnership and support. It made a difference to these 15 participants.

More trips planned this coming season! We hope you can join us on one of the programs or field trips!

From the President

Susan Schuller

Welcome back to another year of great programs to inspire, learn, and engage in bird- and nature conservation. This year, the Board of Directors has organized a wonderful list of events for the year. We will continue our monthly speaker series with some incredible presenters coming up. Board member, Rob Pendergast, will continue leading bird walks each month to local hot spots. And we have an impressive list of field trip opportunities coming up. We hope you can join us as we continue to offer the high quality, FREE programs to the public. Check out our website or Facebook page for upcoming events. www.aldoleopoldaudubon.org

Over the summer, a naming committee met monthly to create a roadmap for us as we redefine our chapter, starting with a new name. The board will be voting on the official name this month, and a call for creative designs will be announced to help create a logo. It is an exciting time to get involved.

Lastly, it is our Annual Birdseed Sale! This is a great time to stock up on your bird seed for the winter while supporting our mission. The birds will be so happy you did so. Order by September 30 to ensure availability of your preferred birdseed. www.aldoleopoldaudubon.org/birdseed

Annual Bird Seed Sale

Our 2026 birdseed sale is ready to go! We know that the birds will be hungry when the fall and winter months arrive. We hope that you will continue to support the organization through a purchase at this birdseed sale, which is the most important fundraiser for our organization. We also encourage you to share this opportunity with friends and family.

Order During September

To make it easy to help our feathered friends, we offer a wide assortment of foods and two ways to make your order. You can order and pay online at https://aldoleopoldaudubon.org/birdseed, or fill out and mail the order form in the sale flyer. If you prefer to order by mail, please send your form, along with a check payable to ALAS, to ALAS Birdseed Sale, c/o Steve and Midge Hall, 3188 Dans Dr. Stevens Point, WI 54481. Be sure to mail your order on or before September 26 so the postal service has time to deliver it. Include your email address on your order form to receive a receipt and a reminder of the pick-up days and times. While walk-up orders are welcome on the pick-up days, making a pre-order guarantees that you get what you want.

Pick Up October 16 & 17

Mark your calendar to pick up your order on either Friday, October 16 between 3 and 6 pm or Saturday, October 17 between 10 am and 1 pm, in the parking lot of the Pineries Bank at 3601 Main Street, Stevens Point. If you cannot make either of these delivery days/times, please contact Steve and Midge (alasbirdseedsale@gmail.com or 937-608-0864) to see if they can make alternate arrangements.

Volunteers Needed

We need people to work at the sales tables, to gather orders from the truck and to move those orders to our customer's vehicles. We would also welcome volunteers that could bring snacks. Volunteers work 1.5-hour shifts between 3 and 6 pm on Friday, October 16 and between 10 am and 1 pm on Saturday, October 17. Please contact Steve & Midge at alasbirdseedsale@gmail.com if you would like to help with the distribution. A few days ahead of time, we will send each volunteer a schedule with date, start time and end time. We ask volunteers to park in the Metro Market lot to avoid crowding in the Pineries Bank lot.

***We must* RECEIVE *your order no later than* SEPTEMBER 30, 2026**

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society

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Your dues support local chapter activities and environmental projects exclusively in Central Wisconsin. You will receive *The Almanac* newsletter and invitations to ALAS programs, field trips, and educational events. ALAS will notify you when your annual membership is due.

☐ $25/year Supporter Local Chapter Membership.

☐ $50/year Sustainer Local Chapter Membership.

The date your* Local *membership expires is on the back cover!

☐ ***I'll help conserve resources, protect the environment, and save postage! Please send my newsletter via email.***

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More Ways to Give

We appreciate your additional donations supporting the work of ALAS.

☐ $_____ ALAS Endowment Fund.
Managed by the Community Foundation of Central Wisconsin.

☐ $_____ ALAS Chapter Operations Fund.

ALAS will not distribute your contact information to any other organization.

ALAS and the Community Foundation are 501(c)(3) organizations.
Your donation will be tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

Please remember ALAS in your estate planning!

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society
P.O. Box 928
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Bird Seed Sale

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The mission of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society is to foster appreciation and concern for all living things, and to protect and preserve their ecosystems.