the almanac

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Alliance of Central Wisconsin November 2026



Upcoming Events

Nov 11	ALAS	*November board meeting*
Dec 19	ALAS	*127th Annual Christmas Bird Count*

Upcoming Events

ALAS Field Trip
Migration on the Mississippi
Saturday, November 7

On November 7, we will be meeting for a "Migration on the Mississippi" field trip at 7:30 AM. We will meet at the Chase Bank parking lot along the river in Stevens Point to carpool to a variety of sites along the Mississippi River, visiting overlooks, parks, and a national wildlife area around La Crosse. We will be doing some walking along trails for those who are able. We will return to Stevens Point at approximately 5 PM. Contact Scott Reilly for more information at 920-636-6299 or scottjreilly@gmail.com

Waupaca Chain field trip

In October, the Bird Conservation Alliance paddled the upper lakes of the Waupaca Chain. The cool morning was clear, with lovely colors and calm water. Four members met and spotted a few local birds such as Pileated Woodpecker, chickadees, and others.



Stevens Point Weekly Bird Walk Schedule

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

Bird Conservation Alliance of Central Wisconsin programs and field trips are free and open to the public.

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

Wisconsin's Native Orchids and Their Pollinators



Stephanie Lyon.

Dr. Stephanie Lyon is an Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, where she teaches botany, plant taxonomy, and ethnobotany. She earned her Ph.D. in Botany from UW–Madison in 2014, specializing in orchid evolution, ecology, and systematics. Her research has taken her around the world, resulting in the discovery and description of several new orchid species.

Dr. Lyon oversees the UWSP Freckmann Herbarium and Tropical Conservatory, and continues to conduct research on native and exotic orchids alongside undergraduate students and conservation partners. Her presentation will explore Wisconsin's native orchid diversity, highlighting what is known about their pollination biology and sharing preliminary findings on pollinator interactions with native orchid species. She will also connect local research to the broader story of orchid evolution, ecology, and conservation worldwide.

Join us on Wednesday, November 18 at 7 pm, when Stephanie will share with us her extensive knowledge of native orchids and their pollinators.

Programs will be held in-person at the Lincoln Center (1519 Water St., Stevens Point, Wisconsin) and remotely live via Zoom. To view via Zoom, register here https://tinyurl.com/BCAC-W2026Nov18

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



Calypso orchid (calypso bulbosa), *a state threatened plant.*

Photo courtesy Wisconsin DNR.

From the President

Susan Schuller

It is November already! Season of gratitude. I just wanted to take time and share a little bit about our chapter and remind us all on the work we do. As a local chapter, 100% of your annual dues paid directly to the local chapter stay right here to support our community and local wildlife. Because of your generosity, we are a 100% volunteer-run organization dedicated to protecting birds and local ecosystems.

Let me share a summary of the work we do and welcome you to bring a friend to the next program you attend. Let's spread the love of birds with others.

Programming: This year (August '26 to July '27) we have 8 presentations, 10 field trips and events, and bi-weekly local bird walks—all offered free to the public.

Scholarships: We offer two dedicated scholarships for students at UWSP.

Grants: We offer year-round grants of up to $500 for environmental education programs and restoration projects across Portage, Wood, Marathon, and Waupaca counties. Have a project in mind? We welcome applications at any time!

Newsletter: Putting together a newsletter every month takes a village. We are grateful to Alan Haney for sharing "Delightful Birds" every month. Thank you! Scott Riley adds the "Avian Kids' Corner" to help us extend the love of birds to youngsters. The program committee and field trip committee makes sure we have information on our upcoming events pulled together. And lastly, we owe Lora Hagen for pulling it all together! We are grateful for the team effort. Thank you to everyone involved.

Conservation & Education: We are dedicated to supporting local bird research, habitat needs, and environmental education.

As we enter the season of gratitude, I want to say a heartfelt thank you to our members. Your contributions truly matter, and we work hard to put every dollar to work for our feathered friends and natural spaces. Learn more and join us for an upcoming program or walk at www.BirdsCW.org Note: our new URL for the website.

2026 Birdseed Sale

Midge and Steve Hall

The 2026 birdseed sale was another successful event, thanks to the terrific support of Jay-Mar, the Pineries Bank, Friends of Schmeeckle Reserve, the volunteers who helped with distribution, and most importantly, the folks who purchased seed and suet for our feathered friends. The sale generated a significant amount of money for the organization to continue and expand its many important activities. Thanks to everyone who contributed.

The 2026 Sale had 81 preorders and some number of walk-ups (2 paid by check, a few in cash, and a bunch by credit card). The pre-order system worked well with only a few minor glitches.



Having the truck at the south end of the parking lot worked very well; it was much easier to control traffic during the busy Friday afternoon. We'll continue to use that spot from here on out. We also have a few ideas to help us manage the Friday afternoon rush that we'll try next year

Brad kindly listened to our account of issues related to walk-up orders and has agreed to bring some ideas to the board at a future meeting to perhaps make some changes for next year.

If you have ideas or suggestions to make future birdseed sales even more successful, please forward them to us.

We are already planning for the 2027 bird seed sale with preorders open during September and the pick-up days October 15 and 16.

Delightful Birds I Have Known

Black-billed Cuckoo (***Coccyzus erythropthalmus***)

Alan Haney



Black-billed Cuckoo. Photo National Audubon.

For patient birders, both the Black-billed and its close cousin, the Yellow-billed Cuckoo might be seen in central Wisconsin during the summer months. Whereas the Yellow-billed is far more common in the southwestern half of the state, the Black-billed is more evenly present throughout but is most common in the northern two-thirds of the state. Populations of both species have continued to fall since systematic breeding-bird surveys began over 50 years ago, probably because of insecticide use, which has resulted in a decline in number of outbreaks of caterpillars, their primary food. Indeed, there are year-to-year variations in cuckoo populations, dependent on the local populations of caterpillars. When food is more abundant, cuckoos lay more eggs and fledge more young.

The breeding range of the Black-billed Cuckoo extends from southern Saskatchewan along the Canadian border east to Nova Scotia and south through the Ohio River Valley. Preferred habitat is a dense forest of young deciduous trees in extensive tracts. Larger trees are not a requirement, but dense understory is. Above all, cuckoos demand good cover near the ground. The best sighting I ever had of this elusive bird was in an extensive post-fire forest of young aspen in southern Ontario during a forest tent-caterpillar outbreak. The jay-sized brown bird with white tips on long tail feathers is most distinguished by its prominent red eye-ring.

Black-billed Cuckoos winter in South America, along the northwestern Pacific Coast and down the Andes to Bolivia. They migrate at night in spring, north through Central America. They arrive in the Upper Midwest and eastern U.S. during the last two weeks of May. Both males and females "sing" their distinctive "song," which is described by the Cornell Laboratory's "All About Birds," as a "staccato series of 3 to 5 toots on the same pitch," with a short pause between series of repeated songs. Their call is a guttural croak, often preceded by a "rapid and harsh chortle." Although the songs and calls of the Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos are similar, you can easily learn to distinguish between them. Because cuckoos are so difficult to spot, it is more often their song or call that most likely cues you to their presence.

Populations of Forest tent caterpillars, Gypsy moths, Army worms, and related species tend to rise and fall in cycles dependent upon weather and other factors, peaking once or twice a decade. Adults of these episodic insects are small, nondescript moths, but it is the larvae that attack foliage, and are the cuckoos' preferred food. Cuckoos are caterpillar specialists. The spiny hairs that cover caterpillars is a complete deterrent for most birds, but not the cuckoos. They have evolved a way to shed the lining of their stomachs with the embedded hairs, much like an owl regurgitates a pellet of indigestible things it consumes in its food. By far, the best opportunity to see a cuckoo is when there is a local outbreak of one of these insect populations, attracting an influx of hungry cuckoos. Cuckoos, however, are opportunistic, and utilize a wide variety of larger insects as well as lizards, frogs, or other small animals they might catch. In the non-breeding season, cuckoos also will consume various fruits.

Black-billed Cuckoos build their flimsy nests in the thickest foliage they can find, usually within 20 feet of the ground. It consists of twigs and various plant fibers forming a platform with a shallow cup, so minimally constructed that young cuckoos often fall from the nest. Some cuckoos may not even build a nest; they are known to lay eggs in the nests of at least 11 other species, although they are less consistent nest-parasites than the Brown-headed Cowbird. The number of eggs laid varies according to food availability. During caterpillar outbreaks, as many as five might be laid, but only one or two, if any, in off-years. Eggs are laid over a longer period than is the case of most birds, with four or five days between each, resulting in asynchronous hatching. The oldest chick may be ready to leave the nest when the youngest is hatched in some cases. When food is scarce, younger chicks may be removed by the parents, even fed to the older chick is some cases.

The young of both the Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoo develop faster than other passerine chicks. Incubation is only 10-11 days, compared to 12-14 that is typical of other passerines. Male and female cuckoos share incubation of 10-11 days. Cuckoo chicks can leave the nest within a week after hatching, well before they are prepared to fly, which may be not for two more weeks. Perhaps it is the precarious condition of the nest that leads chicks to leave so quickly.

As summer ends, Black-billed Cuckoos join with other cuckoos and begin their long flight to South America, flying at night and feeding during the day at stop-over habitats, always in heavy cover. Their diet will have increased to include various fruits to supplement the invertebrates and small vertebrates they find near or even on the ground.

Let's hope the populations these fascinating birds, one of our more unusual species, will not continue to decline, although that seems very likely. Don't miss an opportunity to take note if you hear what many call a rain crow, often just before or during a thunderstorm. Better yet, perhaps you can get a look at one of the most unusual of our avian neighbors.

Avian Kids' Corner

Scott Reilly

Talkin' Turkey: This month many of us will gather with family and friends to celebrate the annual feast of Thanksgiving. Many travel in the area or further for the holiday, however, wherever you may spend this Thanksgiving, you may be sharing the traditional turkey dinner. But, turkeys are not just for dinner! Chances are you have seen a turkey (or many turkeys) recently!

Turkey In Wisconsin:

- Wisconsin is home to approximately 300,000-350,000 turkeys according to the WI DNR.
    - Turkeys can be found in every county in the state including downtown Milwaukee!
    - In the early 1970's turkey was not found in Wisconsin, but in 1976 they were reintroduced from Missouri.



Turkey Joy!:

- Turkeys are originally from North America and have been domesticated since the 1500's by European settlers.
    - Turkeys live in every state except Alaska and parts of southern Canada.
    - In the winter, turkeys can form large flocks of over 100 birds. Next month during the Christmas Bird Count, see if you find any large flocks of turkeys in our area.
    - According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, when they need to, turkeys can swim by "tucking their wings in close, spreading their tails, and kicking."
- You can identify the gender of turkey by their poop! J-shaped is a male, spiral-shaped is female.

Attracting Turkey:

- Wild Turkey are found throughout the area, in fields and open woodlands, we often see them moving through neighborhoods. Turkeys eat lots of plants, depending on the season, from seeds and nuts to conifer buds and grasses. By scattering cracked corn outside, you can attract turkey to your home for a snack!

- Make a DIY Cup-and-String Turkey Call by the National Turkey Federation
    - **What you need:** A paper or plastic cup, a piece of heavy string or yarn, a paperclip or button (to anchor the string), and a damp sponge or paper towel.
    - **Step 1:** Poke a small hole in the very center of the bottom of the cup.
    - **Step 2:** Thread the string through the hole from the inside of the cup. Tie it to a paperclip or button on the inside so it won't pull all the way through.
    - **Step 3:** Wet your damp sponge or paper towel.
    - **Step 4:** Pinch the wet sponge around the string near the cup, and pull it down the string in short, jerky strokes to vibrate the bottom of the cup and mimic a turkey gobble.



New Outdoor Classroom at Madison Elementary

Our chapter was part of making this happen, a new Accessible Outdoor Classroom at Madison Elementary! We were part of over seventy-five individual donors and nearly twenty businesses and organizations that made this happen. The project was managed by Eagle Scout candidate, Bridger Barret, in partnership with their PTO-Green & Healthy Schools Team. The seed money for the project came from a bequest of a former staff member from Rotary Club Stevens Point. On October 21, the school held their official ribbon-cutting event. We even have a paver with our new name for our contribution of $1,500 to the project. It is a beautiful structure that will serve this school for decades to come.



Visit it at 800 Maria Drive, Stevens Point or learn more about the project at www.MadisonElemGrows.com Thank you BCACW!



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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 BCACW 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.***

Name: _____

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Join/renew online:

Go to our secure website and click on "Ways to Give"
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Please make check payable to:
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PO Box 928
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More Ways to Give

We appreciate your additional donations supporting the work of BCACW.

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

☐ $_____ BCACW Chapter Operations Fund.

BCACW ***will not distribute your contact information to any other organization.***
BCACW and the Community Foundation are 501(c)(3) organizations.
Your donation will be tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

Please remember BCACW **in your estate planning!**

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