

LAKELAND AUDUBON SOCIETY



The Chat



April 2023

CHAPTER MEETING

Tuesday, March 25

7:00 PM

Lions Field House - 270 Elkhorn Road (Hwy 67), Williams Bay, WI

Free and open to the public.

Featuring the following educational talk:

"Getting to Know Shorebirds"

By Bill Volkert

Shorebirds can be challenging to identify, with some 40 species known to occur in the Upper Midwest. However, by breaking down this large order of birds into its component parts and learning to look closely at key features which define adaptations to specialized feeding niches, observers can learn to identify shorebirds during their annual migrations.

About the Speaker

Bill worked as the naturalist and wildlife educator for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at Horicon Marsh for 27 years, where he conducted more than 3,700 education programs for over 220,000 people. His broad audiences included professional training for 66 delegations of scientists from 43 countries. Bill has been watching and studying birds for 50 years and in his travels has sighted more than 4,200 species. To facilitate his studies, he is also a federally licensed master bird bander, with the Bird Banding Laboratory of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Bill shares his experiences and understanding of the natural world through lectures, presentations, field trips and the media. He has been a regular guest on Wisconsin Public Radio for more than 30 years with over 200 appearances as Wisconsin's bird expert. He is also working on several writing projects that will give these presentations more permanence and reach an even wider public.



One of the "Peeps" in typical habitat. Photo by Bill Volkert.

When it Pays to Take a Second Look

By Wayne Rohde

This past March 11th, as the snow continued to accumulate, I glanced out my window at the numerous birds, including about 20 House Sparrows (aka: English Sparrows), which were furiously scratching for seeds beneath one of our feeders. But something caught my eye, something which appeared a bit odd on one of the birds, so after doing a double take I quickly grabbed my camera in order to capture a few shots before the differently marked individual flew away. Then, as I eagerly reviewed the images, the reason for my surprise became apparent: the bird that looked different than the numerous male House Sparrows was not a House Sparrow at all, but its close relative in the weaver finch or old-world sparrow family: a Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer Montanus*).

Unlike the male House Sparrow, which has a grayish crown, male and female Eurasian Tree Sparrows alike sport a brownish crown. But even more obvious --and the tell-tale field mark which grabbed my attention-- is the prominent black spot which adorns the white cheek of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow (the House Sparrow has no such cheek spot); in addition, the black bib of the House Sparrow generally extends farther down its breast.

In 1870, a dozen (some authorities claim as many as 20) Eurasian Tree Sparrows were introduced in the St. Louis, Missouri area. Since that time, they have spread from northeast Missouri to southeast Iowa and west central Illinois. For the most part, the range of this species has largely been restricted to this relatively small region, and birders have been known to travel to St. Louis in order to see the birds. More recently, it appears that Eurasian Tree Sparrows have extended their range to the northeast. A number of individuals, for example, have been found within flocks of House Sparrows in Wisconsin's Green County -- especially during the winter months.

House Sparrows, initially introduced to North America in 1851 in a vain attempt to control insect pests, despite the fact that these birds are primarily seed eaters, have themselves become pests: especially to native cavity nesting birds such as Eastern Bluebirds and Purple Martins. Eurasian Tree Sparrows, by way of contrast, appear to be much less aggressive, and are actually out-competed for nest sites by House Sparrows - a factor which may account for the relatively small range of Eurasian Tree Sparrows. On the other hand, the population of House Sparrows has declined during the past century, even though this species is still abundant throughout North America. Could it be that this decline has afforded an opportunity for the Eurasian Tree Sparrow to expand its own territory?

One need only recall a host of other non-native avian species such as Mute Swans, Rock Doves, and European Starlings, to recognize that such introductions, even in the case of good intentions, can wreak havoc on our native birds, and thus on the fragile ecological balance and health of our environment. From spreading disease to competing for food and habitat, introductions of non-native birds, much like that of non-native plants (such as Purple Loosestrife) and other organisms (such as Zebra Mussels), can have a multiplicity of adverse effects. I wonder, for example, what will come of the introduction of the Eurasian Collared-Dove to southern Florida in 1974. This species has spread rapidly over the continent, reaching Wisconsin over a decade ago, and has been nesting in our yard for the past few years.

Perhaps the moral of the story is this: Sometimes it pays to take a second look. Not only while birding (for identification purposes), but also for thinking (about conservation matters).



Eurasian Tree Sparrow



House Sparrow

Nesting, Kingfisher Style

By Janice Bain



Early spring is a great time to look for bird nests. The leaves are gone, enabling you to notice things you previously missed. Birds are skilled at camouflaging their nests for protection. Usually it is smartly located, maybe in the crotch of branches tricking your eyes into skipping right over it. Nests built in trees and bushes are the ones people most encounter and are happy to talk about. This article is about an unusual nester, one that hasn't piqued the curiosity of most. It doesn't build a cavity, cup, platform, pendulous or ground nest. It is a burrower, but one without the luxury of a shovel.

Meet the Belted Kingfisher, it is well known as a skilled fisher. Kingfishers are found near streams, lakes, rivers and ponds. They are usually perched on a branch that allows them to survey the water below. When a meal is spotted, it dives down into the water and fans its tail to correct its aim. If it is successful, it returns to its perch with its catch and proceeds to beat it to death on a branch. Lastly, it flips the fish into the air and swallows it headfirst. Many are aware of these Kingfisher traits but ask the same people where a Belted Kingfisher nests and you will most likely get perplexed looks. Most haven't even considered where or how nesting takes place for Kingfishers.

As burrowing nesters, you won't find their nests in any tree. They burrow a hole into vertical earthen banks usually avoiding those with vegetation; tree roots interfere with their digging. While they prefer a bank near water they may use a ditch, road cut, landfill, sand pit, or gravel pit that is far from water to raise their young. The entrance hole is a mere 3 inches in diameter but the tunnel they dig may extend from 3 to 6 feet in length. The tunnel usually starts about 18 inches below the cliff top and is dug at a slight incline to prevent rainwater from flooding the cavity. The end of the tunnel, the chamber, is a bit roomier; it is roughly egg-shaped with a floor nearly a foot around and a 7-inch ceiling. Both parents create this space by taking turns digging the tunnel with their beaks and feet. The male puts in twice the time digging as the female.

Throughout the breeding season, a layer of undigested fish bones and fish scales accumulate and help provide some insulation for the chicks. This creates an odor that is a compilation of fish, dirt and eventually feces. As the pair repeatedly goes in and out, their feet create a groove on the bottom of the tunnel, a sure sign that a pair of Kingfishers are using the space.

Once the nest has been excavated, the female will lay 5-8 glossy white eggs. During the nesting season, both the male and female develop brood patches; a patch of featherless skin on their underside used to incubate eggs. Thus, both parents will spend time incubating. After 22 to 24 days the nestlings hatch, helpless and naked, as they peep and wiggle in the pitch-dark chamber. These wee naked chicks need plenty of food to survive.

The male rattles from a dead branch nearby. It darts into the small hole and makes its way up the tunnel. The chicks have heard the rattle and are eager for a meal of regurgitated fish. After feeding the young, he uses his brood patch to keep them warm. A mere 5 minutes later, they hear the rattle of the female. The male makes a quick exit down the tunnel to allow room for the female to enter. She will then feed the chicks and brood the nestlings just as the male has done. This fishing and feeding by both parents continue from dawn until dark every day. They are always on the lookout for danger and protect their fishing territory which includes the nesting site and about 1,000-foot segment of stream.

Inside the nest, a nestling ejects feces onto the wall of the cavity (eww). It then scratches and pecks at the wall with its beak to bring the feces and loose dirt down onto the scale and bone covered floor. The chicks are equipped with a special tip on their bill, most likely to help protect them from their wall pecking. The special tip will be shed by the time they leave the burrow. The first week is spent naked. Finally, feathers begin to emerge, but they are tightly contained in a sheath. The chicks look comical, a bit like a porcupine given the dense layer of thick quills they wear. By day 18, the quills begin to split and the feathers emerge, 'ta dah' - they are nearly fully feathered. In a few short days they will wander down the long tunnel toward sunlight.

Young Kingfishers are not given time to flutter or to practice flying. When they step out of the entrance, their wings must work on the first try. They will fly to the top of a nearby tree alongside one or both parents. The parents will continue to feed them for a few days as they get accustomed to their new surroundings; then the lessons begin! Fishing is the most important lesson, and it is taught with parents dropping dead fish into the water for the nestlings to retrieve and eat. Lessons continue until the fledglings are independently catching their own fish. It takes roughly 10 days to perfect this skill. At this point, it's time to say good-bye and the parents drive the young away from their territory. Some pairs will start all over again and raise a second brood. In the fall and winter, each parent will independently maintain their own separate territory.

For me, nothing is easier to miss than a 3-inch hole a foot and a half below the top of a bank with a groove on its bottom! It's no wonder that few people are aware of the Kingfisher's ingenious burrowing and nesting habits or their innate ability to keep the location of their burrows safe from prying eyes and dastardly predators. If you're lucky enough to have a resident pair of Kingfishers in your area, take some time to observe their behaviors and patterns, you may discover their burrow location and experience the joy of seeing this process unfold. After learning about nesting Kingfishers, I've begun to ask myself what other interesting avian unknowns are out there waiting to be discovered. Stay tuned, you may find out in my next article.



Belted Kingfisher (Female)



Belted Kingfisher (Male)



Local Events

Opportunities abound for nature-based activities this Spring!

Celebrate Earth Day

Saturday, April 22

10:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Gateway Technical Collage (Elkhorn Campus) - 400 County Road H, Elkhorn, WI

Visit the Elkhorn Campus for a variety of on-campus activities to celebrate Earth Day! Visit booths from local environmental organizations, enter to win door prizes, enjoy a petting zoo, and drop off donation items and electronics to be recycled. Click or tap the link below for more information:

[Earth Day - Elkhorn Information | Gateway Technical College \(gtc.edu\)](#)

World Migratory Bird Day 2023

Sunday, May 7

8:00 AM - 9:30 AM

Four Seasons Nature Preserve - N1889 County Road H, Lake Geneva, WI

A licensed bird bander will be catching, banding, and releasing migratory birds. Come see songbirds up close! Then, join us at Glacial Park at 10:00 AM for a special presentation by Stephanie Schmidt, Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator for the International Crane Foundation. This event is part of the Friends of Hackmatack NWR - World Migratory Bird Day Celebration. For more information, please visit their website by clicking or tapping the link below.

[World Migratory Bird Day 2023 - Friends of Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge \(hackmatacknwr.org\)](#)

World Migratory Bird Day Hike

Saturday, May 13

7:00 AM - 9:00 AM

Kishwauketoe Nature Conservancy - 251 Elkhorn Road (Hwy 67), Williams Bay, WI

Join us for a guided tour through one of the best birding locations in Walworth County. This walk will be co-led by KNC Board Member Jim Killian and members of Lakeland Audubon. Click or tap on the link below for more information.

[Kishwauketoe Nature Conservancy - Dedicated to the Children of Tomorrow \(friendsofknc.org\)](#)

(Local Events Continued)

Spring Bird Walk

Saturday, May 13

8:00 AM - 10:00 AM

Price Park Conservancy - N6418 Hodunk Road, Elkhorn, WI

Join us at beautiful Price Park Conservancy for a morning with the birds. We will hike the park's trails and watch for birds and other interesting things of the natural world. Check in for the event will begin at 8:00 AM and the walk will start at 8:30 AM. Coffee and muffins will be served prior to the walk. This event is organized by the Kettle Moraine Land Trust. for more information, click or tap on the link below.

[Kettle Moraine Land Trust – Serving the South Kettle Moraine lakes area in Walworth County, Wisconsin \(kmlandtrust.org\)](http://kmlandtrust.org)

Kettle Moraine Bird Festival

Friday, May 19

8:00 AM - 12:00 PM (Noon)

Bromley Woods - W5798 Greening Road, La Grange (Whitewater), WI

Guided bird walks at Bromley Woods Preserve \$5. Available at 8, 9 and 10 AM. There will be a presentation, with lunch included for an additional \$20 at the local United Methodist Church - N8548 County Road H, La Grange (Whitewater), WI. For more information and to pre-register for the event, visit the Geneva Lake Conservancy website by clicking or tapping on the link below.

Geneva Lake Conservancy

RARE BIRD SIGHTING

Leucistic Red-winged Blackbird Spotted at Local Marsh



Photos by Kathleen Dooley, Lake Como Dam - Town of Geneva

Field Trip

Tuesday, April 18, 2023

10:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Horicon Marsh NWR – N7725 State Road 28, Horicon, WI

Join us for a visit to Horicon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge. We will stop at multiple locations within the refuge to view birds and other wildlife. The starting point for this field trip will be the Wisconsin DNR visitors center, which is located near the City of Horicon on the Southeast corner of the refuge. The field trip will be cancelled in the event of bad weather. Carpooling is encouraged, but not required.

Please contact us if you have any questions or would like more information.

<https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact> Call or Text: +1 (262) 729-9702

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Field Trips

(Volunteer Needed)

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Bird Walks

Saturdays

11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Big Foot Beach State Park

N1550 S Lakeshore Drive, Lake Geneva, WI

Meet in the main parking area to the right of the entrance station a little before 11:00 AM. A state park sticker (\$28, \$13 if age 65 or older) or daily pass (\$8, \$3 if age 65 or older) is required to enter Big Foot Beach State Park.

Sundays

11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

White River County Park

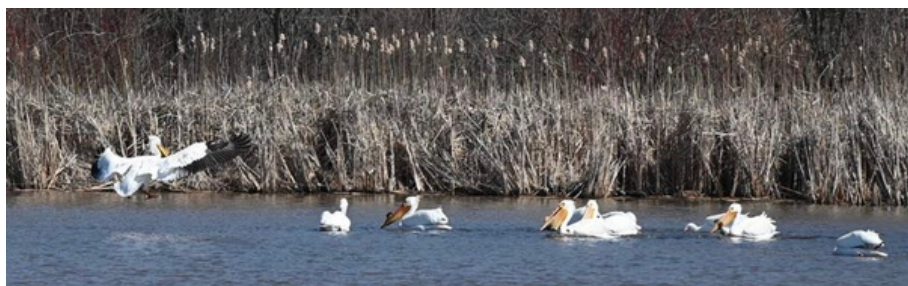
6503 Sheridan Springs Road, Lyons, WI

Get out and enjoy one of the best parks Walworth County has to offer. We'll walk the trails and be on the lookout for birds and other critters. We'll also watch for plant blooms and other interesting elements of nature. Meet at the kiosk by the parking lot a little before 11:00 AM.

Please contact us to let us know you are interested in attending a walk.

<https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact>

Call or Text: +1 (262) 729-9702



White Pelicans in the Delavan Inlet - Delavan, WI. Photo by Janice Bain

The Chat is the newsletter of the Lakeland Audubon Chapter of the National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 473, Elkhorn, WI 53121. Subscription is \$15 per year for printed copies sent by US mail.



LAKELAND AUDUBON SOCIETY
A chapter of the National Audubon Society
serving Walworth County, Wisconsin and the
surrounding areas.

LAKELAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

Native Plant Sale

2023 Chapter Fundraiser

Order Form

Order date:

Orders are due by May 26, 2023
(Payment must be included)

Customer Information

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone number:

Email:

Mail to: Lakeland Audubon Society
P.O. Box 473
Elkhorn, WI 53121



Quantity of Plants

Plant Species

	Pasque Flower
	False Aster
	Sweet Flag
	Whorled Milkweed
	Tall Coreopsis
	Shorts Aster
	Pale Purple Coneflower
	Mist Flower
	Early Sunflower
	Elm-Leaved Goldenrod
	Wild Senna
	Bottlebrush Grass
	Prairie Dropseed

Total Number of Plants (minimum of 4)

"Buy 8 and get 2 for free"

Total Amount Due

X 5.00 = \$

+Donation of: \$

= \$

Order Pick-up:

Orders need to be picked up at the Lions Field House (270 Elkhorn Road, Williams Bay, WI)
on Tuesday, June 6, 2023 between 4:00 PM - 7:00 PM. "No Exceptions"