



The Chat

February 2026

CHAPTER MEETING

Tuesday, February 24

7:00 PM

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

Free and open to the public!

"Migratory Birds and the Spread of Invasive Non-native Shrubs"

By James Marshall

Invasive bush honeysuckles are primarily dispersed by birds that feed on honeysuckle berries. Those berries, however, are relatively high in carbohydrates and poor in lipids. This is a combination that makes them low-quality food for most birds and leads to the question of why birds would consume honeysuckle in the first place.

Migration is one of the more widely recognized bird behaviors, even though not all birds migrate. Migration is a very costly behavior requiring birds to repeatedly find sufficient food in unfamiliar environments. Delays in finding food resulting in delayed arrival on wintering grounds can have costs that extend into future breeding seasons. Long searches for particular foods in unfamiliar environments can also increase the risk of being eaten by predators. These factors all increase the probability that migratory birds will settle for lower quality food in order to continue their migration quickly and safely.

Resident birds do not face these costs. For much of the fall, abundant food and reduced environmental stresses allow resident birds to be selective in their food choices. As a result, we predict that migratory birds are more likely than resident birds to choose low quality food like honeysuckle. To test this, we collected fecal samples from migrant and resident birds caught each fall at two sites in and around Rockford, Illinois. We then compared the number of migrant birds carrying honeysuckle seeds to the number of resident birds carrying honeysuckle seeds.

Bird dispersal of plant seeds is an example of a mutualistic relationship. These relationships have the potential to become very specific, with birds and plants both evolving features that increase their dependence on each other. Given that many of the bush honeysuckles in the Midwest are invasive species, it is uncertain whether native bird species can successfully disperse viable seeds. To investigate this question, we planted honeysuckle seeds collected from bird fecal samples to determine how often bird-dispersed seeds would germinate relative to seeds taken directly from honeysuckle bushes.



Invasive non-native Honeysuckle, photo provided by James Marshall.

About the speaker: James Marshall grew up in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. He began his interest in birds through a Boy Scouts project, and his parents frequently brought him to meetings of the Prairie Woods Audubon Society. He has a degree in environmental science from TCU. He studied birds in power line rights-of-way for his Master's degree from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and West Nile virus impacts on cardinals for his Ph.D. from Ohio State. He has been in the department of Chemical and Biological Sciences at Rockford University since 2010. There, he teaches ecology, conservation, and evolution courses, and studies how birds spread things we wish they wouldn't.



Cedar Waxwing, photo provided by James Marshall



Swainson's Thrush, photo provided by James Marshall



Common Buckthorn (ripened fruit and leaves)



Common Buckthorn (large shrub form)

WHY FEBRUARY SOUNDS LIKE A HORROR MOVIE

Every scream has a purpose.

GREAT HORNED OWL — 25 days on the nest. Her mate calls at 2am to deliver food.

CARDINAL — Staking territory 6 weeks early. He's fighting his own reflection.

SKUNK — That smell = rejection. She sprayed him point-blank.

RED FOX VIXEN — That blood-curdling scream? She's announcing a 10-day fertility window.

Don't call animal control. Your backyard is performing the oldest opera on Earth.

Lake Geneva Christmas Bird Count Report

Here's a recap of the final data that was collected through the count

By Kyle Cudworth

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in our local Lake Geneva circle was held on Sunday, Dec. 21, 2025, adding to many decades of data submitted from this area. Our circle of 7.5 miles radius is centered near the southwest corner of Lake Como. The weather on count day was sunny all day, with temperatures in the teens and twenties, very little snow on the ground, and considerable open water on our larger lakes.

This year, about 27 local birders spent some or all of the day driving and hiking their assigned areas, or watching their feeders and yards, all keeping careful track of how many birds of which species were seen. Some did feeder watches as well as covering an area. Cumulatively, we spent about 100 hours birding, drove over 400 miles, and hiked about 17 miles, totaling 12,081 birds. In all, 60 species were found on count day and 3 more during count week.

We often count more Canada Geese than any other species (2249 this year), but Common Mergansers were more common this year, with 2383 counted (including an estimated 2000 together on Geneva Lake). Common Goldeneyes were also very numerous, with 1889 logged, mostly on Delavan Lake. We saw 28 Bald Eagles, which is far above recent years. According to Audubon's CBC website, the Mergansers, Goldeneyes, and Eagles were new records for our count circle. We also had a few unusual sightings, such as Eurasian Tree Sparrows seen by 2 birders during the count week, a Red-Tailed Hawk with a Crow in its beak, and a Hairy Woodpecker with a white head.

Lisa Granbur organized things before the count and Kyle Cudworth compiled the data and submitted it to Audubon. Counters included Wayne Rohde, Jim Black, Jim Killian, Pat Parsons, Lisa Granbur, Lynne Carpenter, Dale Jefchak, the Haases, the Tyksinskis, Aleata Evans, Kathleen Wagner, and Nick Mimier; as well as Kevin Dickey, Joe Jacyna, Beth Goeppinger, the Martins, Porter McLean, Doug Mohr, Kelley Frank, and the Cudworth/Albrecht team. I humbly apologize to anyone I left off this list or whose name I spelled wrong. This year we had a few new people participating in our CBC and we would love to have some additional birders join the fun next year.



Common Merganser | [Cornell Lab - All About Birds](#)



Common Goldeneye | [Cornell Lab - All About Birds](#)

6 LATE-WINTER MISTAKES THAT HARM NATIVE BEES



CUTTING STEMS
TOO EARLY



RAKING BARE
SOIL PATCHES



CLEARING LEAF
LITTER TOO SOON



TILLING BEDS
BEFORE EMERGENCE



REMOVING
DEAD WOOD



OVER-MULCHING
BARE GROUND

Field Trip

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

10:00 AM – Noon

Lake Ivanhoe/Bloomfield SWA – 845 Dunbar Avenue, Burlington, WI

Free to attend and open to the public!

Join us for some birding at [Lake Ivanhoe](#), which is part of the Bloomfield State Wildlife Area. The property is located south of Burlington and east of Lake Geneva in the Town of Bloomfield. We will do some hiking and also some stationary scanning for birds. The location has an interesting and somewhat unique history that is worth reading about. For more information, click or tap the following link: [Lake Ivanhoe's History-WHS](#). Meet at the parking area on the north side of Dunbar Ave before 10:00 AM. From there, we will follow the trails throughout the property on the lookout for birds during spring migration.

Please contact us and let us know if you are interested in attending this field trip.

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

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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 or daily pass (\$28, \$13) (\$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 and let us know that you are interested in attending a walk.

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

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.