LAKELAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Chat

November 2026

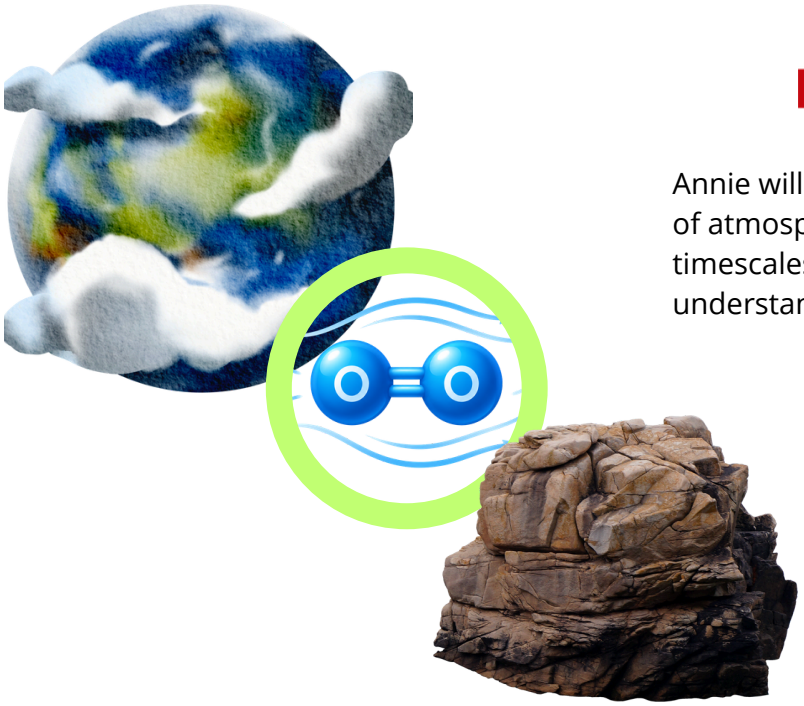
CHAPTER MEETING

Tuesday, November 24
7:00 PM
Lions Field House
270 Elkhorn Road (Highway 67), Williams Bay, WI

Free and open to the public!

The Rise of Oxygen in Earth's Atmosphere 2.5 Billion Years Ago

By Annie Bauer



BADGER TALKS

Annie will describe what we know about the trajectory of atmospheric oxygen concentrations over billion-year timescales on the Earth, and how this is critical for our understanding of the evolution of complex life.



About the Speaker

Annie Bauer is a geologist and geochronologist– she studies how the Earth became a habitable planet, from the origin and evolution of the earliest continents to the development of an oxygen-rich atmosphere. In her work, Annie uses the decay of radioactive isotopes in rocks and minerals as chronometers and tracers of major geological processes.

When Change Is in the Air: Changes to Birds, Birders & amp; Birding

This ever-changing world in which we live entails changes to every corner of the cosmos, including to the birds, as well as to us birders and our birding.

By Wayne Rohde

Consider, first, the changes to birds…

Years ago, the late, well-known and highly regarded Wisconsin birder Noel Cutright observed that approximately one-third of our birds are in decline, another one-third are on the increase, while the remaining one-third are holding their own.

Several species of ducks have increased in abundance, thanks to Ducks Unlimited and the Duck Stamp Program, which raises funds that help preserve wetlands. Trumpeter Swans, once extirpated from Wisconsin, are now present throughout the state due to successful reintroductions. Whooping Cranes now migrate from Wisconsin to Florida each fall, and back again each spring, because of the innovative and tireless efforts of Operation Migration. Several of our diurnal raptors, such as Bald Eagles, Ospreys, and Cooper's Hawks, once nearly decimated by DDT, have recovered to such an extent that they are now fairly common to common, thanks to the Endangered Species Act and the nationwide ban on DDT. Turkey Vultures, once found primarily in the Baraboo Hills and the bluffs along the Mississippi River, now soar the skies statewide (thanks to roadkill?). Wild Turkeys can again be found throughout the Badger State, because of the exchange program between Wisconsin and the State of Missouri (the "Show Me" State sent us one turkey for every two Ruffed Grouse we sent them).

Canada Geese now roam almost every beach and golf course, and Ring-billed Gulls are found in abundance at almost every Walmart parking lot - as well as in countless agricultural fields behind tractors and plows. Species as diverse as Sandhill Cranes and Pileated Woodpeckers have fairly recently evidenced rather amazing tolerance of and adaptation to human presence. Eurasian Collared-Doves, mistakenly released in the Bahamas from the Mideast, have rapidly spread from Florida northward to cheeseland.

What's true of the aforementioned birds is also the case with many songbirds. Eastern Bluebirds (and Tree Swallows!) have multiplied due to the efforts of many folks to build, place, and monitor bluebird houses. The population of the rare Kirtland's Warbler has been boosted in our state --in suitable jack pine stands-- aided by the eradication of nearby parasitic Brown-headed Cowbirds. House Finches have spread west to Wisconsin in the 1980s, after the illegal release of illegally caged birds in New York City. Eurasian Tree Sparrows, native to Europe and Asia, have gradually and mysteriously pushed north and east, including to southern Wisconsin, from a very localized and small population in St. Louis, Missouri. Several other songbirds, such as Tufted Titmice, Carolina Wrens, and Northern Cardinals, as well as Red-bellied Woodpeckers, have extended their range farther and farther north in the past several decades, due to climate change.

On the other hand, all-too-many species are in decline: some are in serious decline, while others are now extinct (e.g., the Ivory-billed Woodpecker). In a few cases, some species suffer at the hands of other birds. Golden-winged Warblers are displaced by the increasing population of Blue-winged Warblers. Non-native birds like starlings and house sparrows are a deleterious menace to cavity-nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers and Purple Martins. But more often than not, avian declines are directly related to human threats. The Passenger Pigeon is extinct because of over-hunting. Dickcissels are mercilessly poisoned by the thousands on their wintering territory in Venezuela. Wood Thrushes, along with Veeries, as well as Western Meadowlarks, along with Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrows, have plummeted due to human-caused fragmentation of forests and grasslands, respectively. Still others are threatened by habitat loss. Our native American Kestrels and non-native Gray Partridges have also experienced serious declines – even though the causes of such decreases are not necessarily understood. Yet other factors can be at play. Northern Bobwhites (as well as Tufted Titmice and Carolina Wrens) may undergo population declines at the northernmost extremities of their ranges – particularly after severe winters. And the so-called irruptive finches (i.e., Pine Siskins, Common Redpolls, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Red and White-winged Crossbills, and Red-breasted Nuthatches) fluctuate from year-to-year, depending on the success or failure of the pinecone seed crop.

Consider, next, the changes to birders…

Years ago, according to some, the community of birders consisted primarily of what was derisively deemed "little old ladies" – confined largely to elderly females (regardless of size or shape!).

But how that conception has changed in more recent years, both in perception and in reality. For in the past few decades the number of people who count themselves birders has grown in leaps and bounds, and surely includes many young people of both genders: men and boys, as well as women and girls. And that's a good thing, is it not?

Consider, finally, the changes to birding…

When I first started birding in 1967 (yes, 2026 is my 60th year of birding!), my only means of seeing and hearing birds entailed the use of a $19.95 7x35 Penny's binocular and my own ears. But birding optics have improved greatly through the years, especially with respect to the more expensive and much sharper roof prism binoculars, and the higher magnification spotting scopes which are great for viewing distant and/or skittish birds such as loons, grebes, waterfowl or shorebirds. Furthermore, apps such as Merlin alert today's birders to the otherwise undetected songs and call notes of birds.

Back in 1967, my sole field guides for identification were Roger Tory Peterson's well-known A Field Guide to the Birds (3rd edition) and the newly published "Golden Guide." RTP's 3rd edition still featured many black-and-white patternistic illustrations, scattered throughout the guide, whereas the "Golden Guide" sported color illustrations on every two-page spread. But later guides, particularly the "Geo Guide," published by the National Geographic Society, and the "Sibley Guide," illustrated and written by birding guru David Sibley, proved to be more comprehensive and detailed. The latter, for example, shows the over-wing and under-wing appearance of birds in flight. In addition, the "Audubon Guides" as well as the "Focus Guides" by birding veteran Kenn Kaufman utilized digital photos of birds instead of paintings, thus offering, to those who had both types of field guides, the advantages of each approach. Furthermore, many specialty guides became available (e.g., to waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, hummingbirds, warblers, sparrows), providing significantly more detailed ID clues for more challenging bird groups. Titles such as Hawks in Flight by Pete Dunne, David Sibley and Clay Sutton, and Hawks at a Distance and Hawks from Every Angle by Jerry Liguori, demonstrate the special skills which can be deployed in the art and science of bird identification.

When I initially started birding by ear, I purchased the 33 1/3 rpm vinyl recording of Peterson's A Field Guide to Bird Songs to learn bird songs at home, and augmented it with the turntable recordings that accompanied National Geographic's Water, Prey and Game Birds of North America and Song and Garden Birds of North America. Those days eventually gave way to cassette versions of Peterson's Birding by Ear and More Birding by Ear, as well as the "Stokes" CD set – each of which provided additional cues for IDing birds by their vocalizations. But today's birders can check out birding apps such as the excellent ones from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology – whether on a computer at home or via a smartphone in the field.

Long gone are the days when I lugged a large and heavy film SLR and telephoto lens to visually record my findings. Now I take a smaller and lighter digital camera and lens into the field … and capture images to my heart's content, with a much lower cost per image to boot! Long gone too are the days when I carried a cassette recorder and parabolic ear afield. Now I simply switch my camera from the still image mode to the video clip mode to capture audio as well as visual images. I've also come to discover that in many situations I can use my camera and lens to bird, without the need to lug along my binoculars, tripod and spotting scope. I've even found that recording the sights and sounds of birds in the field, digitally, will help me see and identify more birds … because I'm able to inspect photos at my leisure, and discover (after the fact) what I may very well have failed to notice in the field (e.g., a lone Lapland Longspur in a flock of Horned Larks). I'm also able to utilize these images to get a more accurate count of birds in large flocks (e.g., thousands of Canada Geese at the Fontana beach during a Christmas Bird Count).



Click here to learn more!

In days gone by, the proper identification of birds took place in three basic steps: (1) studying birding resources, such as field guides and audio recordings, at home; (2) looking for and listening to birds in the field, and taking copious notes of what one has seen and heard; and (3) consulting with the previously mentioned birding resources to compare what one has observed in the field with the expert resources – when back at one's vehicle, or back at home. But how things have changed with the arrival of Merlin and other apps! More and more devices are becoming available for use in the field, which can – it is claimed—secure proper identification for us. Of course these devices can also be mistaken, and for that reason their suggestions should be regarded for what they are: suggestions. Nevertheless, these apps have surely changed the way we process what we see and hear … and provide another layer: the multi-layered task of correctly identifying birds.

As one might suspect, birding has changed in several other ways too. At one time, birding hotlines enabled a birder to report a sighting, especially of a rarity, to the wider birding community. A call chain was utilized to call birding buddies via a landline phone, a practice which eventually gave way to an approach both quicker and easier: email. But emails have in turn given way to social media, and "chasers" and "twitchers" now rely on such means to be informed of the location of rare birds in order that they, at a moment's notice, might track down such birds and so pad their life lists. As another example, observations of birds were once made on field cards, and these cards were funneled to coordinators who would tabulate the results by hand for various birding organizations and their publications (e.g., the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, North American Birding, etc.). But many (most?) of today's birders "e-bird" by submitting their observations directly and digitally to a global database, which quickly and automatically tabulates a full range of data regarding bird observations (i.e., species, habitat, location, etc.), to the end that this data may be available to the global birding community in real time. In addition, social media has enabled birders to share their observations and images for review and interaction about key identification points –especially with respect to hard-to-ID groups of birds, such as hawks in flight, shorebirds, Empidonax flycatchers, confusing fall warblers, juvenile sparrows, etc. In this way, birders help other birders make correct IDs. (Might birders be able to ID birds better than they can ID each other?)

Finally, yet another set of welcome changes seems to have occurred among today's birders: (1) they are not content to simply properly identify the birds they encounter, but they are eager to learn more about the natural history of these birds, indeed about all aspects of ornithology, and thus to enjoy in a wholistic way the exciting experience of birding; (2) they are not content to restrict their knowledge and appreciation of the world which surrounds us to the birds, but they are eager to understand more about the entire environment, the ecosphere, and thus they want to grow in their appreciation of all things wild: from rocks to mosses, lichens, mushrooms, ferns, wildflowers, trees, arthropods, insects (including dragonflies and damselflies), amphibians, reptiles, mammals, etc.; and (3) they are not content to simply understand, as if knowledge were an end in and of itself, for they are also eager to act … so as to conserve the beauty of this fragile world in which we too participate, for generations to come.

What about you, fellow birder? Have you experienced or witnessed any of these (or other) changes with respect to bird, birders, or birding? If so, I'd love to hear of them.



Bald Eagle with nest building material. Photo by Wayne Rohde



Click here to learn more!

Katydids

So what is a Katydid?

By Janice Bain





Confusion often sets in the first time one sees a katydid. Is it some type of cricket? A grasshopper? They seem to be a little of both. Interestingly, while they look more like a grasshopper, they are a little more closely related to crickets. Monikers like “bush cricket” or "long-horned grasshopper” can be misleading and add to the confusion. Let’s explore the curiosity of this wonderful insect.



- There are over 8,000 katydid species worldwide and they can be found on all continents except Antarctica. North America is host to 255 katydid species with about 20 of those species found in the midwest.
- Each species is a “master of disguise.” They are often leaf shaped and are colored to match their environment. In the photo at right, note how difficult it is to locate the curve-tailed bush katydid on the hibiscus. It looks just like a stem. (Photo courtesy of: Wisconsin Horticulture Division of Extension)
- Both katydids and crickets perform stridulation, rubbing their wings to make noise. The sound the katydid produces sounds “buzzier” than the classic cricket noise. As nocturnal insects, you are more likely to hear them than actually see them.
- Katydids are taller than they are wide and typically hold their wings vertically over the body (kind of like a roof over a house).
- The hearing organs of a katydid are not located on the head, but rather are found on the front legs.
- Katydids have long, slender antennae, at least equal to the length of their body. (Some sport antennae multiple times longer than the length of their bodies.)
- Antennae are a quick way to distinguish katydid from grasshoppers since grasshopper antennae are generally short and thickened. Antennae provide a sense of touch used to detect obstacles, humidity and chemicals while they perform their nocturnal activities.
- Most katydids are herbivores but a few species are carnivorous. They are considered to be beneficial or neutral to a garden. They are also a good food source for birds, bats, frogs and lizards etc. Finding katydids in your yard is a sign of a healthy, well-balanced ecosystem.



Sources

Katydids: https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/katydids/

Katydid facts: called bush crickets but that's confusing! | Animal Fact Files

Don't Confuse These Two

Downy Woodpecker

Dryobates pubescens



5.5 – 6.7 in
(14 – 17 cm)

Hairy Woodpecker

Leuconotopicus villosus



7.1 – 10.2 in
(18 – 26 cm)

Mauricio's
HOMESTEAD & GARDEN



BILL SIZE
Short, stubby bill. About the same length as the head.



BILL SIZE
Long, chisel-like bill. Noticeably longer than the head.



TAIL FEATHERS
Black spots on the outer white tail feathers (usually).



TAIL FEATHERS
Outer white tail feathers usually clean and without black spots.



RED PATCH (MALE)
Usually a solid red patch across the back of the head.



RED PATCH (MALE)
Red patch often divided by a vertical black line.



OVERALL SIZE
Smaller and more compact with a shorter tail.



OVERALL SIZE
Larger and more elongated with a longer tail.

Different Shapes Different Stories ♡

What's Flying Overhead?

Raptors of North America

Use wing shape, tail shape and flight style to help identify!

Look Up Learn Enjoy! ♡

Falcons

- Long, pointed wings
- Long tail
- Fast, powerful flight
- Often flap more than other raptors



Example:
Peregrine Falcon
(and American Kestrel)

Accipiters

- Short, rounded wings
- Long tail
- Quick wingbeats, then glide
- Built for speed and agility



Examples:
Cooper's Hawk
Sharp-shinned Hawk

Buteos

- Broad, rounded wings
- Short, wide tail
- Soars and glides
- Often seen riding thermal currents



Examples:
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk

Northern Harrier

- Long, narrow wings
- Long tail
- Flies low, often with a slight V shape
- May appear to hover



Northern Harrier
Unique white patch on rump (often visible in flight)

Osprey

- Long, narrow wings with a noticeable "kink"
- Shorter tail
- Often holds wings in an "M" shape
- Usually near water



Osprey
Look for the dark wrist patches.

Bald Eagle

- Very large, broad wings
- Short, white tail (adults)
- Soars with flat wings
- Immature eagles have mottled dark and light plumage (no white tail)



Bald Eagle
Adults have a white head and tail.

Turkey Vulture

- Very large, broad wings
- Short tail
- Holds wings in a shallow V (dihedral)
- Often teeters while soaring
- Two-tone look: dark body with lighter underside edges



Turkey Vulture
Look for the two-tone wings and small head (appears smaller than other raptors).

Field Trip



Wednesday, December 9, 2026
12:00 PM (Noon) – 2:00 PM
Lake Como Dam - Highway H, Town of Geneva, WI

Free and open to the public!

Join us as we visit the shores of beautiful Lake Como. We will search the lake for both resident and migrating waterfowl. This outing will be conducted in a more stationary manner, as we bird at one spot and then drive to another. This field trip will begin at the Lake Como dam/outlet, which is located at the East end of the lake just off of Highway H. Meet in the parking area prior to 9:00 AM.

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 ($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

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