

# The Northeast Wisconsin Birder

## Recreational Birding + Bird Conservation + Applied Birding



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December 2008

### Special points of interest:

- Evening Grosbeak
- X-mas Party

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### Evening Grosbeak Status

The Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) breeds throughout the northern forests of Canada and Northeastern United States, as well as at higher elevations in the West into central Mexico. During certain winters, they move to more southerly latitudes in the East, or to lower elevations in the West. These winter irruptions typically begin in early October, and flocks of Evening Grosbeak are conspicuous where they regularly aggregate at bird-feeding stations. An analysis of CBC data indicated that the evening grosbeak, like many Wisconsin winter residents, is an irruptive species. The overall frequency of sight-

ing will vary from year to year.

For many decades a common species in winter in the northern third of Wisconsin, this species has declined considerably in numbers here and across the northern United States and southern Canada. Populations in the western United States have remained stable though. Several hypotheses have been formulated for the significant decline. Global climate change may be halting southward winter movement and limiting breeding success throughout the Great Lake states. Logging practices may alter the natural seed production of hardwood tree

species, a favorite food of the species. Finally, the decline has been attributed to various diseases. There is evidence to suggest that the larger populations we've noted here in the past 50-70 years may have only been a recent phenomenon, and that they were formerly less common in the Great Lakes states and New England. Winter in Wisconsin is not the same without these colorful, big-billed sunflower seed glut-tions.

### NWBC Christmas Party

The December meeting will be the annual club Christmas Party. We will have a special Christmas treat as Kim Grveles is presenting an update on the status of Kirtland's warbler field research in Wisconsin. Our party and business meeting will follow.

If you have not signed up to bring a dish to pass, please contact Steve Petznick at MHNC: (920) 779-6433 or [petznisj@co.outagamie.wi.us](mailto:petznisj@co.outagamie.wi.us). Since there is another event at MHNC the same day, you are politely asked to bring a card table.





## Irruption Migrations

Although we understand the phenomenon of migration, the extent of migrations of specific species remains less predictable. Species such as some sparrows, grosbeaks, finches, and owls, vary annually. The unexpected and anticipated influx of certain species make winter birding exciting. This year is no exception as reports of crossbills, redpolls, and snowy owls is unusually high. Almost 20 different individuals have been reported!

Essentially all migration is tied to the availability of food sources. Neotropical migrants evolved to take advantage of the huge insect population in the

northern hemisphere during our summer. A number of boreal species show partial migrations. In years of low food availability, larger numbers of boreal species have migrated southward. They thus "irrupt" into our area. These species are typically either birds of prey, finches, or sparrows. Some western species fit this category as well, such as Bohemian Waxwing. On truly exceptional years we have had occurrences of Great Gray Owl and Boreal Owl as well.

Predicting the years when irruptions occur is currently less scientific than astrological. The best way to find out when they will occur is to be aware when

they are actually happening. Following rare bird alerts for states and provinces to our north is one way to anticipate them but perhaps the best way to find out is by word-of-mouth. Once again we assert that one of the best birding resources available is other birders. Keep your eyes open! With the early irruptions in November, late winter may prove to be even more successful.

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## NWBC Book Borrow Club

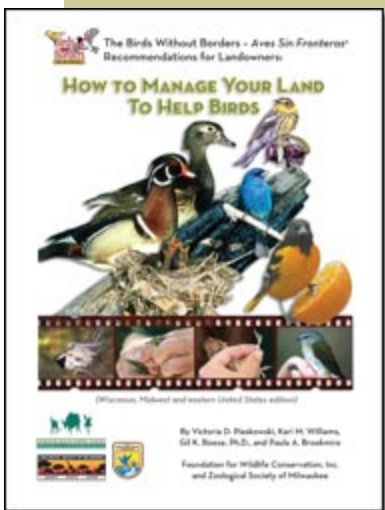
In keeping with the theme of the new NWBC Book Borrow Club, a book review form follows.

<http://bluebirdslaugh.blogspot.com>

If you have land that you'd like to manage to help birds, a new manual is available that will help you learn effective ways to do exactly that. "How to Manage Your Land to Help Birds", by Vicki Piaszkowski, Kari Williams, Gil Boese, and Paula Brookmire, is the product of a

decade of hard work by Birds Beyond Borders-Aves Sin Fronteras, a long-term project of the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation, Inc. and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee. How do you get a copy? There are two ways: the entire book is downloadable, or you can make a point of attending one of Vicki's talks around the state, where she gives them away. Production and publication of this book was funded by a grant, making it possible to give copies away. Learn more about the book, and

about Birds Beyond Borders: [www.zoosociety.org/Conservation/BWB-ASF/WiLandowner.php](http://www.zoosociety.org/Conservation/BWB-ASF/WiLandowner.php).



## Sax Zim Birding Festival

Although irruptions may not occur as far south as the Fox Cities, the Sax Zim bog annually produces northern rarities such as northern hawk owls. The habitat consists of a mix of cedar, tamarack, and spruce wetlands with a diversity of upland hardwood areas.

The 2009 Sax Zim Bog Festival of Birds will be held February 13-15, 2009. The festival will

offer a variety of guided field trips and ornithological presentations throughout the weekend. Registration and event information is located online at <http://moumn.org/sax-zim/>.

Consider traveling to the Duluth area and beyond. Many rarities show up throughout the winter months.




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## Bird Fun Facts

Hummingbirds are the only species which can fly backwards.

Many species of toucans have bills half as long as their bodies.

Roadrunners can eat rattlesnakes whole.

An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.

Emu can't walk backwards.

A group of owls is called a parliament.

A group of ravens is called a murder.

Chickens can't swallow upside down.

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## Upcoming Field Trips

No field trips have been scheduled by either the NWBC or WSO in December. A schedule of the upcoming field trips in 2009 will be available in the next newsletter. Until then, consider participating in one (or more) Christmas Bird Counts. Over 100 are held throughout Wisconsin. MHNC sponsors the Shiocton CBC. Details on

CBCs can be found on Wisbird.



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## *Northeast Wisconsin Birding Club*

### **Monthly Gatherings (first Saturdays)**

- >>> Pre-program bird hikes around Mosquito Hill Nature Center,  
New London (April, May & September)
- >>> Highly entertaining and informative programs
- >>> Food and fellowship time

### **Field Trips**

- >>> Most months have trips to birding "hot spots" in Wisconsin

### **Annual Events**

- >>> Birdathon fundraiser each May
- >>> Christmas social and dinner

***Promoting Recreational, Social, and Scientific Aspects of  
the Sport of Birding!***