



Meet a Member!

Nancy Willing recently exchanged her days as a middle school teacher at John Paul II Academy for a calmer existence



Nancy Willing

fulfilling her dreams and, of course, bird watching. She's been a Hoy Audubon member for the past two years. "I have always liked birds, but since I've been coming to the meetings, I've learned so much more about them." Nancy's parents' love of birds piqued her interest as a child. "My parents always fed them, and we enjoyed the visitors

that came to our yard." Not only does she still enjoy viewing birds from her kitchen window, but she and her husband have become actively involved in manning one of Hoy's bluebird trails. This is no simple feat, which includes gingerly opening up the birdhouses and counting eggs without stressing out the parents. "It's been fun looking for different birds we don't usually see in the city."

During vacations up north, Nancy spent many relaxing hours watching the loons on the lake. "Then, I read Loon Magic and I was hooked." No doubt about it, the loon tops the list as her favorite.

Nancy carries along her Birds of Wisconsin field guide whenever she's birding and recommends, "Get a good book, get outside, and have fun! And it goes without saying—join Audubon!" *Linda Fare Hirsh*

The Dinosaur-Bird Link

At the October 2010 Hoy meeting, Dr. Thomas Carr, associate professor of biology at Carthage College and director of the Carthage Institute of Paleontology (<http://www.carthage.edu/paleontology/>) gave a talk

on how many of the features that we think of as unique to birds, such as hollow bones or the wishbone (fused clavicles), are in fact dinosaur features that birds inherited from their dinosaur ancestors. **As Dr. Carr pointed out, the special thing about dinosaurs is that not all of them went extinct!**



Dr. Thomas Carr

For more information on the dinosaur-bird link, you may want to read "Dinosaurs' Living Descendants," an article by Richard Stone in the December 2010 issue of *Smithsonian Magazine*. The article focuses on the rich fossil record from China,

including the discovery of the first feathered dinosaur in 1996. According to the article, "the fossils finally have confirmed, to all but a few skeptics, that birds descended from dinosaurs and are the living representatives of a dinosaur lineage called the Maniraptorans." Paleontologists now refer to the dinosaurs that went extinct millions of years ago as "non-avian dinosaurs." The article is available online at: go to <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/Dinosaurs-Living-Descendants.html>

Birds and Windows: Controlling Daytime Collisions

In North America, the number of bird / window collisions is estimated at between 100 million and a billion each year!

We've all heard it, that heartbreaking "thud" of a bird hitting our window. The death-toll is **staggering** and with native song birds facing so many threats (pesticides, pollution, and the destruction of their wintering grounds in Central and South America) it is important that we do everything we can to prevent birds from colliding with windows.



A bird sees the landscape reflected in the glass, and mistakenly thinks it can fly into that landscape. Collisions such as this can be reduced or even eliminated by any one of the following:

- Apply static-cling window appliques to the outside of the window. (available from the Wisconsin Humane Society.) On some windows, these appliques may have to be spaced no more than a few inches apart to be fully effective.
- Hang fluttering ribbons in front of the window.
- Install fine-mesh plastic netting in front of the window (especially during periods of peak migration); leave a few inches between the glass and the netting so they'll collide softly with the mesh instead hitting the glass.
- Place your bird feeders within about a 1.5 feet of your window, or 30 feet or more away from your window. Lower window awnings to reduce or eliminate reflections on the outside of the window.
- Close draperies to prevent birds from seeing all the way through a building when windows "line-up," creating a tunnel effect.
- This information is courtesy of the Wisconsin Humane Society. Go to their website for more information on what you can do for your home and your workplace: <http://www.wihumane.org/>.

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Email addresses of Board members are available at: www.hoyaudubon.org

Next Board of Directors Meeting:
 Thursday, Feb. 24, 7:00 PM, 810 Indiana St, Racine. All interested members are welcome. Come and find out what your club is doing!

Monthly Program Coordinator*
 Dana Garrigan 262-652-1737

Field Trip Coordinator*
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* If you have suggestions regarding future programs or field trips please contact the coordinators directly.

Newsletter Editors
 Linda Fare Hirsch
 Keith Kennedy

Ideas for the newsletter? We welcome your suggestions, recaps of birding seminars/activities, fun facts and birding tidbits for use in future newsletters. Please mail to the attention of Linda Hirsch at: Hoy Audubon, P.O. Box 044626, Racine, WI 53404 or email to: hoynewsletter@hoyaudubon.org

The Hoy Honker is the newsletter of the Hoy Audubon Society, Inc. PO Box 044626, Racine, WI 53404.

Hoy Activity Reports—A brief recap of some of our recent events for members.

Churchill, Manitoba—the Hoy Audubon January program.

Some people would travel to the ends of the earth to seek out birds. It just so happens that Rick Fare, Eric Howe, John Dixon and Jack LeSuer did just that when they trekked out to Churchill, Manitoba, this past summer. These hearty souls loaded up their SUV and drove 23.5 hours to Thompson, Manitoba (via Winnipeg) which is the northernmost point that vehicles dare to tread. They viewed the transformation from boreal forest to the sparser regions with smaller, stunted trees, as they luxuriated by train up to Churchill, just a mere 18 and one-half more hours. Rick indicated that due to the permafrost, the train averaged between 20 and 25 mph, affording the birders ample time to strategize their viewing plans.



Rick’s oratory, Eric’s visuals, and John’s sound effects provided an exciting virtual tour for the packed house of meeting attendees. The explorer, Henry Hudson, navigated the area in the mid-to-late 1600’s. Fur traders flocked there and started the Hudson Bay Company. Throughout the years, excellent birding records drew the English to Churchill to collect an extensive amount of bird samples. Formal birding tours began in the 1960’s, drawing birders worldwide. Around 1978 and 1979, the Ross’s gull migrated there enticing hopefuls to add it to their life lists and setting birding tourism on fire. In the 60’s, the population of Churchill reached 8,300 primarily due to the presence of the Canadian military for maintenance of the ‘distant early warning line’ or DEW line, a system of radar stations built during the cold war. Numerous trails, originally created for the military, are now accessible to the public, including school groups which also attend classes at the Churchill Northern Studies Center.



Today, Churchill’s population is around 900, but tourists visit all-year round. October and November are prime months to see polar bears, and the winter months’ highlight is the breath-taking views of the aurora borealis. In addition to being the Polar Bear Capital of the World, it is also the Beluga Whale Capital. So, there’s something to captivate everyone.

During their ten-day stay, the guys usually rose around 4:00 AM, layered themselves against the 35-to-45 degree temperatures, and hopped in their ramshackled jeep, complete with broken headlight and persistent rattles. But, hey, it did the trick, providing them faithful service to birding sights without a breakdown. Everyone enjoyed a couple of the 50-degree days and, although some patches of snow still lingered, the Churchill residents deemed this as “picnic” weather. Rick pointed out that not even the chillier days deterred the onslaught of mosquitoes that clung to their clothing. “I will never complain about our mosquitoes again after that experience,” he remarked.

The diversity of birds, however, made dealing with the mosquitoes worth it. The trip also granted three additions to their life lists: the Arctic tern, the willow ptarmigan, and the common eider. “The Arctic tern,” Rick pointed out, “makes one of the longest migrations, 10,000 miles one way, from the Arctic to South America.” He indicated that one tern was reported to have lived to age 34, chalking up a record

Locations for our Meetings: Note that the February and March meetings will be at the **Northside branch of the Kenosha Public Library**, 1500 27th Avenue, Kenosha, WI ((262) 564-6100). For directions from Racine, check MapQuest or Google Maps (Ohio Street is almost a straight shot to the library).

Churchill continued...

mileage. The willow ptarmigan, a member of the grouse family, sports unusual feathered feet, allowing it to walk on the snow. It also possesses a red eye comb which can be inflated during courtship. The largest North American duck, the common eider weighs in at about five pounds and molts all of its flight feathers at once, so the male dons his camouflage during his non-flying time. Rick also said that current value of eider feathers, about \$500 per pound, has convinced the natives to stop shooting these ducks for food.

The gray jay, also known as the Canada jay and camp robber, stores its food by cementing it to the bark of trees. A member of the corvid family, its highly-developed brain allows it to remember where the food is hidden. Eric captured some priceless shots of the guys feeding trail mix out of their hands to these daring birds. One even snatched some food from the bill of a cap! One baby, still in training, mistakenly nipped Rick's thumb and finger, but eventually got the hang of it.

Other birds sighted included the Harris's sparrow, merlin, Bonaparte's gull, parasitic Jaeger, little gull, orange-crowned warbler, Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow, yellow rail, Pacific loon, long-tailed duck, sora, Tennessee warbler, pine grosbeak, Hudsonian godwit, boreal chickadee, and whimbrel. Some unique features were the Hudsonian godwit's long, yellow-orange bill with dark, slightly upturned beak, and the whimbrel's decurved beak. The boreal chickadee wears a brown cap, unlike our black-capped chickadee, and is able to conserve energy by entering a state of torpor on cold nights. This means it can lower its temperature to 22 degrees, thus slowing its metabolism to conserve energy.

A captivating video of the birds and plant life ended the program, further enticing the audience to perhaps consider planning a trip to Churchill. *Linda Fare Hirsch*

Be on the lookout for unusual winter birds.

Keep a close watch on your backyard feeders in the next few months for some less common birds that might show up. Pine siskins (see photo at right) occasionally visit southeast Wisconsin thistle feeders in the winter mingling with the resident goldfinches. Common redpolls and American tree sparrows may also make an appearance.



Pine Siskin on thistle feeder

Upcoming Activities

Thursday, February 3rd, 7:00 PM: *Economic and Ecological Impacts of the BP Oil Spill in the Gulf—a conservation update.* Presented by **Professors Ron Cronovich and Jerry Mast, and students**, Carthage College. Kenosha Northside Library (see directions at top of this page).

Saturday, February 19, 2:00-3:00 PM: *Birdscaping in the Midwest.* A guide to gardening with native plants to attract birds presented by **Mariette Nowak**. Kenosha Northside Library (see directions at top of this page). Note: if you cannot attend this Saturday talk, Mariette Nowak will also be the featured speaker for Hoy Audubon's May 5 program.

Thursday, March 3rd, 7:00 PM: *Wisconsin's Migratory Birds - Where are they now?* Presented by **Andy Paulios** Coordinator, Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, Wisconsin DNR. Kenosha Northside Library (see directions at top of this page).

Saturday, March 19: WSO birding field trip to Dane and Columbia County ponds. Meet at 8 AM at Goose Pond, 1 mile south of Hwy 51/60 on Goose Pond Road (south-east of the town of Arlington). The group will tour by auto to several ponds and flooded fields in this very productive area. A wide variety of water birds, shorebirds, migrant passerines and others are possible. Hoy Audubon members from Racine and Kenosha should meet at the Ryan Road Park and Ride at 7:30 AM and car pool to the event.

Golden Eagle Survey: Bald Eagles 25, Golden Eagles 0

Hoy Audubon Society was well represented at the Golden Eagle Survey (western WI and southeast MN) conducted by the National Eagle Center on Saturday January 15. Our nine erstwhile 'Hoyians' included: John Dixon, Rick Fare, three members of the McFall family, Bob, David, and Frances, Helen Pugh, Jenny Wenzel, and Barb and Joe Vass. Our group saw no golden eagles, but we did contribute to the effort by greatly expanding the total area surveyed. We were assigned survey route #30, that part of Grant County north of Highway 18. In four cars, we drove the mostly gravel roads of northern Grant County for almost seven hours (a total of 340 miles). While no golden eagles were sighted, we did see a total of 25 bald eagles, 31 red-tailed hawks, 19 rough-legged hawks, 8 American kestrels and 95 wild turkeys. All had fun. Outstanding memories were: bald eagles at breakfast and the Packer win after supper. *Robert McFall.*



Bald Eagle juvenile (Keith Kennedy)

HOY AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Canada Geese at Shoop Park



Hooded Merganser male

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House finch in snow

Remember...you can see the Hoy Honker "In Living Color." There are two ways to see our newsletter in color: view it on the Hoy website at www.hoyaudubon.org or get on the e-mail newsletter distribution list by sending an e-mail to keith.kennedy@hoyaudubon.org and ask to be put on the electronic mailing list.