



THE GOSS HAWK

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What is a Species? And who says?



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Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club

The Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club was founded to increase knowledge and appreciation of birds through education, research, preservation and conservation, and to provide public awareness of birds and their role in the environment - all of which remains our goal and purpose to this day.

Unless otherwise noted, events are held Retzer Nature Center, located about 4 miles west of Waukesha, near the end of Madison Street.
514 W28167 Madison St, Waukesha, WI

We all know what a field guide is. We each have one at home, or in our car, and carry one on the birding trail. The pages of a field guide show all the species we could possibly see in the geographic area covered by that publication. We use the guides to help us ID warblers and hawks and shorebirds and gulls. Yes ... gulls.

But how do we say what birds are what? How do we determine which bird is a species distinct from any other bird, and which classification is just a sub-species? Surely we can tell a Bald Eagle from a Mourning Warbler. But why are there two species of redpolls that look so similar, when all six races of Dark-eyed Juncos, which are each so unique, are still considered the same species?

It's enough to make one's head spin isn't it? So it's a good thing we have the folks at the American Ornithological Society to hash this all out for us. Each summer, the AOS checklist committee analyzes proposals from scientists throughout North America regarding the speciation of our continent's birds. Some of the changes to the list are cover taxonomical order, name changes, and additions to the list due to the visitation of vagrants from other continents. But the most interesting changes to the list are always the lumps and splits.

To many birders lumps and splits are simply record keeping issues. But to avid listers who take pride in maintaining and increasing their species list, lumps and splits are a huge deal, and the checklist publication is viewed with much consternation!

Splits are often thrilling for listers, as they can often add a new species to their list. The Pacific Wren was recently split into a unique species from the Winter Wren. If a birder had visited the west coast in the past and recorded a Winter Wren, they could reasonably add Pacific Wren to their life list without leaving the couch. The publication of the list by the AOS changed the classification of the west coast bird, so voalá it's a life bird!

Lumps, however, create much anxiety in the world of bird listing. This past year, the AOS addressed the speciation of the Thayer's/Iceland/Kumlien's Gull complex. And it IS complex! For decades the Thayer's Gull was considered a unique species from the Iceland Gull. While difficult for many birders to differentiate, the split was based on independent scientific studies performed by Neil Smith in the 1960s in far northern Canada. He claimed the

birds nested separately and did not interbreed. Thirty years later, however, Smith was outed as a fraud. Richard Snell attempted to recreate Smith's research in the 1990s, but he found that Smith's research was impossible to recreate - one person cannot be in two places at once! Snell found non-assortive breeding between the two supposed species, which contradicted Smith, whose research has since been debunked. As a result, the AOS committee re-lumped the Thayer's back as a sub-species of Iceland Gull. Listers "lost" a species from their life list.

Research is coming fast and furious, and as a result, speciation is always changing. The birds aren't changing of course, but how we classify them does. In the future, we may see a split of the Yellow-rumped Warbler. The Myrtle (eastern US) and Audubon's (western US) Warblers had been lumped in 1983, but there is growing pressure to re-split them. Even more likely is the lumping of the Common and Hoary Redpolls, since no one can seem to prove, genetically speaking, they justify having different names.

Upcoming Club Events:

3/18 - Club Meeting

Presenter - Ellen Censky
Bio Blitz - 24 hr. Nature Party

4/15 - Club Meeting

Presenter - Bill Volkert
Warbler Identification!

5/12- May Count

Stay tuned for the spring field trip schedule!

WHAT'S THE DIFF?

Or is there any....



www.facebook.com/gossbirdclub

Take Five

With Tim Hahn

Tim Hahn is in his 3rd year on the executive committee having served as secretary and now as vice president. He made friends with this juvenile No. Saw-whet Owl at in 2009 at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory in the UP.



Where is your favorite nature spot?

Some of my best memories are of birding with friends in the Nicolet National Forest in northern Wisconsin. The area presents ample opportunity to find unique boreal birds at the southern edge of their range. Beyond the birds, the pristine bogs are picturesque and the Pine River is very calming. The bridge on Pine River Road has become one of my favorite lunch spots in the entire world. If you're lucky, Gray Jays may join you for a cashew or other morsel. Crossbills and other finches fly over. Ravens croak. And if you're really lucky, a Black-backed Woodpecker may fly in and show off its yellow cap.

How did you come to join the Goss Bird Club?

While in college I began working at Wild Birds Unlimited with Paula Stich. My interest in the hobby grew as I learned more about the birds. Eventually Paula invited me to visit a club meeting. I visited on and off for a few years before joining officially in 2013.

What is your most enjoyable birding memory?

While surveying breeding birds in a seldom visited area of the Vernon Marsh SWA, an Ovenbird exploded off the trail, perched on a nearby branch, and scolded me harshly. I searched and searched but could not find a nest. Coming back along the trail, I stopped in the same area to look for a nest. Just as I was about to leave I caught her eye looking out of her "oven" nest, and she BOLTED! She took her place on the scolding branch, and I was able to quickly inspect the "oven" with four eggs that was. Reviewing its location, I noted that it was in the middle of the trail, and I had nearly stepped, which caused the bird to flush the first time through. No wonder they were unhappy with me! I snapped a few pictures with my cell phone for documentation and made my way down the trail, leaving the Ovenbirds in peace. Thankfully the trail is rarely traveled in summer, so hopefully they were able to raise their young to fledging.

What is the regular birding event you most enjoy attending?

Anyone who gets the bug to fully immerse themselves into birding should attend Jaegerfest at Wisconsin Point in Superior. This informal birding event, hosted by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology each September attracts upwards from 100 birders from all over Wisconsin and beyond. The sand spit peninsula is known as one of the great fall migrant traps in the Midwest. Jaegers are the highlight for many birders, and with a bit of coaxing, they put on great aerial shows while chasing gulls. As enjoyable are the waves of warblers, kettles of hawks, rare gulls and terns, and the sought after Harris's Sparrow which is commonly found on or near the point during the weekend. And while the birding is great, meeting birding friends new and old is just as fun.



Jaegerfest 2007 with birding buddies, including Paula Stich, fellow Goss Club member.



What's the craziest bird you've found?

During winter northwoods birding trips, friends and I always seem to find a "what the heck" bird every year. One year a Brown Thrasher was found at a feeder in Argonne. The next year we found an Eastern Phoebe in Hiles hanging out by the dryer vent on a house. And the next year, a Baird's Sandpiper was doing it's best Purple Sandpiper impression on the lakeshore. While we haven't made that trip in a few years, the next time we go, I fully expect to find another "what the heck" bird.

Northwoods birding in the Nicolet National Forest, ca. 2007.

A Moment from the Archives with Goss Bird Club Historian Jennifer Tyskiewicz

First Nest of White-eyed Vireo in Wisconsin Discovered by Members of the B.F. Goss Bird Club!

Up until June 29th 1988, the White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) had been considered a rare bird in Wisconsin, with most of the sightings attributed to spring migrants that were “over-flying” their more southerly breeding areas.

A few records from the 1960’s and 1970’s from Sheboygan, Dane and Sauk Counties reported White-eyed Vireo adults “carrying food,” “having a brood patch,” or “adults with possible juveniles,” but none of the sightings had confirmed a nesting situation.

Then, on the above-mentioned date in 1988, B.F. Goss Bird Club members, Bob Adams (one of our club founders), John Bielefeldt (a member who worked for the Racine County Parks Planning Division at the time), Wilbur Reimer, and Harry and Nancy Auchter, were in the Kettle Moraine Forest in Waukesha County, when they discovered a White-eyed Vireo female on a nest! Nearby, a male White-eyed Vireo sang from a branch!

The sitting female did not leave the nest during the time that our members observed her. But, upon examining the empty nest one week later, these members discovered shell fragments on the ground below, with no adults or juveniles in sight. The report that was written by Bob

Adams and John Bielefeldt, for acceptance of this record, indicated that Nancy Auchter had taken photos of the nesting bird, but that the photos were not suitable for reproduction.

However, the photos did presumably show that the nest was in “gray dogwood, amid dense, low vegetation that included raspberry or blackberry.”



A White-eyed Vireo carrying food to feed it's young.
Photo by Kelly Azar from www.AllAboutBirds.org

The report goes on to describe the surrounding area as a “lowland thicket, dominated by buckthorn (even then!) and quaking aspen, with some slightly-elevated islands of drier woodland (black oak and black cherry).

The earlier “possible” nestings mentioned above had occurred in

every habitat from “river-bottom willow thickets,” to “abandoned fields and fence rows,” upland oak woods” to “cut-over oak woods.”

All these habitat possibilities may have been what prompted Bob Adams to utter his now-famous words, “Birds are where you find them!”

In looking over the data in the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas I and II, it appears that there have still been only “possible” and “probable” nestings of this elusive species in recent years.

Atlas I (1995 – 2000) showed a “possible” nesting site in New Glarus, and “probable” nesting on the Milwaukee/Ozaukee County line, the Milton area, western Waukesha County, as well as southwestern Wisconsin and along the Mississippi River.

Atlas II (2015 – 2019), has so far added and handful of “possible”, and several “probable” locations in Jefferson County, western Waukesha County and southwestern Wisconsin. A single confirmation was reported deep in the scrub along the Wisconsin River at the Arena boat landing in Iowa County.

Bob Adams would again have added his, “Birds are where you find them!” to all of these atlas locations!

Species Profile

Bonaparte's Gull

In Wisconsin, we rarely have the opportunity to see a great variety of gulls. Two white-headed gulls are quite common: Ring-billed Gulls are common in Wisconsin in all but the coldest months, and Herring Gulls are present around large bodies of water all year round. Can you guess what the next most common gull is?

The Bonaparte's Gull is the smallest gull commonly seen throughout North America, and it can regularly be seen in migration on inland bodies of water throughout Waukesha County. They have a buoyant, tern-like flight, picking small insectivores off the surface of the water. Some non-breeding birds are known to over-summer in a few locations, but most move on to the taiga or boreal forest. And while most gulls nest in colonies on the ground, the Bonaparte's Gull is the only gull that is known to regularly nest in trees. Choosing sparsely vegetated areas near open bodies of water, Bonaparte's nest in loose colonies of 2-20 nests which can be found 4 to 15 feet above the ground on horizontal branches of black spruce, white cedar, tamarack, and jack pine.

With such a nest location, Bonaparte's predators are mostly avian, so parents must defend from hawks and ravens, but have been known to travel half a mile to mob humans disturbing their nesting territory. Hatchling Bonaparte's are semi-precocial, meaning their eyes are open and they have down, but they still require parental care. Once able to leave the nest, however, chicks follow their parents to open water and learn to feed and fly away from the nest.

ID Tips - Bonaparte's Gulls, or "Bonnies", are easily differentiated from other Wisconsin gulls by their size. While similar-sized gulls can be found in Wisconsin, Sabine's and Little Gulls are quite rare. Mid-sized gulls such as Franklin's are more similar to the white-headed gulls. In breeding plumage Bonnies maintain a dark black hood, red-orange legs, and a lighter slate mantle. Young birds and non-breeding adults lack the full hood but maintain a small, dark "ear patch" behind the eye.



BE INVOLVED!

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AT THIS YEAR'S SPRING HEARINGS FOR THE WISCONSIN CONSERVATION CONGRESS

Do you want to have a say in how Wisconsin manages its public natural areas? Then attend the spring hearings of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress! The WCC is a citizen-elected board that conveys the opinions of Wisconsinites to the DNR Natural Resources Board. While the WCC does not have decision making abilities, it certainly can influence the NRB's decisions and can propose new issues that the NRB has not yet taken up. While the hearing is not a debate, it's an opportunity for any citizen to provide input, by voting on myriad topics. Additionally, each attendee is given up to 3 minutes for each question you wish to discuss.

Topics usually covered include, but are not limited to, habitat management, wildlife population management, hunting, fishing,, proposals for new and changes to regulation, funding for public lands, and much more.

This year, the hearings take place on **April 9th**. The Waukesha County spring hearing will be held in the auditorium at Waukesha West High School. The hearing starts **promptly at 7:00** and voters will not be admitted after that time, so get there early!

