



# THE GOSS HAWK

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April 2018

## Spence Speaks: The Imperial Woodpecker

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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

It was a dark and starry night...

Part family, and part friends trip, with lots of bird watching, I was driving from Tucson to San Diego. For much of the driving I'd get off the main I-8 and take local roads. After sunset, I'm in western Arizona, and I'm fighting the dark and getting tired. Turning on NPR radio, a story comes on about the world's largest known woodpecker. That woke me up!

In 1956, a dentist from Pennsylvania named William L. Rhein, an amateur birder that goes on expeditions to find birds, goes out looking in the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico for a rare bird, the Imperial Woodpecker. It's about two-feet tall, with a wingspan of 23 inches – larger than its cousins the Ivory Billed, or Pileated woodpeckers. He

actually takes a short-film of it. He thought the film wasn't good enough to be worth showing, and after that, nothing for almost 50 years. Then, another birder finds some notes in the Cornell archives about this search trip, and follows up with the dentist. The dentist finds the old 16-millimeter film, and there is an 85 second film of assorted views of this largest of woodpeckers, the only recorded visual evidence, except for some study skins or mounts.

From that meeting, the Cornell birder, and another Cornell editor take off to Mexico in search of this bird. They take off for the rural mountains near Durango, Mexico, and a 5-hour ride from there to go back to the original locations the bird was seen in. The only catch, the area is now run by drug cartels that are battling for control, and no one is safe. A Mexican ornithologist backs out. The remaining birding team gets to some areas, but alas, the AK-47 armed patrols and danger are too much. And while they did try to "call" the bird in locations that they made it to, they weren't successful

It appears that one of the ways that loggers in this bird's area would use to get rid of the birds was to smear poison on the trees. Apparently, groups of Imperials would work on a tree for days at a time that was infested and that



**A National Geographic photo showing skins of the Imperial Woodpecker (left), Ivory-billed Woodpecker (center), and Pileated Woodpecker (right). Only the Pileated is known to survive to this day.**

poison could kill many birds at a time. The myth was that the birds were destroying the logging crop.

Since this trip, there haven't been any more expeditions, and only anecdotal stories of the bird being possibly seen.

Well, that story woke me up driving in the general global vicinity of this unique bird!

For more on this story, you can click on the following NPR story on your computer and either read it or listen to it as an audio file.

[www.npr.org/2011/12/23/144190097/searching-for-a-ghost-bird](http://www.npr.org/2011/12/23/144190097/searching-for-a-ghost-bird)

The book is: *The Grail Bird* by Tim Gallagher



**A female Imperial Woodpecker foraging on stands of Durango pine in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico, filmed by Rhein in 1956.**



Find us on  
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[www.facebook.com/gossbirdclub](http://www.facebook.com/gossbirdclub)



Melanie keeping wildlife wild with the Wildlife In Need Center.

## Take Five ... With Melanie Krause!

Melanie Krause joined the club in 2017. She works for the Kettle Moraine State Forest at their Headquarters so she's always got nature on her mind. And what do you know... she cites the same intrepid buckthorn-hating birding mentor so many of us have had over the years. If you see Melanie, welcome her to the club!

### How did your birding journey begin?

My journey began a little over three years ago counting feeder birds at the Kettle Moraine State Forest-Southern Unit while a co-worker was on maternity leave. While training for her departure, I quickly began learning birds while watching our feeders and became particularly fond of the Tufted Titmouse. I remember asking, "a what?" A short time later I had been out filling feeders when I looked up to see a Titmouse land not two feet in front of me. I was in love. The following next fall I was finally able to put feeders out at my own home and I patiently waited in hopes of a Tufted Titmouse to visit my feeders. Early Halloween morning I peeked out of my drapes and there my Titmouse was! I scurried into my bedroom waking my husband saying, "we've got a Titmouse!" What a treat it was!

### What is your most enjoyable birding memory?

Todd Miller. I was lucky to cross paths working with Todd while he spent some time as an Assistant Naturalist Guide for the Kettle Moraine Southern Unit. His love of birding became my inspiration for venturing out beyond the bird feeders. Early one morning I drove out to the Mukwonago River Unit to embark on my first bird hike with Todd. It was a brisk, early spring 7am when I pulled into the Hwy LO parking lot and remember thinking, "am I ready for this or am I crazy?" Shortly into our hike we spotted my first pair of Eastern Bluebirds. There were many Red Winged Blackbirds about but we happened to spot one showing off one of the most beautiful mating displays. Red winged blackbirds may not be my favorite birds but I will always cherish that beautiful display that only Todd and I witnessed with our one other hiker. After that hike Todd became a cherished friend and mentor that I will always be thankful for and never forget-and we'll never forget that blackbird.

### How did you come to join the Goss Bird Club?

My first winter working at the Southern Unit I met many birding visitors and got to know one in particular as "the Purple Finch guy" and later introduced himself as Spence Stehno. Spence invited me to a meeting that winter but I wasn't able to attend. One year later I mentioned to Spence that I was ready for more than feeders and wanted more experience but needed a helping hand. He was able to connect me with Anne Moretti and I attended my first meeting just before joining Anne on the 2017 Christmas Bird Count and officially joined the club.

### Where is your favorite nature spot?

One of my favorite spots would have to be Paradise Springs Natural Area (pictured at right). I first visited Paradise Springs with my Mom about 20 years ago when we happened to stop by while searching for pumpkins. We couldn't believe how crystal clear the water was and were excited to see trout in the pond. After that visit we couldn't remember where that spot was until I realized it was part of the property I worked in! Last year I took my mom back to Paradise Springs for a Mother's Day bird hike to reunite that memory and do some birding while we were at it.



Melanie and her husband Steven at Acadia National Park on the coast of Maine.

### What is the craziest bird you've found?

While it may not be a "crazy" bird, I was thrilled to spot Greater White-fronted Geese in a field of Canadian Geese early this year in an agriculture field while heading to a friend's house in Jefferson County. It wasn't until I got home, looked it up and asked Anne for ID advice that I realized I captured an uncommon migrant on a stopover. Now that my bird spirit has awakened, I'm excited for a future of feathered surprises, no matter how "crazy" one might think it is.



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

## A Storm- Halted Bird Migration, as reported by the B.F. Goss Bird Club in the Waukesha Freeman March 23rd, 1939.

Some of the oldest information in our club's archives is a series of newspaper articles, prepared by club members, that appeared in the local Waukesha Freeman newspaper.

The headline in the title above refers to a blizzard that hit southern Wisconsin on the night of March 14, 1939 and caused an "abrupt halt" to the spring migration. Goss Club members reported in their monthly Waukesha Freeman column that such sudden changes in March weather can cause the birds to arrive at "irregular times."

The article goes on to say that once the weather becomes more settled in April and May, the arrival dates of the birds will become more uniform, and club members believed that if the weather were always the same, the various species would arrive virtually on the same date each year!

When asked in the article if migratory birds would be able to stand the severe blizzard, the response was that early spring birds are hardy and can stand considerable cold as long as the inclement weather doesn't last too many days. Club members had spotted Song Sparrows, Killdeer, meadowlarks, bluebirds and Red-winged Blackbirds before the storm hit, and one member had observed 5 robins "feasting on suet, bread crumbs and apples" at a feeding station.

Goss Club members informed their readership that people in the United States had recently become more interested in conservation, an aspect of that being the "protection of bird life." Members stated that, "Robins have been killed because they ate farmers' cherries; blackbirds have been slaughtered because they destroyed the corn; hawks and owls have always been considered public enemies." The club reporters felt that the misdeeds of birds were attracting much publicity, while their



Taking a break during the May Count, 1940.

"service to man" was being overlooked!

The writers of the 1939 newspaper column described how the bird kingdom is divided into 5 "service" groups: the first and most important being the "insect-destroying group." They state that agriculture would suffer a huge loss from the "ravages of insects," were it not for birds whose diets consist partially or totally of insects, such as swallows and vireos.

The second "service" group is the "weed destroyers." Members estimated that "thousands of tons" of weed seeds are destroyed each year by the likes of sparrows and finches.

Hawks, owls and shrikes make up the third "service" group. This group "assists man" by destroying mice, rats, and gophers. It is true, acknowledged the authors, that some in this bird group do prey on songbirds and domestic fowl, but that their benefit outweighs their harm.

Group four "renders service" as scavengers including vultures, crows, and gulls.

Finally, the fifth "service" group as described by the Goss Club members, is the game birds comprised of ducks, grouse, and geese, with over 6 million hunting licenses issued every year.

The 1939 newspaper article then "morphs" into a question-and-answer format, with the questions presumably being asked by the public, and being answered by a Goss Club member.

An interesting question reads as follows: "Are cardinals being seen in Waukesha?"

Answer: "There are a few cardinals in Waukesha County. At least 3 have been observed in the city this winter." (Jennifer says, "This statement may seem strange to us now, but the cardinal, although called a Northern Cardinal, is actually a bird that moved north from our southern states, and was first observed in Waukesha County in 1928.....the first one being spotted in a swampy area of New Berlin off of Calhoun Road by Bob Adams and members of our club!").

Continuing with questions-and-answers, a reader wondered what kind of bird they were observing that is black, but is not a



Club members at a picnic. Note the ties for men and the dresses for ladies! No jeans and t-shirts then!. Notables in the group are S. Paul Jones, (seated lower left); Vince Batha, (kneeling lower right), one of the club's founders along with Jones and Adams; and Bob Adams, (standing far on the left in back row).

Red-winged Blackbird. The answer given was that the reader was probably seeing starlings that had entered Waukesha County about 10 years previously. A comment was made that starlings, for the first time, were becoming as "numerous as the English Sparrow," (House Sparrow)!

When asked if there were 2 kinds of meadowlarks in Waukesha County, the answer given in the newspaper column was a definite "yes" and that they could easily be identified as the eastern and western by their songs. (If we could only be so lucky to have this dilemma today!).

The article concluded with a list of all of the birds seen since the first of that year, (1939), in Waukesha County. (We are still keeping track of that yearly today!). Although some of the species names are different, such as Sparrow Hawk and Marsh Hawk, the majority of the birds listed are ones that we would expect to see by early spring in 2018 in our county. Exceptions would be their listings of the European Partridge, the Prairie Horned Lark (?) (when Northern Horned Lark was already listed), the Bronzed Grackle, and of course, the Western Meadowlark.

Another interesting comment from the article of 1939 was that club members were awaiting the arrival of warblers that, they stated, would often land in trees in droves along the city streets of Waukesha, "where they may be easily observed feeding throughout the day. So numerous are they that it is not uncommon for one to see representatives of as many as ten different species of warblers feeding in one tree!" Wow! The good old days! Maybe the club members then had no knowledge of "warbler neck!"

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# MAY COUNT

## 5/12/2018

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Our club's May Day Bird Count has been a tradition for many years. Similar to the Christmas Bird Count, our club covers a circle around the Waukesha area to see how many species we can find. This year's count takes place on Saturday May 12. The difference is the May count is conducted in much more pleasant weather! This is a very laid back, social event that is perfect for beginner birders to learn from those with more experience. If you'd like to hook up with one of our groups, feel free to contact Spence Stehno or one of these section leaders.

Paula Stich - City of Waukesha/Fox River

Anne Moretti - South Kettle Moraine State Forest

Jasonn Weber - Southeast Waukesha/Mukwonago

Jennifer Tyskiewicz - Retzer Nature Center

Jim Toft - Vernon Marsh

Don Reel - Nagawicka and Pewaukee Lakes Area

Mike Fort - North Prairie/Genesee Depot/Wales

Wally Hahn - Dousman Area/Nelson's Woods

Following the count will be a compilation dinner at the Chancery on Moreland Blvd in Waukesha at 5PM to tally the species for the entire count circle.

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## UPCOMING BIRDING EVENTS

### SPRING/SUMMER 2018

WE MAY NOT HAVE ANY MORE OFFICIAL CLUB MEETINGS THIS SPRING, BUT OUR CLUB SEASON IS FAR FROM OVER. STAY IN TOUCH WITH FELLOW CLUB MEMBERS BY ATTENDING OUR FIELD TRIPS, AND MEET NEW FRIENDS AT OTHER EVENTS!  
CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS: [WWW.GOSSBIRDCLUB.ORG](http://WWW.GOSSBIRDCLUB.ORG)

#### GOSS BIRD CLUB EVENTS

##### **MAY 5: SPRING BIRD COUNT AT RETZER NATURE CENTER - 7:00 AM - NOON**

JOIN THE BENJAMIN GOSS BIRD CLUB IN THE ANNUAL SPRING BIRD COUNT AT RETZER NC.

##### **SUNDAY MAY 6: MARTINS WOODS & FOX RIVER GREENWAY—MEET AT 6:30 AM**

THE WALK STARTS ON LEVEL MOWED TRAILS, AND CONTINUES THROUGH NARROW, PROBABLY MUDDY TRAILS DOWN TO THE RIVER, WHICH CAN BE A GOOD SPOT FOR WARBLERS. SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS AS CARPOOLING - WATERPROOF FOOTWEAR ARE REQUIRED.

##### **MAY 12: MAY COUNT CONDUCTED BY BENJAMIN F. GOSS BIRD CLUB**

##### **MAY 26: ENGEL CONSERVATION AREA IN MUSKEGO - MEET AT 6:30 AM**

A 2 MILE WALK OVER MOSTLY LEVEL TERRAIN; BE PREPARED FOR MUDDY TRAILS. WE EXPECT TO FIND A VARIETY OF MIGRANTS INCLUDING FLYCATCHERS, WARBLERS, WATERFOWL, & SHOREBIRDS.

##### **JUNE 9: KAYAKING & CANOEING THE ROCK RIVER - MEET AT 8 AM (RAIN DATE JUNE 10)**

START AT HARNISCHFEGER PARK LOCATED AT THE END OF CRAWFISH ROAD WEST OF ASHIPUN. WE WILL SPEND ABOUT 2 - 2.5 HOURS ON THE WATER PADDLING APPROX. 5 MILES ONE WAY. RENTAL CANOES MAY BE AVAILABLE.

#### WSO SPONSORED EVENTS

##### **MAY 18-21 WISCONSIN SOCIETY FOR ORNITHOLOGY CONVENTION AT GREEN LAKE**

THIS IS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN WISCONSIN BIRDING. AN EXTENSIVE FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE AND SCIENTIFIC SEMINARS ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS. REGISTRATION FEES APPLY.

VISIT [WWW.WSOBIRDS.ORG](http://WWW.WSOBIRDS.ORG) FOR DETAILS

##### **JUNE 2: SOUTHERN KETTLE MORaine WITH THE WSO - MEET AT 6 AM**

START AT SCUPPERNONG SKI/HIKING TRAILS HWY ZZ. CARPOOLING IS ADVISED FOR THIS TRIP; BRING ALONG WATER AND SNACKS. THIS TRIP MIXES A COUPLE OF 1/4 MILE HIKES ALONG LEVEL, WELL GROOMED TRAILS WITH ROADSIDE STOPS THROUGH HABITATS RANGING FROM PINWOOD FORESTS TO THE LARGEST WET PRAIRIE EAST OF THE MISSISSIPPI.

##### **JUNE 22-24 & JULY 6-8 ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING IN MARINETTE COUNTY**

DURING THE DAY WE WILL WORK IN TEAMS TO COLLECT BREEDING BIRD DATA FOR THE WI BREEDING BIRD ATLAS. AT NIGHT WE'LL ENJOY THE COMPANY OF FELLOW BIRDWATCHERS. COME FOR A FEW HOURS OR STAY FOR A FEW DAYS! IF YOU'VE NEVER ATLASSED BEFORE, THIS IS A GREAT CHANCE TO LEARN AND CONTRIBUTE TO CITIZEN SCIENCE!

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