



Newsletter of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, Inc.

September 2014

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society
presents

Winged Wonders

Abbey Krumrie
speaker

**Wednesday,
September 17
7 p.m.**

Lincoln Center
1519 Water Street, Stevens Point

Photo by Gerry Janz

Upcoming Events

Sept 7 ALAS event	<i>Grandparents' Day at the Mead</i>
Sept 13 ALAS field trip	<i>Exploring Quincy Bluff and Wetlands SNA</i>
Sept 20 ALAS field trip	<i>Early Fall Bird Hike at Big Eau Pleine County Park</i>
Oct 15 ALAS program	<i>Passenger Pigeons: 100 Years</i>

www.aldoleopoldaubon.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

ALAS Event

Grandparent's' Day at the Mead

Sunday, Sept 7, 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.



Bring your whole family for fun at the “Fall Family Festival” on Grandparents’ Day at the Mead Wildlife Area on Sunday, September 7 from 11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Aldo Leopold Audubon Society is joining forces with the Friends of the Mead/McMillan for this free event.

There will be a variety of activities for people of all ages including:

- *Animal and nature crafts—11-1
- *Walk and explore the Nature Trails: Audubon Prairie, Turkey Foot, Ephemeral boardwalk, new observation decks
- *Scavenger hunt the historical exhibit
- *Wildflower and butterfly walk—noon
- *Live animal presentation—1 p.m.

The animal presentation will be presented by Dino Tlachac from “Nature’s Niche”. Dino is a Native American Oneida tribal member and naturalist who has traveled to various rainforests to see the natural habitats of animals of the rainforest. His presentation is educational, interactive, and “hands on”. He uses his “creature teachers” to show the audience how local animals as well as animals of the rainforest adapt to their environments.



ALAS Field Trip

Quincy Bluff and Wetlands, Adams County

Birds, Plants, Geology, History

Saturday, Sept 13, 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.

From atop Quincy Bluff, the spectacular vista is akin to stepping back 300 years in Wisconsin history, before European settlement. The 2-mile-long ridge and other nearby sandstone mesas tower above an unbroken expanse of wooded ridges, open cliffs, and extensive wetlands, with no sign of human habitation. The preserve also features sedge meadows, shrub carr, open areas favored by Sandhill cranes and harriers, and one of the rarest plant communities in the state, a pine-oak barrens, characterized by open sandy areas of grasses and low shrubs, sparsely timbered with pine and oak.

The 3,792-acre preserve is a State Natural Area managed by the DNR. It was formerly held by The Nature Conservancy and gifted in 2013 to the State of Wisconsin, its wildlife and its people.

WINGED WONDERS



Have you ever met an owl face to face? What about a hawk? A falcon? Meet some of Wisconsin's common, but rarely encountered birds. Discover what a raptor is, hear their stories, and learn what you can do to ensure they remain a significant part of the ecosystem.

The Raptor Education Group, Inc. from Antigo will present a program featuring live birds at the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society's first program of the season on September 17, 2014 at 7:00 p.m at the Lincoln Center, 1519 Water Street in Stevens Point.

The presenter, Abbey Krumrie, graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a BS in Biology and a minor in Captive Wildlife, and has been working with birds for 5 years and working at REGI for 2 years. Her husband will be helping with the presentation. He recently graduated from Stevens Point with a major in Wildlife Ecology, and has been at REGI for a year. Abbey is the Director of Education at REGI and Joe is an avian trainer and educator.

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society programs are free and open to the public.

Meet at the parking lot behind Applebee's off Highway 10 east, Stevens Point, at 8 am to car pool.

There are good hiking trails, although the climb to the top of the bluff is moderately challenging but "worth the climb." Wear sturdy shoes or hiking boots (no cleats), bring a water bottle, insect repellent, snacks, and a picnic lunch, binocs, and camera, of course. Please call Nancy Stevenson for more information. 715-341-0084.



ALAS Field Trip

Early Fall Birding at Big Eau Pleine County Park
Saturday, Sept 20, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Big Eau Pleine County Park contains a mature northern hardwood stand with sugar maple as a dominant species. There's plenty of foliage there to accommodate southbound migrants. We will be looking for early fall warblers, thrushes, raptors, and more. We will also check the shorelines and water for migrating waterfowl. There are plenty of trails to hike, so bring comfortable footwear. We will meet at the Chase Bank parking lot (next to Clark Street bridge) at 8:00 a.m. We should be back in Point by 1:00 p.m. For more information, contact Stan Skutek at (715) 544-0572.

DELIGHTFUL BIRDS I HAVE KNOWN

Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

Alan Haney



One of the birds I came to appreciate in southern Ohio where I grew up was the Eastern Towhee, then called the Rufous-sided Towhee. I continued to admire this most beautifully colored member of the sparrow family when I moved to Illinois, and later to North Carolina. When I moved to central Wisconsin in 1988, there were few, if any, Eastern Towhees to be found, although I could easily locate them only 50 miles south of Portage County. On

two previous years, I heard a Eastern Towhee at the farm during spring migration, but this year, for the first time, I have a pair nesting in heavy brush along the woods behind my barn. Their distinctive call, *chewink*, can be heard any time I am in that area, and many times a day I can catch the song, *drink-your- tee-e-e-e-e!* In her write-up in the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Wisconsin* (2006), Bettie Harriman suggested that the Eastern Towhee may have been the first bird of North America to be documented with an illustration. On his first visit to the Roanoke Colony in 1585-86, John White described and illustrated it. Harriman, with tongue- in- cheek, observed that it was appropriate, given its song, that this bird be first recognized in an English colony.

Both the male and female Eastern Towhee have bright rufous sides with white bellies. Males have sharply contrasting black heads and necks, while females have brown heads and necks. In the Southeast, where towhees are more common, the male has a white eye that becomes increasingly red along a northerly gradient. There are also small variations in the calls along the clinal variation from south to north. Here, along the northern edge of the Eastern Towhee range, males all have red eyes.

The Spotted Towhee of western United States is quite similar to the Eastern Towhee, and they regularly hybridize where their ranges overlap in the Great Plains. Until separated as distinct species, they were called Rufous-sided Towhee. Four other towhee species occur in North America, all in the Southwest.

Climate change and northward migration notwithstanding, the Eastern

Towhee appears to be on a downward trend that dates back at least to the 1960s, when breeding bird censuses were started. At the beginning of the 20th century, they were reported to be common in Wisconsin, at least in summer. Reasons for the decline are unknown, but nest parasitism by the Brown-headed Cowbird may be part of the problem. Studies have shown that 50 percent or more of nests will contain a cowbird egg. Cowbirds commonly remove one of the towhee eggs and replace it with one of their own, and unlike many birds, the Eastern Towhee seems to have no recognition of the alien egg. Young towhees fare poorly in nests shared with the precocious cowbird chick.

We can begin to look for Eastern Towhees in central Wisconsin by early April, with stragglers still arriving into May. This is an edge species, preferring heavy brush and ground cover, so getting a clear look is difficult, but listen for that distinctive call and song. Their nests are usually on the ground, sunk into leaf or grass litter, nearly always in heavy brush. Nests are constructed by the female using fibrous bark, grass, leaves, and rootlets. Nesting begins in early May and continues to mid-July. Clutch size is two to six eggs, usually four or five. The female also does all the incubating, for 12 to 13 days. Young birds are primarily fed insects, spiders, and other invertebrates obtained by scratching in leaf litter. As they get older, the diet expands to include seeds, fruits, and grain. Adults will also consume hard mast such as acorns and hazelnuts. During spring migration, adults also will use leaf and flower buds.

Young towhees are ready to fledge in 10 to 12 days, but parents will continue to feed and care for the young birds for two or three weeks. Second broods are sometimes attempted, although not commonly in our region. If a second brood is started, the female will usually build a second nest and begin incubating the clutch while the male cares for the young of the first brood. Eastern Towhees nesting in the north, migrate southward in winter, but many remain in the southern counties year round. Most will have left our area by late September.

Towhees may be increasing in central Wisconsin, but we must be concerned about the steady decline in the overall population. Breeding bird surveys suggest that this species may now be only half as abundant as it was 50 years ago, and the decline continues. In addition to cowbird parasitism, loss of habitat is undoubtedly a problem as brushy fencerows are eliminated, and cut-over forests are converted to agriculture and subdivisions. Now that they have begun nesting at my farm, I'd be very disappointed to not be invited to tea on a lovely June morning. If you know of a good brushy patch, listen carefully, and you, too, may be invited.

IT'S BIRDSEED ORDER TIME

The Aldo Leopold Audubon Society will conduct its annual birdseed sale on October 17-18. Included in this newsletter is an order form so that you may pre-order and then pick up your order. We will have all Stevens Point orders available in the Pineria Bank parking lot just across from the entrance to the Copps grocery store on the east side in Stevens Point. There is also a designated pick-up place for our Wisconsin Rapids members (see enclosed order form for dates.)

Due to a good harvest season, prices are down from last year. It is a good time to stock up on your birdseed needs. Our local birds depend upon locating feeders to get through the very cold winters that we have been experiencing of late.

Please send in your seed orders no later than October 3. This gives our birdseed-sale coordinators sufficient time to get the orders on the truck and ready for pick up.

Help is always needed and appreciated. Please call Anne Graham at 715-344-0968 to volunteer. Help is needed from 3-6 PM on Friday, October 17 and from 9 AM-1 PM on Saturday, October 18. Any amount of volunteer time is appreciated. Lifting bird seed bags of 50 pounds gets old without enough help.



Photo by Gerry Janz

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society

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ALAS Audubon Chapter

____ Yes, I would like to join the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society of Central Wisconsin I will receive *the almanac* newsletters describing chapter activities and events. My check for \$25 is enclosed. ALAS will notify you when your annual membership is to be renewed. Your dues will be used in their entirety to support the local ALAS chapter. ***You will not receive Audubon magazine.***

____ National Audubon Society

Yes, I would like to join the National Audubon Society. Please send the Audubon Magazine and my membership card to the address below. My check for \$25 is enclosed. You will also receive membership in the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society of Central Wisconsin, but the majority of your dues will be used to support ***National*** Audubon Society events and activities. The National Audubon Society will notify you when your membership is about to expire.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

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Please send my newsletter via email _____

Please make all checks payable to:
Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, and
mail to:

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society Membership
Chapter code: Z11 7XCH
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In this issue: Raptor Education Group
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the almanac

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Stevens Point, Wisconsin

The mission of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society is to foster appreciation and concern for all living things, and to protect and preserve their ecosystems.