

## Birds of Chippewa Nature Center

Chippewa Nature Center's bird checklist includes 222 species that have been seen here since CNC was founded in 1966, plus one species that we have evidence was here historically (Passenger Pigeon). Some have been seen here only a handful (or fewer) of times. Others could arguably be inappropriate for the list, since they were not ON the property, but flying over. Many are species that nest here year after year, or can consistently be found during spring or fall migration. Unfortunately, several are species in rapid decline, and aren't likely to show up here again.

Examining the history of what birds have been seen here combines both the obvious, that is, "what birds have been seen here," as well as the not-so-obvious, as in, did anyone write down what they saw? For instance, we have very few records of birds seen here in the first 15 years of the nature center's existence. Many of those records are of species seen only once or twice in the 1970s, and not recorded since, such as Lark Sparrow (1976), Red Crossbill (1970), Western Sandpiper (1976), Dunlin (1971), Harris' Sparrow (1976 & '79), and Common Moorhen (1968).

A total of 82 species have "first records" in 1982 and 1983, when Chip Francke, CNC's Lead Naturalist from 1981 – 1990, first made a serious effort to improve our bird records. Many of those "firsts" were hardly new birds to this area; they simply had never made their way into the nature center's record books. For example, it's highly unlikely the Mourning Dove, Common Grackle, and Great Blue Heron were "first" seen here in 1982! On the flip side, Chip did find many "firsts" that are indeed uncommon, such as the Red-Shouldered Hawk, Whip-poor-will, Vesper Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Connecticut Warbler.

Other special "first records" for CNC include Pileated Woodpecker (first evidence in 1989, now seen regularly), Eastern (formerly "rufous-sided") Towhee (1991), Mockingbird (1991), Black-crowned Night Heron (1986), Long-tailed Duck (formerly "oldsquaw", 1990), Bald Eagle (1987), Bohemian Waxwing (1994), Long-eared Owl (1988), Yellow-breasted Chat (1987), and Golden Eagle (1998).

The checklist also includes many birds that are on the National Audubon's "Watch List," including the "high-concern" (red list) Golden-winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler and Henslow's Sparrow. "Yellow list" species, those whose populations are declining but not as drastically, include American Black Duck, American Woodcock, Red-headed Woodpecker, Willow Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Blue-winged Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Canada Warbler, Harris' Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird. If you see any of these species at CNC, please let us know right away!

One change in the bird life at CNC involved not record-keeping practices, but major habitat alteration. Prior to construction of the Wetlands Area in 1991, the Oxbow was the only sizeable open wetlands on the property, and its shallow water and narrow channel didn't attract as many wetland species as the new area has. American Coot, Bonaparte's Gull, Black Tern, Little Blue Heron (1994 only), Caspian Tern, and Forster's Tern are species that have been seen only at the Wetlands Area. Others, such as Pied-billed Grebe, Marsh Wren and Hooded Merganser, have become regular nesting species, where previously they had been seen only during migration.

As the habitat of CNC changes from recently-farmed or mined, open areas, to shrubby old-field, and finally mature forest, bird life will continue to change as well. However, you can continue to expect a diversity of bird life at CNC, as our land management practices call for maintaining a variety of habitats, including open grasslands and various successional stages of woodlands.

--Janea Little  
Senior Naturalist