



Trees We Love 2020

Article and poem by Sue Schuit; photos by John Krerowicz

Dendrochronology (or tree-ring dating) is the scientific method of dating tree rings (also called growth rings) to the exact year they were formed. As well as dating them this can give data for dendroclimatology, the study of climate and atmospheric conditions and the timing of events and rates of environmental changes during different periods in history.

New growth in trees occurs in a layer of cells near the bark. A tree's growth rate changes in a predictable pattern throughout the year in response to seasonal climate changes, resulting in visible growth rings. Each ring marks a complete cycle of seasons, or one year, in the tree's life.



A 2020 Trees We Love winner: American Beech

Hence, for the entire period of a tree's life, a year-by-year record or ring pattern builds up that reflects the age of the tree and the climatic conditions in which the tree grew. Adequate moisture and a long growing season result in a wide ring, while a drought year may result in a very narrow one.

I wonder if we were all trees in 2020 would our yearly ring be wide or narrow? Feast or famine, wet or dry? I think either/or could be appropriate. Could/would the torrent of bad news, conflict, death, disease and violence in 2020 translate to a wide ring (and a thicker skin), or could we argue that the same events create a famine year of peace, wealth, health, patience and tolerance, resulting in a stunting of growth and thin skin? Rhetorical, of course; subjective, certainly; conjecture, at best.

Perhaps we are all in need of an "into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul" – John Muir moment (or more)? There is no better way to turn off the intellectual mind chatter, the turmoil, strife, angst and stress than a walk in the woods – a forest bath. Enter a living, green hush. Feel the powerful effects of the forest. To consciously pursue self-forgetfulness is to bridge the gap between unnatural and nature. Enter the green peace – alone and alert – and you will leave with the calm cast before you.



A 2020 Trees We Love winner: Norway Maple

Take a walk through the woods
Just a small sliver of time,
Slow down the pace, quiet your mind,
Breathe deep of the air
Take in what you see,
The countless hues, textures and colors
The make-up of one single tree.

Stand still for a bit, look up, down and around
Listen, hear, see, all the sights and the sounds.
Smell the woody perfumes
Get away from the streets
Hear the crunch of the leaves that are under your feet.

A walk through the woods,
The fine art of slowing down
Relish the silence
Traipse through the leaves.
Turn off the phones
Tune in to the peace.

Get out of the weeds
Shallow roots in the soil.
Get in to the trees
Growing up towards the light.

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

Next Board of Directors Meeting:

February 11, 2021. We will continue to meet via phone.

Newsletter Editor

Kristin Wegner

Ideas for the newsletter?

Send your suggestions, recaps of birding seminars/activities, fun facts, and birding tidbits to the Newsletter Editor at: Hoy Audubon, PO 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.

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Red Crossbills vs. White-winged Crossbills

With the cold season upon us, there has been an explosion of winter finches in Wisconsin. Two of them, Red Crossbill and White-winged Crossbill, have been seen in the Racine/Kenosha area. Here are a few tips to help separate them in the field.

Let's start with the Red Crossbill. It is a rather small finch, just a bit over 6 inches long. As its name implies, at least for the male, it is a rather dull reddish color, with the wings and tail being dull black. The female's color scheme is the same except the reddish plumage of the male is replaced by an olive coloration.

Both sexes have the namesake crossed bill with the upper mandible crossing the lower. This adaptation is used for opening pine cones to extract the seeds. The flight call of this bird is an excellent way to identify them in flight. *Kip kip kip* or *jip jip jip* is a good way to think of it.



Male White-winged Crossbill

In comparison, the White-winged Crossbill, being the same size as the Red Crossbill, has several different plumage differences to help with the identification. The male is a bright pinkish color with some grayish undertones on the lower breast and abdomen. The wings and tail are black as in the Red Crossbill, but as its name implies, it has two bold white wing bars. It has a crossed bill that is smaller and not as bulky as the red's bill is.

The female is a dull grayish-yellow with a light gray breast and abdomen that have faint streaking. The wings and tail are black with two bold white wing bars. Its call is distinctive also, being a twittering, rather high pitched call with a few squeaky notes thrown in.

The bill size difference allows each crossbill to feed on different conifer cones. With its larger bill, Red Crossbills can feed on the larger cones of Red and White Pines.



Female White-winged Crossbill



First-year Male White-winged Crossbill

The smaller bill of the White-winged Crossbill allows it to feed on the cones of spruce, hemlock, and tamarack trees. Occasionally both species will come to bird feeders with sunflower and nyjer seed being offered.

Hopefully these tips will help with the ID of these nomadic visitors.

- article by John Dixon, photos by Kristin Wegner

Trees We Love, continued

2020 Trees We Love Winners

Tree	Approx. Age	Location & Connections
Norway Maple (<i>Acer platanoides</i>)	120 years	<i>Racine</i> Steward: Aleks Cucik
American Beech (<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>)	140 years	<i>Racine</i> Stewards: Karen Horwitz

Please go to hoyaudubon.org/treeswelove to view all awards, pictures and narratives.

May we all be as resilient, as strong, and as beautiful as the 2020 Trees We Love Awardees. The Norway Maple, a non-native but prolific grower, planted in urban areas to replace Elms lost to Dutch Elm Disease, giving cool shade in heat, green versus glaring concrete and natural beauty to urban landscapes; the magnificent and revered Mother of the Woods, the American Beech Queen, mighty enough to overshadow and overgrow her sun-loving consort, King Oak.

2020 has burned a permanent scar in our collective psyche. What a comfort to consider the long perspective trees can provide; they are the reminder that we are surrounded by living witnesses to years far beyond our memories. Primal spirits beneath the soil, angels singing in the winds; everywhere poems and prose marvel at these ideals of perfection and eternity, as if they, like trees, are a visible part of the scenery.

Nature can be majestic and powerful. Nature is also subtle and discreet. You may pass her by, unnoticed. But the most ordinary scene, the one right outside your door perhaps, can be an endless source of fascination. Nature is the great spectacle - folks can sit on their porch and watch it go by; if one focuses there is so much to see.

Special thanks to all who have helped make the 5th year of Trees We Love a success, once again!

- ◆ John Krerowicz – photographer extraordinaire
- ◆ Kevin Nolan – on-site viewing, and expert arborist
- ◆ Helen Pugh – on-site viewing
- ◆ Carol Wiechers – beautiful photography framing
- ◆ Mary and Phil Hines – generous benefactors and supporters



White-winged Crossbill at feeder (see, it does happen!), Kristin Wegner

Shoop Park Field Trip



Saturday, November 21 was a beautiful day for Hoy's field trip, and we had a good turn out. Due to the warm weather, there were no waterfowl at Eagle Lake. The location was changed to Shoop Park. Most of us wanted to see the Crossbills that had been reported, and we were successful! Many among us added either a county bird or a lifer. We had a mild sunny walk, and relished the time with friends.

- article and photos by Helen Pugh



Red-breasted Merganser, Kristin Wegner

Upcoming Activities

Due to the ongoing situation with COVID-19, Hoy will limit our field trips to activities/locations where we can maintain social distancing.

If you attend our field trips, we ask that you **wear a mask**, and please bring your own water, snacks, and optics (binoculars and spotting scopes) to help minimize contact. We will also not be carpooling to events as we have in the past.

The field trip end time will depend on bird activity and/or weather conditions but will generally conclude no later than 12:00 p.m.

If you have questions or need directions to field trip locations, contact hoyfieldtrips@hoyaudubon.org.

Saturday, January 16, 9:00 a.m.

Hoy Field Trip: Waterfowl & Gulls on the Kenosha Lakefront
7825 First Avenue, Kenosha, WI 53143

We'll meet at the Southport Park parking area (just north of the Kenosha Sand Dunes). Dress warmly!

Friday, February 12 through Monday, February 15

The Great Backyard Bird Count!

A world-wide, joint effort by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada—open to all. Visit birdcount.org for more information.

Saturday, February 20, 9:00 a.m.

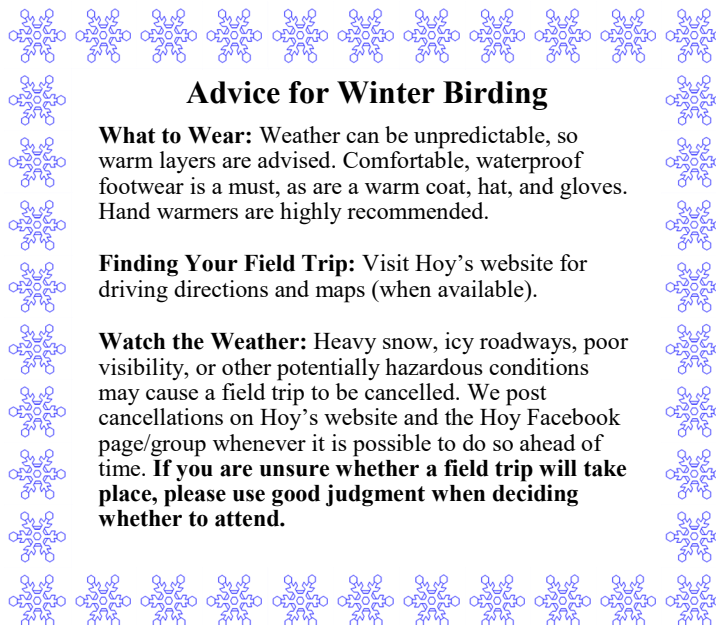
Hoy Field Trip: Gulls on the Racine Lakefront
Myers Park, Racine

We'll begin at Myers Park then make our way northward to the Racine Harbor. Bring your binoculars (and spotting scope if possible) and dress for the weather!

Saturday, March 27, 9:00 a.m.

Hoy Field Trip: Eagle Lake Waterfowl
Meet at Eagle Park

We'll arrive at Eagle Lake park (north side) at 9:00 a.m. We'll bird the lake then check the wetlands near the intersection of Hwy 11 and 75 on the way back. **Check our website prior to the trip;** if the lake is still frozen by late March, we may go birding elsewhere.



Advice for Winter Birding

What to Wear: Weather can be unpredictable, so warm layers are advised. Comfortable, waterproof footwear is a must, as are a warm coat, hat, and gloves. Hand warmers are highly recommended.

Finding Your Field Trip: Visit Hoy's website for driving directions and maps (when available).

Watch the Weather: Heavy snow, icy roadways, poor visibility, or other potentially hazardous conditions may cause a field trip to be cancelled. We post cancellations on Hoy's website and the Hoy Facebook page/group whenever it is possible to do so ahead of time. **If you are unsure whether a field trip will take place, please use good judgment when deciding whether to attend.**

- ◆ View the Hoy Honker in full color at www.hoyaudubon.org
- ◆ Visit Hoy on Facebook at www.facebook.com/HoyAudubonSociety

Join Hoy Audubon or renew your Membership!

Renewals for Hoy Audubon Society "Chapter Supporter" memberships are due on July 1 of each calendar year. Chapter Supporter dues are \$15 per individual.

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Jenny sports a Pileated Woodpecker mask, photo by Helen Pugh