



by Douglas H. Frazer

Fox Point



FOX POINT became a new Bird City Wisconsin community in 2012. Bird City – modeled after the widely successful, community-recognition Tree City USA program – has developed and encourages municipalities to address 22 criteria across five categories including: habitat creation and protection, community forest management, limiting bird hazards, public education, and recognizing International Migratory Bird Day. Its aim is for local governments to expand their conservation efforts and motivate residents to do more.

Bird City Wisconsin's overall goal is a simple one: encourage all communities to implement sound bird conservation practices by offering recognition to those municipalities succeeding in enhancing birds' environments, and educating the public about bird-and-people interactions along with the contributions birds make to a healthy community.

Towards this end, communities, local governments, and private citizens all over Wisconsin are teaming up to increase green spaces and native plantings (and to remove invasive, non-native species) in parks and backyards, building nest boxes and chimney swift towers, adapting lighting systems that reduce collisions, preventing window strikes, and educating cat owners about the need to keep their pets indoors.

"Birds are a vital component of a healthy ecosystem in our local communities and they provide environmental as well as economic benefits," said Flo Miller, former TogetherGreen co-director at the National Audubon Society.

Birds are unheralded assistants for backyard gardeners, flower fanciers, private and municipal landscapers, farmers, and foresters. Without them, communities would have to spend more money keeping the natural systems in balance. Insect eating birds reduce the need for chemical pest control. Birds are also ferocious eaters of weed seeds and rodents.

BUT BIRDS ARE ALSO IN PERIL. CONSIDER THESE FACTS:

- Scientists estimate that 300 million to 1 billion birds die each year from collisions with buildings.
- Up to 50 million die from encounters with communication towers and wind turbines.
- At least 11 million die from car strikes.
- 1 million birds die *each day* from attacks by cats left outdoors.

Many migration stopover sites in Wisconsin's Great Lakes region are also threatened. Conversion of land to urban and agricultural uses has resulted in habitat loss and fragmentation leading to invasion by non-native plants that replace native species. Water quality degradation from pesticides, industrial waste, and erosion can also limit food availability and expose migrant birds to harmful toxins.

The pathways of migratory birds span cities, states, counties, and even continents. Fox Point resident Carl Schwartz, current president of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology and state coordinator for Bird City Wisconsin, observes that Wisconsin sits astride one such major flyway, and its unique location allows us to enjoy one of the most diverse collections of birdlife in the U.S. "More than 400

species have been recorded in the state with the most active 'birders' regularly spotting/recording over 300 species in the course of a year's time. This is among the largest number of regularly sighted birds in the country."

Some of the birds seen year round in Fox Point include the American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jay, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Cardinal, Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, and Cooper's Hawk.

May is the peak season in the village to observe migratory birds, many of which breed in Wisconsin including the Baltimore Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, and the Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

We have bats too, although bats are not birds but mammals. Bats are also important to our ecosystem and vulnerable if the ecosystem becomes unbalanced. During their night flights bats can consume as many as 1000 insects an hour!

Two important resources are close at hand: The Schlitz Audubon Nature Center and the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory at the Forest Beach Migratory Preserve. The latter, located in Belgium south of Harrington Beach State Park, is now up and running. It is dedicated to monitoring and studying the flying creatures that inhabit our area. And Carl Schwartz recommends *The Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Eastern and Central North America* as a good, personal resource. Given our providential location, every resident of Fox Point can look out the window and spot scores and scores of colorful and delightful birds – some traveling up from Argentina or down from the Arctic – to pay us a visit.



Carl Schwartz

Birds capture our imaginations with their flight, their songs, their annual migrations, their antics at our birdfeeders, and their beauty. Birds do a lot for us yet they face many threats. As a Bird City community each of us can make things better for them in our own backyards.

Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village Board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the Village Board, other Village Board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.