

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 928  
Stevens Point WI 54481-0928

In this issue:  
Kestrels  
Northern Shrike  
Winter  
New Zealand  
and more....

# the almanac



*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.*



Newsletter of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, Inc.

February 2009

## THE LIFE AND PERILS OF THE BUENA VISTA KESTRELS



*American Kestrel* photo by Ted Keyel

Janet and Amber Eschenbach, UWSP Biology graduate students, will present a program on the Buena Vista Kestrels for the February program of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society. Janet has been working with the Kestrel Program since 2004 and Amber has been working on the program since 2005. The program will be held at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at the Lincoln Senior Center, 1519 Water Street, Stevens Point, Wisconsin. This free presentation is open to the public.

This historic kestrel monitoring program was started in 1967 by the well-known naturalist Frances Hamerstrom. It is one of the longest-running monitoring programs in the United States. Studies have shown that providing nest boxes for kestrels can increase local populations, as well as increase accessibility of birds for study. Even though the kestrel has been studied in great detail, additional information will improve our understanding of this raptor. Data seems to indicate populations in northeastern United States have declined substantially since the mid-1970s. Nest-box monitoring programs may reveal important information about what is influencing these downward trends. Central Wisconsin kestrel researchers Janet and Amber Eschenbach will present an informative discussion on the status of the Buena Vista kestrel and show you some of the latest in raptor research techniques.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

|        |                     |  |
|--------|---------------------|--|
| Feb 13 | Newsletter deadline | items to llhagen@uniontel.net                      |
| Mar 4  | ALAS program        | <i>Birdscaping in the Midwest</i> , Mariette Nowak |
| Mar 28 | ALAS field trip     | Early Spring Migrants at Shiocton Wetlands         |

## UPCOMING EVENTS

*ALAS Field Trip*  
**Early Spring Migrants at the Shiocton Wetlands**  
*Saturday, March 28*

Mark your calendars now. Further information will be in the March newsletter.

### Want to stay up-to-date on sustainability events in central Wisconsin?

If you would like to receive the *Central Wisconsin Sustainability Newsletter* by email with recent news and upcoming related to sustainability events every few months, enter your email address in the green box at <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/sustainability.html> or email Lynn Markham at [lmarkham@uwsp.edu](mailto:lmarkham@uwsp.edu) The December 2008 edition is available at [http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/cweco-news/dec08\\_cws-news.html](http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/landcenter/cweco-news/dec08_cws-news.html)

### ABOUT THAT LEUCISTIC CHICKADEE....

...There has been some disagreement in the scientific community about what exactly to call birds with white spots. Solid white birds with pink eyes everyone agrees are albinistic, and pale birds with normally colored but pale plumage everyone agrees are leucistic. But birds with white patches intermingled with normal plumage have been described with a variety of terms.

Albinism is a genetic mutation that prevents the production of melanin in the body. Leucism is a genetic mutation that prevents melanin from being deposited normally on feathers. Since the white patches on birds have no melanin, birds with these patches have been said to have partial or imperfect albinism.

More recently, however, scientists are clarifying the definitions and pointing out that since birds with white patches do have melanin in the body, they cannot be albinistic.

Therefore the white patches are caused by a defect preventing normal deposition of the melanin. And since leucism is a deposition problem, it makes sense that birds with white patches would be leucistic. Consequently leucism comes in two main varieties — paleness, an equal reduction of melanin in all feathers; and pied, an absence of melanin in some feathers creating white patches.

Interestingly, albinism only applies to an absence of melanin. Since some colors come from other pigments, such as carotenoids, it is possible for a bird to be albinistic and still have color. Leucism, on the other hand, applies to all pigments. It is also possible for a bird to be completely white and still have melanin in the body. In this case the bird would be considered leucistic and would have dark eyes because the mutation only applies to depositing melanin in the feathers. Albinistic birds have pink eyes because without melanin in the body, the only color in the eyes comes from the blood vessels behind the eyes.

From Project Feederwatch at Cornell University [http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/AboutBirdsandFeeding/Albinism\\_Leucism.htm](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/AboutBirdsandFeeding/Albinism_Leucism.htm)

## ALDO LEOPOLD AUDUBON SOCIETY

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|                 |          |
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| Vice-President  |          |
| Alan Haney      | 592-6949 |
| Secretary       |          |
| Lauren Ebbecke  |          |
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| Maureen Brocken | 677-6772 |

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| Larry Graham/John Munson     |                      |
| Conservation                 |                      |
| Bob Juracka                  | 824-5339             |
| Education                    |                      |
| Karen Dostal                 | 592-4706             |
| Field Trips                  |                      |
| Bob Freckmann/<br>Gerry Janz | 344-0686<br>341-6384 |
| Membership (Mailing list)    |                      |
| Barb Munson                  | 341-1208             |
| Membership (Recruitment)     |                      |
| Bob Lane                     | 824-3978             |
| Newsletter                   |                      |
| Lora Hagen                   |                      |
| Newsletter Distribution      |                      |
| Barb DeWeerd                 | 341-9037             |
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| John Zach                    | 341-9788             |

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| Sue Hall          | 344-8081 |
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### ALAS Chapter

#### Membership Application

Yes, I would like to join the Central Wisconsin Aldo Leopold Audubon Society. 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

#### Membership Application

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 \$25.00 is enclosed. *You will also receive membership in the Central Wisconsin Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, 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: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society  
Membership  
PO Box 928  
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Chapter code: Z11 7XCH

## CLOSING THE CIRCLE

*Words of beauty and wisdom and joy from a masterpiece of nature literature.*

“The circle of Hocoka tightened and closed, I suppose, on a starry winter night when I howled with the wolves. Inevitably the snows had come, again and again, deepening, astounding even old men and women of many winters.

“...For me, living as I did, chores multiplied as the severity of winter progressed.

“There was twice as much snow to shovel off roofs, deck, and paths as during a normal winter. There was more sledding and handling of firewood. Getting water required snowshoes instead of mukluks on a packed trail. I needed a shovel more often to get at the wooden waterhole cover, and there was more-than-average chiseling of ice followed by a delicate slog with buckets uphill to the cabin.

“Mornings were colder to awaken to (with, sometimes, ice in water and slop buckets...getting thicker during the coldest spells). The cabin took longer to heat and, some nights, I'd need to rise to an alarm clock to feed the stove, meaning less deep sleep. Even trails had to be packed with snowshoes more often and sometimes that didn't do much good.

“Bad head trips didn't help:

Winter's seasonal post-rangering unemployment.

“...Even a canoe expedition from northeastern Minnesota's Quetico-Superior to Hudson Bay hounded me. For years I'd wanted to flow like a feather on the waters of my life, the rains and snows of my years, and of Hocoka, downstream to the sea. But I had always put it off. I'd return to rangering: to duty, responsibility, obligations, paycheck, the challenges of Lake Superior, and the potentials of human companionship...There were countless excuses for postponing a canoe journey that wouldn't go away, that was preposterous in scope, yet that called for some unknown soulful purpose for five years, ten years, forever: most powerfully at critical personal junctures.

“But never had I gone.

“...The head trips, the physical drain of deep snow and persistent sub-zero cold, the penetrating presence of a season civilization insulates itself against: it all reminded me of how the great naturalist Richard Nelson remarked that the earth's core is winter.

“Even the universe is winter.

“Life is only something taken for a moment,” he wrote in *The Island Within*, “rubbed warm and held back from the chill...Winter waits and finds all life. In the end, each of us stares through the dark eyes of winter.”

“...A March night came when I heard wolves howling so I stepped out on the cabin deck beneath winter's stars.

## PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS

*by Larry Graham*

Have you noticed that squirrels are chasing each other around the trees and through the snow? It's that time of year again; squirrel romance is in the air.

Most mornings the first critter I see on our feeder is one of our two resident red squirrels. Anne really likes red squirrels: “They are so cute.” I think they are stinkers. I recall once tending the fire and cooking dinner on Mountain Lake in the Sylvania Wilderness. I had a bag of really great gorp on the ground between my feet. When I reached down to get a handful the bag came up empty. Our campsite red squirrel had sneaked in and managed to steal and spill the goodies.



*Chipper*

*photo by Anne Graham*

It seems as if I have spent my married life with squirrels. During our first year one of Anne's students brought a baby fox squirrel to school. It had been knocked from a nest during a thunderstorm and was a pathetic-looking bedraggled specimen. She bottle-fed it and I built a large chicken wire cage for her classroom and another cage for our apartment. Anne would take Chipper to school in a birdcage and bring her home to our apartment on Friday for the week end. The squirrel had some free run of the apartment. One of my favorite memories is coming into the living room one day and finding Chipper on the mantle munching on a small palm, which she had just uprooted, holding it like an ear of corn. Anne was furious.

When we lived in Appleton, we had a gray squirrel, Bushytail, who would eat sunflower seeds from our hands at the dining-area window sill.

We usually have a couple of red squirrels but seem to live on an edge between fox and gray squirrel territories. Right now the fox squirrels are winning; however Anne saw gray and black squirrels chasing each other in the yard this week. Black squirrels are a color phase of gray squirrels. We must have flying squirrels but I never have seen them although I suspect they are among the critters that clean off our feeders at night.

Some people who feed birds run a continuous battle trying to prevent squirrels from consuming their birdfeed. One of our Audubon board members continuously live traps and relocates squirrels from his yard; I suspect every one he removes opens a spot for another to move into. We have always assumed that if you are going to feed birds you are also going to be feeding squirrels; it's the price you pay for the birds. I wasn't so sure of this philosophical attitude yesterday when a fox squirrel decimated a suet cake that I had just put out. Our woodpeckers are going to have to get more aggressive and protective of their suet feeders.

Judging by the activity around here, we are certain that we will have squirrels and their progeny again next year.

*Continued on page 7*

## DELIGHTFUL BIRDS I HAVE KNOWN

### NORTHERN SHRIKE

(*Lanius excubitor*)

by Alan Haney



Northern Shrike Photo by Ted Keyel

Our kitchen has large windows through which we can look across our gardens to the fields and forests beyond. I keep two bird feeders, one visible out the north window and the other through the east-facing window. Two weeks ago while having breakfast, I noticed that the usual dozen or more birds that hang around the feeders were absent. I automatically scanned the nearby trees, thinking that a Cooper's Hawk was near. There was no Cooper's Hawk, but a Northern Shrike was sitting conspicuously in the alternate-leaved dogwood near the east feeder. It was the first I had seen so close to the house, and its presence clearly had sent all other birds for cover, even the Blue Jays and woodpeckers.

Many would not consider shrikes to be "delightful" birds. They are predators on insects, small mammals, reptiles, and other birds. The Northern Shrike is a robin-sized bird with coloration similar to a Northern Mockingbird, but note the strong black eye stripe and darker wings and tail of the shrike. Of course a mockingbird would be unlikely in Central Wisconsin in the winter, and that is the only time we'd likely see a Northern Shrike. Its cousin, the Loggerhead Shrike, nests in Wisconsin, but spends winters in the deep South and Southwest. Slightly smaller than the Northern Shrike, the Loggerhead has a shorter bill that is less obviously hooked. The Loggerhead has what appears to be a disproportionately large head, thus the name.

Shrikes are best-known, perhaps, because of their habit of impaling prey on spines or barbed-wire, presumably to preserve it for future use. Observers have seen Loggerhead Shrikes return to mummified prey that was impaled as long as eight months previously. Shrikes lack talons, and kill their prey by sharp raps of their heavy beaks. Both species are quite aggressive, and sometimes kill prey as large as themselves, although the bulk of their prey is insects and small mammals.

Both shrikes are uncommon enough to trigger some excitement among birders. The Loggerhead is rare, and observations suggest that it is declining. Because they feed primarily on insects, and require wide, open spaces, their decline may

## BIRDWATCHER – THE LIFE OF ROGER TORY PETERSON

*A book review by John Munson*

Elizabeth J. Rosenthal captures the essence of a man who has made bird watching a common experience for people around the world. What once was the experience of a select few, mostly self educated, individuals, bird watching has become, not only big business. but an important tool for monitoring wildlife habitats throughout the world.

In this biographical sketch of Roger Tory Peterson, Rosenthal traces the life of a man, enamored with birds at a very early age, to the ultimate professional who created the bird guides so familiar to many bird watchers. These guides drew in people from around the world. His life's work established bird watching, the study of ornithology and the science of bird habitat as important life lessons. Readers will be enthralled with this book as it illustrates how one highly dedicated individual changed the birding world as we understand it today. Few people truly understand how the bird guides that all of us use, evolved over the course of many years.

The author invites readers to understand Roger Tory Peterson on both a personal and professional level. His idiosyncrasies, including a natural tendency for authoritarian rule in his family, his tendency to merge into his introverted shell and his lack of organization in the many tasks he undertook are all weaved into a compelling story. Readers will not only enjoy the book but also grow in their own personal knowledge. What we as birders enjoy today did not happen accidentally but grew out of the many experiences of this man.

He was an artist, writer, speaker, politician, world renowned public person but Rosenthal explains the many influences that created him as a person known through-out the world.

Sit by the fireside and enjoy reading this magnificent biography. Become awed by a man who possessed immense levels of personal energy, an artist's eye for detail and a drive for excellence found in few individuals. At the same time see Roger Tory Peterson as a human being with many of the flaws found in all of us. This is a must read for amateur as well as professional birders, environmentalist and visionaries. What one man accomplished in a lifetime of following birds and their lives impacted modern society in a very positive direction. His life stands as a lesson to all of us, encouraging all of us to tune into our environment and its animal creatures. To purchase a copy of this book contact Elizabeth J. Rosenthal at <http://www.petersonbird.com>

**Birdwatcher – The Life of Roger Tory Peterson**, Elizabeth J. Rosenthal: The Lyons Press, Guilford, Connecticut, 2008.

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fund raiser for the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society. It is possible that the trip may spend 7 days in New Zealand and then move to Northern Australia to experience birding in Australia's rainforest for the final 6-7 days.

# POTENTIAL NEW ZEALAND CULTURAL AND BIRDING EXCURSION

November, 2010

By John Munson

I am in the process of investigating offering ALAS members an opportunity to go birding in Australia in November of 2010. As this is a relatively expensive trip I would appreciate knowing if any our members would be interested in going along. The following is a sample itinerary of the trip. It will vary some as a final itinerary is completed. If we have a large enough group, we will travel between destinations via rented coach. A smaller group would be traveling via mini-van.

**Day 1 Arrive Auckland** Meet and greet and transfer to your accommodation. Accom: First Class, Auckland 2 nts

**Day 2 Guided Tour to an Island Bird Sanctuary** Get up close and personal with one of the world's most successful conservation projects - Tiritiri Matangi Island. See some of New Zealand's most endangered birds and rare wildlife in this open sanctuary. During the last 21 years almost half a million native trees have been planted allowing the re-introduction of 11 threatened native bird species.



**Day 3 Glow Worm Caves** The Waitomo glowworm, *Arachnocampa luminosa*, is unique to New Zealand. Thousands of these tiny creatures radiate their unmistakable luminescent light as our expert guides provide informative commentary on the Caves' historical and geological significance. Your visit concludes with a brief, yet remarkably moving, boat trip through the Glowworm Grotto. *Drive to Rotorua* Accom: First Class, Rotorua 2 nts

I envision a trip of 13-14 days with a variety of birding and cultural experiences. The total trip will cost around \$5000 U.S and will include most meals, transportation, flight and guides.

**If you think that you might be interested in going along on this experience, please send me an email at [barbjohn@charter.net](mailto:barbjohn@charter.net).** I need to get an idea of interest before I pursue setting up final details. This trip will be run as a

be a result of both loss of habitat and pesticides acquired through their diet. While the Northern Shrike also is uncommon, it nests in the northern boreal and taiga region from the Atlantic to the Pacific, including all of Alaska. Its winter population in Wisconsin is probably more stable, although it is seen too infrequently to be sure. It overwinters in the northern tier of states and through the Rocky Mountains. We are most likely to see the Northern in winter and the Loggerhead in summer, but either shrike is rare enough to trigger a quick reach for the binoculars. As with raptors that come south in the winter, periodic eruptions of Northern Shrikes have been recorded. Its winter population seems to be influenced by the cyclic abundance of mice, shrews, and lemmings.

Not much is known about Northern Shrike nesting habits. Their nests are usually in conifers in semi-open habitat. They rarely are seen interacting with members of their own species, perhaps because they are so sparsely distributed. Keep an eye out for this unusual bird. You may be delighted to spot it in your backyard.



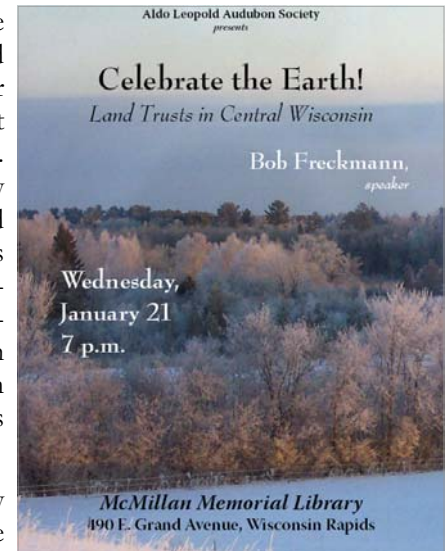
*Loggerhead Shrike*

*Photo by Ted Keyel*

## JANUARY PROGRAM POSTER

Did you wonder about the photo in the poster for our January program about land trusts in Central Wisconsin. Your editor had permission to use the photo, but credit information wasn't available at press-time. The photo of the fog and ice on a wintry morning is a view of the Annette and Rowe Klade land near Council Grounds State Park on the Wisconsin River in Marathon County. The Klades signed a conservation easement to protect land values with the North Central Conservancy Trust in October of 2007. The photographer is their daughter Stacy Klade Pettit.

Thank you to North Central Conservancy Trust and Stacy Klade Pettit for use of the photo.



# REFLECTIONS ON AN IDAHO ELK HUNT

*A short story by John Munson*

The bus driver is sitting on his rock at the top of Blue Nose, Professor is on the little meadow, Elk-wagon hiked to his secret “big meadow” and I’m snuggled in my -20 degree sleeping bag. A mouse that has avoided our makeshift water-can trap nibbles on the edge of an English biscuit. Cellophane is no hindrance for him. The sky is a misty grey and the tent sags from another 6 inches of fluffy snow. I should get up and hunt the ridge behind the tent but warmth drives me deeper into my bag. Finally nature calls and I find myself melting snow on the rim of the bucket toilet seat and gazing off in the distance. For those of you who haven’t had this magnificent experience, I highly recommend a Holiday Inn Express. Off to my left, a flash of blue announces the arrival of my friend and I retire to the tent, throw two logs in the barrel stove, and fix my version of an egg McMuffin complete with ham, eggs, cheese, plus an English muffin with nibbled spots. Grabbing a cup of Java I am soon sitting on a camp stump-stool peering out through a crack in the fly of the tent.

It’s early morning, just before 6:00. Black on blue, blue on black stealthily hiding in the lower branches of a white bark pine, a Steller’s Jay hops up one branch, down to another and finally to my feeding stump. Last night, I covered it with dried cherries, raisins, peanuts, cashews and just for fun M& M’s. He doesn’t like green or red M& M’s but carries off the blue ones immediately, only to return for more. I sit in my tent, camera in hand aiming for the perfect shot. Frustration sets in immediately; as I begin to push the shutter, like a shot he is gone. Maybe I need better bait. Aha, venison jerky, now that is another thing. He picks up each piece, carefully weighing how much he can stuff in his beak, goes only a short distance and with a rapid popping shek, shek, shek, shek, announces his return to discover that Gray Jays are coveting his treasure. The race is on, who will get the largest pieces, the most, and carry them away the quickest. Being a solitary soul the Steller’s Jay finds himself at a disadvantage and becomes the camp bully. His piercing coal-black eyes, puffed-up chest and bobbing up and down seems to send a message to his competitors. They back off a short distance and wait for his departure. Once more I move in for the perfect photo knowing that cashews have become his favorite once the jerky is hidden. David Sibley says that the Steller’s Jay has an entirely blackish head and crest, dark blue wings and a pale blue belly and rump with a size similar to our common Blue Jay. However, I can tell you that a week-long, well-fed beggar begins to look a little puffy and maybe downright fat.



For those of you who have never seen this magnificent creature, head to Idaho, go out of North Fork along the Salmon River, take forest road 038 and climb 16 miles to the top and turn left on Blue Nose. Look for the first camping spot, the one with the 4-foot stump beside the fire-ring. Put out some bits and pieces and wait for a flash of blue. A Steller’s Jay just flew through. Listen to the wind in the pines, smell the loam and pine smoke in the air. Sit and be awed by God’s creation. Whatever you do don’t forget the blue M& M’s. I’m glad I slept in that day.

*Continued from page 10*

“I’d seen no sign of wolves for six weeks and missed their wild presence. Everything, it seemed, had been building to a head: all the winters, the cold and darkness, the starving deer, the inexorable loneliness of living on the edge: even the wolves were gone. Perhaps now, however, as winter’s snowpack crusted over and provided better footing, the wolves were heading back into the hinterlands.

“It was good to hear the wolves again.

“...I howled back.

“...And I felt, more than knew, why the land-through-wolves was howling. Felt why. Felt what the deep pool of silent knowledge, the voice of all primordial time, was singing.

“It rose through my spirit like a wave passing onward, onward, into the infinite light of stars.

“...And suddenly I knew, beyond doubt, what I was going to do.

“...It would be another three weeks before that thick ice was gone but I’d already seen crows and, at night, could hear gulls partying it up in open water beneath Kawasachong’s falls. Loons flew by daily, checking ice conditions. And that very day, ...I had heard the song of spring’s first robin.

“The winter of all winters was ending.

“It was time, soon, to get going.

“It was time to start packing.

“It was time to varnish paddles and prepare the canoe.

“Another circle needed closing.

“Or was a new circle, ever so delicately, beginning to open and flower.

“When the snow finished melting and rivers ran high, sure thing, I would flow with the spirit of winter’s living and dead—honoring...the wolf’s kind, my kind—all the way to the sea.”

Jim dale Huot-Vickery

*Closing the Circle*

As included in

Gary Schmidt & Susan M. Felch, eds

*Winter: A Spiritual Biography of the Season*

Skylight Paths Publishing, 2003

Woodstock, Vermont