



Bird City Wisconsin Newsletter

May 2022

Northwoods feeding/education station improved with Bird City grant

By **CHARLES HAGNER**
Bird City Wisconsin Director

In June 2021, Bird City Wisconsin awarded small grants to six Bird City communities: Kenosha County, Manitowish Waters, Mequon, New London, Whitewater, and Wisconsin Rapids.

In past issues of the newsletter, we described how New London, the City of Mequon, and Kenosha County used their small grants. In this issue, we tell what the Town of Manitowish Waters, a High Flyer and a Bird City since 2010, accomplished with its 2021 grant.

MARK WESTPHAL, president of the North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Club, tells us that the award helped the club improve bird habitat and an education station on the campus of the North Lakeland Discovery Center in Manitowish Waters, in Vilas County.

The station was created over a decade ago not only to provide quality habitat for Northwoods birds but also to give schoolchildren and other visitors to the Discovery Center up-close opportunities to observe bird behavior and banding demonstrations.

The bird club worked with a landscape designer and a retired Wisconsin DNR wildlife biologist and master bird bander to develop a plan to offer birds year-round cover, food, and water.

"Funds provided by the Bird City grant have been used to purchase 10 shrubs, including pagoda dogwood, arrowwood viburnum, common witch hazel, and Viburnum lantana 'Mohican,' aka wayfaring tree," says Westphal. "These plants have been placed in a central focal point near the bird feeding station."



North Lakeland Discovery Center Bird Club members made a bird-attracting water feature the centerpiece of an improved feeding station.

In addition, bird feeders were rearranged and adjusted to make them easier for volunteers to fill and maintain. A cable system raises

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Help count, track declining Chimney Swifts in Wisconsin

The Wisconsin DNR and the Wisconsin Chimney Swift Working Group are asking the public to report **CHIMNEY SWIFT** sightings this spring to help monitor trends and locate important roost sites.

While migrating through Wisconsin from mid-April to early May from their winter homes in South America, you can find large numbers of Chimney Swifts and hear their chattering sounds in the early evenings, ready to roost overnight in brick chimneys. Some will stay in the area to breed, and others will go farther north.

"It's pretty easy for anyone to identify a Chimney Swift. They have slender bodies with long, curved wings and a short, tapered tail – they look like a flying cigar," said **RICH STAFFEN**, DNR Natural Heritage Conservation biologist. "They fly rapidly, often twisting from side to side and banking erratically. They also give a distinctive, high chattering call while in flight. Chimney swifts



are the only bird that will roost in a chimney, dropping inside at dusk and emerging the next morning."

"Springtime is an excellent opportunity to gauge their population numbers and help assess trends for this species," said **BARBARA DUERKSEN**, a member of the Chimney Swift Working Group, a statewide volunteer effort to keep swifts common in Wisconsin.

"Counting swifts is important because their numbers are declining. We've been doing this for years in the fall, but we're now

encouraging folks to be watching and counting in the spring as well."

According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Chimney Swift populations have declined 72% in the last 50 years. By continuing to monitor these populations, the DNR and the working group hope to learn more about them, identify important roost sites and find ways to protect them.

"Everyday people like you and me can count Chimney Swifts as they enter chimneys in the early evening. It's a simple process; you don't need to be a bird expert to do this. All you need to do is count," Duerksen said.

If you want to help with the count, here's how:

1. WATCH AND LISTEN for Chimney Swifts during the daytime as they hunt for insects to determine when to begin counting. The lower half of the state may see them in late

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check out our website at birdcitywisconsin.org

HOW CAN I HELP?

Bird City is seeking to bolster its small-grant donations. Tax deductible donations can be made online at: <https://birdcitywisconsin.org/support-us> or by mail to BCW, 4230 N. Oakland Ave., #219, Shorewood, WI 53211

WHERE CAN I SEND NEWS ABOUT MY BIRD CITY?

Send pictures, stories and other information to director@birdcitywisconsin.org

WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION AND RENEWAL DATES?

New applications can be submitted at any time but are reviewed the first of March, July and November. Annual renewals are due on January 31.

WHAT ACTIONS DOES BCW ENCOURAGE?

1. Habitat creation, protection and monitoring
2. Community forest management
3. Limiting or removing threats to birds
4. Public education
5. Energy and sustainability
6. Celebration of World Migratory Bird Day

Water feature is feeding station's centerpiece

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the feeders beyond the reach of the region's typically opportunistic bears.

The centerpiece of the feeding station, Westphal explains, is a new water feature. Employing creativity, ingenuity, and plenty of muscle, bird club members fashioned a cascading stream and several small ponds from several hundred pounds of selected rocks. An underground holding tank with a circulating pump allows for the continuous flow of water.

The area around the new water feature will be planted with plants and flowers chosen to benefit birds and pollinators. "We are also planning to provide nearby seating," Westphal reports, "so that visitors can relax and enjoy watching the bird feeders and the activity generated by the new plants and water structure."

This was the second year that Bird City Wisconsin, a program of the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory in Port Washington,

awarded small grants, which are available to Bird City communities only.

The grants are intended to kickstart local projects that help Bird City communities create and protect bird habitat, educate residents about the many positive interactions between birds and people, and reduce threats to birds.

In 2021, in addition to the work done in Manitowish Waters, New London created a fun citywide educational project featuring colorful cutouts of the swallows featured in the Bird City Wisconsin logo.

The Mequon Nature Preserve and the City of Mequon used its grant to replace nest boxes used to monitor bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens. And the Pringle Nature Center and Kenosha County conducted free educational programs aimed at preventing bird-window collisions.

Descriptions of projects funded by Bird City Wisconsin in 2020 can be found on the Bird City website: <https://birdcitywisconsin.org/>

All you need to know to help Chimney Swifts

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April to early May. The upper half of the state may be a little later.

2. LOOK FOR TALL BRICK CHIMNEYS that are uncapped. If you find more than one chimney, do some scouting in the evenings to determine where the swifts will roost. Watch for swifts swooping over the chimney for a while before they enter. Be aware that the roost site choice can change from night to night, especially during migration.

3. PICK ONE OR MORE NIGHTS TO MONITOR IN MAY. Larger numbers show up two or three weeks after the first swifts arrive.

4. OBSERVE THE ROOST starting about 20 minutes before sunset until 10 minutes after the last swift enters the chimney.

Please stay in one location, even if you do not see swifts right away. They may come to your site later and you do not want to miss them. To be sure, stay 30 minutes after sunset to know if it was active or not. If you have zero swifts in your chimney, please record this. This is still valuable information.

5. COUNT (OR ESTIMATE) THE NUMBER OF SWIFTS as they enter the chimney. It's useful to count in groups of five or 10 when they enter quickly in large numbers. A hand-held clicker counter can be helpful.

6. COUNTS CAN CONTINUE AT THE LARGE CHIMNEYS throughout the breeding season if large numbers of individuals continue to use these roost sites.

7. YOU CAN HELP US BETTER ACCESS AND UTILIZE YOUR DATA BY ENTERING IT ON EBIRD. (www.ebird.org). When prompted for location, map your roost site to an exact address or point. After you enter the number of Chimney



Swifts, please use the hash tag **#swiftwi** in the Chimney Swift details section. This step helps us access your information quickly.

8. YOU CAN ALSO TAKE IT A STEP FURTHER BY ADDING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION in the Chimney Swift details section, **in this exact order, with semicolons separating the data:** **#swiftwi**; the type of building (residence, school, church, business, hospital, apartment, swift tower/structure, etc.); the condition of the chimney (in good shape; in need of repair); any other notes. (Example: #swiftwi; residence; chimney in need of repair; any other notes.)

Questions? Contact NANCY NABAK at 920-793-4007 or **RICH STAFFEN** at 608-266-4340. For more information about Chimney Swifts and how to help protect them locally, go to <https://www.wiswifts.org/>