

The White Pine Gazette

Volume 58

Spring 2020

Dear Friends,

It was on April 25th that Gail and I took a springtime walk into Toft Point, but with chilly winds coming off the water it was not very spring-like. The clear blue sky did make our trip enjoyable, nonetheless.

We looked for bald eagle activity near the nest but saw none. As we continued walking down the trail we were thrilled to hear the stuttering chirp of an eagle nearby, but could not see it. When we reached the area where the path nears the shore of Mud Bay we were amazed to see the big marsh was totally under water up to the base of the tamarack trees which border it.

The strong winds were pushing big waves onto the shore. We checked cabin Jeannie and were glad to see that the foundation was still above water. This was not the case at the boathouse, however, where waves were crashing against its footings, and on the east side sand and debris had washed up around to the front of the building.

The shore at the east side of the boathouse had always been the site of the beautiful Indian paintbrush flowers, but that whole area is now under a foot of water, so I wonder if we'll see them this spring. Fortunately cabins Julieanne and Thor are set just high enough above the shore to avoid waves hitting them. Lake Michigan may reach new record high levels this summer so these historic cabins may be threatened.

Our next stop was at the rocky shore where we continue to be astounded by the great number of stones and rocks tossed way up by the strong storms of the past winter. Unfortunately those loose stones are very unstable to walk on. As we headed down the south trail we had to move to higher ground to avoid the standing water on parts of the lower sections.

We reached the Little Bayou and it was amazing to see the huge amount of stones forced way up past the tree line by the wave action and ice shoves. The stones were spread up on the shore of the bayou all the way to the trail's end.

As we turned back we saw at least fifty Bonaparte's gulls flying low over the lake. When we walked past the cabins the musical song of the winter wren greeted us. We also spotted some white-crowned sparrows. On our way out we met some visitors coming in and were pleased to see they were wearing face masks and practicing social distancing. Once again, an enchanting walk into Toft Point made us feel that it is always hard to leave.

Stay safe,

Nick Anderson, president



A hiker looks out at the Lake shore where hundreds of stones were swept on land by waves with winter storms. *C. Lukes*

Officers and Board of Directors

Nick Anderson, President	2022
Joe Wallner, Vice-president	2020
Liz Wallner, Secretary	2020
Ruth Stewart, Treasurer	2021

Beth Bartoli	2021
Nancy Dickson	2022
Mitch Leavitt	2022
Charlotte Lukes	2022
Marsha Wilson	2020

UWGB Advisor	Dr. Robert Howe
Assistant Advisor	Dr. Vicki Medland
UWGB Land Steward	Bobbie Webster
Newsletter Editor	Charlotte Lukes

Membership Report

Annual Members	210
Life Members	145
Total	355

New annual members:

Laraine (Mrs. Gary) Buckles	Genoa, WI
Mark & Noreen Meravy	Fish Creek, WI
Nan & Bill Powell	Sister Bay, WI
Renee White	Fish Creek, WI & Largo, FL

New life members:

Marilyn Huset	Mazomanie, WI
Peggy Lott	Ephraim, WI
Charlie & Margaret Philbrick	Madison, WI



Cowslip or Swamp Cup blooms in May

Roy Lukes

Ducks and Mergansers of Door County

Few groups of native birds have given us as much satisfaction, enjoyment and challenges while observing them during the spring migration as have the ducks. Some species such as the scaups (bluebills), redheads, buffleheads and long-tails, all divers, will soon be heading on to their breeding grounds. Others including the northern shovelers, mallards and blue-winged teal, all dabblers, may or may not remain to nest in the area.

I remember one year that northern shovelers nested at an inland pond a few miles southwest of Jacksonport. One year green-winged teals were found nesting in the big bayou of Toft Point. These are the rarer species to breed in northern Door County.

Ducks are often grouped according to whether they are divers or dabblers. It's the divers that tend to remain on the big water such as Lake Michigan, Green Bay and the deeper lakes. The dabblers may be seen near the shores of the big water or on the shallowest of ponds and sloughs.

Another nickname for the dabblers is "puddle ducks" because they can virtually explode straight upward and out of the water instead of having to take a long running on-the-water take-off as do the divers. The small ponds or puddles suit them well.

I'll always remember the humorous "tongue-in-cheek" advice we received from Fran Hamerstrom when we set out to see the prairie chickens in the Buena Vista Marsh. It had been an exceptionally rainy March and some of the narrow gravel and unusually muddy roads appeared more like small lakes than roadways.

We had to reach our blind well before daybreak so Fran warned us carefully to observe any ducks in the road when they appeared in the headlights. She said, "If the ducks you see are dabblers, then you may safely drive through the puddle, but if they are divers, don't take a chance. Turn around and find another route!"

The bills of all ducks have a series of fine, flexible and comb-like teeth, or lamellae (la-MEL-lee), along the edges of both upper and lower mandibles that serve as strainers and are used to sort out the edible from the inedible matter taken into the bills.

Common goldeneye ducks are seen here throughout the winter. They breed across all of Canada and well into Alaska. The female will nest in a hollow tree cavity in the boreal forest. I remember Miss Emma Toft telling us that the common goldeneye was a regular nesting species at Toft Point.



Roy Lukes

The name is appropriate due to the bright yellow eye of the male. The eye of the browner female is a pale yellow. Another name for these ducks is “whistle wings” due to the sound made as they fly.

Blue-winged teal are quite common in Wisconsin and are puddle ducks. They nest in open lowland marsh habitats and are more common in the eastern wetlands. During the first five-year project to produce the Atlas of the Breeding Birds in Wisconsin they were documented as probable nesters at Toft Point.

The green-winged teal is much rarer. This is the easternmost range of its breeding territory in America. However, a nesting pair was confirmed at Toft Point during the first Atlas work. It is said that this duck is the fastest flyer of any duck species.

Jean and Mitch Leavitt reside along Baileys Harbor Bay and have seen northern pintail ducks near their shore. None were breeding in any part of Door County with the first Atlas work. Wisconsin had only two confirmed and two probable nesting sites in that first survey. Wisconsin is at the southeastern edge of the North American

breeding range. It was one of Roy’s favorite ducks.

Common mergansers are also considered a winter resident in the state. They do nest in the far north but also have been documented breeding in six areas of northern Door County.

It is the largest of the mergansers and nests in tree cavities. Breeding occurs along rivers and lakes in the conifer habitats of the north where tree cavities are large enough for this big bird. They may use the same nest cavity several years in a row and will take a nest box lined with wood shavings.

Friends who lived in Ephraim noticed a common merganser nesting in a large tree on their property. As is the case with species that nest in cavities, once the young are hatched the adult female will wait on the ground for each duckling to drop out of the tree opening and bounce on the ground. Then she will lead them to the nearest water.

This happened on the busiest day of the Ephraim Fyr Bal weekend with heavy traffic on Highway 42. Our friends watched as the progression headed down the bluff and into a parking lot east of the highway.

A helpful person brought a big cardboard box to load all the youngsters in and carry them across the highway. Once safely on the shore the box was emptied and the female led her brood into the water.



Common merganser mom and chicks

Chick Peterson

Red-breasted mergansers were confirmed nesters in four quadrants of northern Door County. They too are seen here in winter and have been recorded on many of our Door County Christmas bird counts.

They are late nesters as confirmed by records made on Spider Island off the coast of Newport State Park. These mergansers share the off-shore islands with gulls and tend to have chicks about three weeks later than the gulls. The young red-breasted mergansers are independent by seven weeks of age.



Red-breasted merganser chicks *Roy Lukes*

Finding nests during the breeding bird atlas work was difficult. The female prefers to set her nest under overhanging vegetation such as Canada yew, red-berried elder, red osier dogwood and stinging nettle.

These nests can be preyed upon by skunks, opossums, coyotes and fox snakes. At the time of the first Atlas work many of the islands off Door County shores were heavily used as double crested cormorant nesting sites. They filled the trees on each island and the great amount of cormorant excrement killed most of the ground vegetation.

Hooded mergansers are the smallest of the three and also use cavities for nesting. There are no records of them nesting at Toft Point. Research shows they prefer an open lowland lake environment.

Wood ducks, like hooded mergansers, will take a box set in the proper habitat. It has been found that female hoodies will lay eggs in a wood duck nest and the reverse is also true. So they apparently get along well and take care of each other's young.

We in Door County are very fortunate to have many native ducks nesting here.

Annual Meeting is in Limbo

No, that is not the new name for the Baileys Harbor Town Hall. We have it reserved for Saturday, August 15th, but with the many unknowns about the pandemic and its effect on our life, we may have to cancel the potluck and meeting. If so the board may resort to an online and mail-in vote for any new board members and officers.

The decision will be made shortly after the July 4th holiday and you will receive news about what course we will take by reading the summer newsletter.

Right now our board does not have in-person meetings but instead reviews issues and conducts work online or by phone.

We want all our members to stay safe and stay healthy, so will follow any rules to maintain that for the future.

Trail Docents Still Needed

We have a number of trail docents who, wearing masks, will walk the trails and help visitors this summer as we always have.

If you wish to join our group and help out perhaps once a week, please contact Liz Wallner at 920-743-6314 or at jmicro@charter.net. She can answer any questions and help you get started.



Gail, Nan and Beth self-distancing on March 24th *C. Lukes*

Friends of Toft Point, Inc. – Membership Form New____ Renewal____

Single Annual _____ \$10.00 Single Life Membership _____ \$250 (payable in 2 annual installments)

Family Annual _____ \$20.00 Couple Life Membership _____ \$400 (payable in 2 annual installments)

Contribution \$ _____ (Please check category) General Expenses _____ Student Research Fund _____

Operating Endowment Fund _____ Invasives Endowment Fund _____

Please print clearly

Name _____ Phone _____

Summer Address _____

Winter Address _____

E-mail _____

The Friends of Toft Point, Inc.
Is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization
All dues and donations are tax deductible.

Make check payable to **Friends of Toft Point, Inc.**
MAIL TO Charlotte Lukes
3962 Hillside Rd
Egg Harbor, WI 54209

Volunteer Opportunities

Trail Docent (training provided) _____

Trail Maintenance (supervised crews) _____

Invasive Plant Removal _____

Serve on Board of Directors (6 meetings per year) _____

Help with Annual Meeting & Potluck in August _____

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Fill in form and mail to **Nick Anderson, PO Box 586, Fish Creek, WI 54212** or call 920-868-3499

Friends of Toft Point
% C. Lukes
3962 Hillside Rd
Egg Harbor, WI 54209



The white form of the lake iris is a special treat to find on a springtime hike.

Roy Lukes