

CICERO'S OUTDOOR PASSION

Text by Al Cornell

Bird Photos by Cicero Stewart

In his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv points out nature-deficit disorder in kids. With an increased percentage of our population being raised in an urban environment, fewer kids are exposed to nature and consequently have little interest in it. We are buffered from the magnitude of that problem because kids under the REC lines get exposed to country. However, even in rural settings, more youngsters are detained by the draw of electronic devices and ignore the outdoors.

I started looking for exceptions and found one that amazed me. I heard that Cicero Stewart photographed birds, but I wasn't prepared for this Weston School eighth-grader's devotion to and knowledge of birding. He has a species list of 212 birds identified during 2014. He didn't get that by looking out a window.

Cicero's interest in birds took off after his dad, Tracy Stewart, had him draw a black-capped chickadee for a Christmas card in 2010. Soon his interest led to the purchase of bird field guides, binoculars, camera, and tripod. He recently upgraded to an 18 megapixel Canon camera with a 400mm lens.

Cicero's mother, Barb Hollay, is his designated driver. When word comes through the birders' hotline system of a rare bird sighting, Barb calculates the distance and time and often heads out. Cicero's hopes of locating and maybe photographing another species are the motivating forces.

Birding expeditions can be as close as his backyard. But they may extend to Bakken's Pond near Lone Rock or even to a couple sites in neighboring states. It may be



Cicero Stewart is a devout birder.

just the two of them on a trip or an organized Wisconsin Society for Ornithology field trip.

Cicero views birding as a challenging sport that has been encouraged by books and people. His favorite book, *Kingbird Highway* by Kenn Kaufman, is about the author hitchhiking all over North America in 1973 in an attempt to set North America's record one-year bird list. Another favorite book, *The Big Year*, is an account of Sandy Komito identifying 749 species in 1989. Cicero spews out those dates and numbers.

Barb says Cicero's enthusiasm for birding is matched by Chris West. Chris, of rural Richland County, is a professional birding tour guide. When they get together, their combined birding energy is extreme. Cicero says, "He's an insane birder." In July of 2011, he went with Chris to Horicon to see Wisconsin's first recorded Neotropical Cormorant.

Cicero would like to become a birding guide. To do that, he would have to rise to elite status among thousands of birders.

Montrose Point is a peninsula along Lake Michigan in Chicago. It's maintained for birds and referred to as



“the magic hedge for birds.” Cicero goes there to view and photograph warblers in the spring. Barb’s sister lives in Chicago and takes them to the point when they visit. In fact, her sister laughs, “I know you come to see the birds and not me.” That area has been productive in adding to Cicero’s bird list and photo collection.

Another favorite area is Sax-Zim Bog northwest of Duluth, Minnesota. Northern species like crossbills and various owls gather in that area. Barb and Cicero went there last June.



Above: A migrating shorebird, the Black-bellied Plover will summer in the Arctic. Right: Braid’s Sandpiper caught during its long migration from South America to the Arctic.



He says, “As we drove down a road in Sax-Zim, I saw a large bird and realized it was a Great Gray Owl. It sat there for 15 minutes. I grabbed the camera, jumped out, and got several good shots of it.” On the other hand, several attempts to view a Snowy Owl have ended in disappointment. Each time the owl had moved on before Cicero’s designated driver got him to the location. This winter will likely provide another opportunity.

The flowages at Bakken’s Pond near Lone Rock offer several possibilities. Most species of spring migrating waterfowl use the area. Brushy shorelines are good for migrating songbirds, including warblers. Cicero had been photographing Magnolia Warblers when suddenly, and to his delight, he realized he had just aimed the camera at the less common Bay-breasted Warbler. As his camera battery was dying, he managed to get a couple shots.

As is evident from his photos, Cicero likes to pursue shorebirds. If the water level is low enough to expose mudflats, Horicon Marsh harbors them. Once while there, he had the opportunity to add a rare Wisconsin sighting of a Red Knot to his species list.

For a person with a goal to add to annual and life lists, our common winter backyard birds are not what

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Left: Many brightly colored warblers, like this Magnolia, migrate through our area or stop for nesting. Below: Cicero saw this Great Grey Owl in Duluth.



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create excitement. However, Christmas bird counts make up a special list, and Cicero enjoys being involved in them.

I asked Cicero how he could identify one bird species from another. He replied, "I've poured through my field guides learning all the field marks for species. Next, I work at applying those identifying characteristics to birds in the field. Mostly it relates to size, shape, and color patterns. For some birds, the song is very important to distinguish species."

With all of his knowledge related to birding, I wondered if any of it could relate to school projects. So far there has been very little that he could tie into anything at school. Hopefully, in high school there will be some opportunities to tie this knowledge to some assignments.

We discussed concepts and values that can come from birding. He thought that the awareness of environmental needs was keenly sharpened by being out there, seeing the beauty of the bird world, and realizing their habitat needs.

He believes that birding will increase in popularity if more people realize that it is an exciting sport. His advice to anyone wanting to start photographing birds is to start small and work your way up through learning how to locate birds and to get quality pictures. ■



Cicero's mother, Barb Holley, is his willing and encouraging dedicated driver.

Richland Electric Bylaws

Article IV, Section 3 Nomination and Election of Directors

Nominations for directors shall be made by a Nominating and Rules Committee of the members selected by the board of directors no later than 60 days prior to the date of the annual meeting or by petition of at least 10 members received by the Cooperative not less than 40 days prior to the date of the annual meeting. Ballots containing the names of the qualified nominees shall be provided to all members along with the notice of the meeting. To be counted in the election of the directors, a ballot shall be signed and returned according to the procedures and deadline provided in Article III, Section 6, above. To the extent permitted by law, the board of directors may allow electronic voting for directors, provided it has first adopted authentication procedures to govern such voting that in the board's judgment will reasonably ensure that it is the member who is casting the vote. Election of directors shall be by the largest number of votes cast for any position.

If you are interested in learning more about the election of directors, please contact any REC board member.



A Yellow Warbler: Aldo Leopold said of warblers, "Each bedecked like unto the colors of the rainbow."



Selling Salve

How could a kid resist? Especially if all he had to do was sell a few tins of White Cloverine Salve and earn a BB gun or a bicycle. I tried to convince Ma that here was a good idea. The company will send me 12 tins of salve to be sold for 25 cents each. All I had to do was walk around the neighborhood and sell this outstanding product that soothed chapped hands, relieved minor burns, and helped heal cuts and bruises.

Ma was skeptical. She said that most people bought their salve from the Watkins man and they didn't need some fancy stuff that came in a little white tin with a picture of a clover on the cover. And besides, 25 cents was a lot of money for a small tin of the stuff, no matter how great it was. I showed Ma pictures of the BB gun, jack-knife, the bike, and other important equipment that was available for prizes.

"Look at this," I said. "All I gotta do is sell 48 tins and a BB gun is mine."

"Don't you have to send in any money?" Ma inquired.

"Nope, you send in the money after you sell the salve. Says so right here."

"I suppose it'll be all right," she finally said. "Wouldn't hurt to have some salve around here that didn't smell like disinfectant."

"Says Cloverine salve smells like clover," I said.

A few days later the rural mail carrier delivered my package of salve to our mailbox. I ran up the driveway to the house, and tore off the wrappings when I got into the

kitchen. Here were the 12 tins of salve as promised. The cans seemed a lot smaller than those pictured in the ad, and I almost had to stick my nose into the salve to catch even a hint of clover smell. Ma took one sniff and said she couldn't smell any clover. I said she should take a bigger whiff, but she said she was too busy to waste her time smelling salve. She also reminded me the tins were a tad small to go for a quarter.

I developed my sales strategy. I would stop at four of our closest neighbors—which meant walking only about two miles. When I got home from my selling trip, Ma asked how many tins I'd sold. I had to admit not one. Over the next several weeks I sold eight tins, including one to Ma and one to my Aunt Arvilla. But I had four more to go, and I was out of prospective customers. Now I was concerned about paying my bill to the Cloverine company. Ma figured that if I sent in all the money I'd gotten for the eight tins I would be free and clear. Thoughts of BB guns and bicycles disappeared from my mind. Four tins of White Cloverine salve sat on the clock shelf in the dining room. I hoped that someone would stop by and ask what those four little tins with the clover design on the cover were. No one ever did. ■

*For information
about Jerry's
books and
television work
go to
www.jerryapps.com.*



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month



Did you know that 90 percent of the energy used to operate a washing machine comes from using hot water? A simple switch from hot to cold can save a great deal of energy! Also, consider air drying or even line drying to save even more household energy.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy



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