



BIRDING BY EAR: Learning to identify birds without relying on sight

Held in partnership with Madison Audubon



Photo of a song sparrow by Mick Thompson.

Just as unique as their coloration and shape, bird songs come in all tunes and pitches. Identifying birds by their song is an exciting activity and skill, and any experienced bird watcher will tell you that most birding is done without actually seeing the bird, but by hearing it.

This class teaches the techniques for identifying birds by close listening. We

welcome participants who are new to the hobby of birding by ear, as well as birders of any level interested in continuing to learn and practice their birding by ear skills. Individuals who have taken this class in previous years will hear some of the same content, but are welcome to participate and continue developing their listening skills.

The first session will focus on techniques and context, as well as introduce some of the most common bird songs heard in early May in southern Wisconsin. The second session will focus on strengthening your listen-memory skills and strategies for picking a song out of a chorus. While the class content

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is geared for Wisconsinites, the skills and techniques learned in this class can be transferred anywhere!

Fully accessible class

In 2021, the class sessions will be held entirely online and specially designed to serve those who experience vision impairment or loss, as well as individuals with full sight. Materials will be available digitally. If unable to access them, we can send large font or Braille options. Let us know at least two weeks prior to the event to prepare and mail the materials.

Identifying birds by their song is an exciting activity and skill, and any experienced bird watcher will tell you that most birding is done without actually seeing the bird, but by hearing it.

Dates, times and locations:

We are offering a weeknight date and a weekend date for both class sessions to accommodate varying schedules. When you register, you will select 1 of the 2 date options for each session.

First session: April 29, 6:00-8:00 p.m. | or | May 1, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Second session: May 6, 6:00-8:00 p.m. | or | May 8, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Registration fee: \$20.00 per person whether attending 1 or 2 sessions; scholarships to cover registration fee are available—request when registering

Enrollment cap: 25 individuals per class

Taught by: Kerry Wilcox

To register, call 1-800-783-5213 or visit our website at WCBlind.org/Events. Questions? Contact Jean at (608) 237-8106 or jkalscheur@wcblind.org. ■

Providing Vision Services Amidst a Pandemic

The Council's Vision Services team adapted to the pandemic by finding new ways to serve people who needed vision evaluations, support and education. Access technology classes (previously assistive technology) and educational webinars were offered via Zoom. Providing more virtual services opened access to resources for more people across the state.

Virtual events including "Retinitis Pigmentosa Plus" in December, held in partnership with the McPherson Eye Research Institute (MERI), provided valuable information to people remotely.

Kelsey Tiradani of Madison joined in the event and appreciated that it was offered via Zoom.

"In one regard it was better than in person; viewing the presentation on the computer enabled me to zoom into the screen and see details on the slides that I would not have otherwise seen," Tiradani says, noting that she missed the networking opportunities of an in-person event.

Vision services such as one-on-one vision rehabilitation for daily living are available by appointment in-home and remotely via phone or video call. The option of both remote and in-person education assistance makes it possible for staff to tailor services to each client. Some needs are easily met with a phone conversation while others are more complex and best done with a safe, scheduled in-person visit. Reach out to our Vision Services team with any needs we can help you meet. Remote or in-person, they can provide you the right education, products and training.

The Council's Sharper Vision Store also offers in-person shopping by appointment only, with assistance and ordering available by phone at 1-800-783-5213 or website at WCBlind.org/store. ■



A person reads a menu using a magnifier.

Letter from Denise Jess



Denise Jess

To say that 2020 and the start of 2021 are “unprecedented” seems like an understatement. Last March, in a matter of days, the Council went from celebrating the success of our annual The Big Share fundraising day and preparing for a host of events, to moving all staff to remote work for everyone’s safety, as the pandemic rolled across our communities. It is easy to recall the challenges of this time, but there are so many opportunities for rich learning, innovation, and heartfelt gratitude.

In short order, the Council was able to resume sending out Sharper Vision Store orders to get necessary accommodative tools into the hands of our clients. To manage the flow of traffic into the building, all store visits transitioned to by appointment only with a vision services professional. Clients commented on how much they valued this focused time in a calm and supportive environment. For many, this is an excellent opportunity for further services and learning. When fully reopening is once again safe, certainly clients will walk into the store to grab items like braille paper and 20/20 pens, but those new to vision loss or experiencing changing vision will be offered this “sit down” visit focused specifically on their needs and goals.

People with vision loss regularly encounter barriers accessing transportation, employment, healthcare, reliable internet and voting, something that many sighted people also face during the pandemic. These shared experiences open the door for the Council to foster new and existing advocacy relationships across the state. We know our voices are stronger when they can join with others to impact positive change and the Council looks forward to continuing these relationships well beyond the pandemic.

Throughout the year, Council staff knew that others “had our backs.” We are so grateful for the support of our donors and volunteers who gave generously of their financial gifts and time, so that the Council could remain fiscally healthy and able to move forward in our mission.

While there is no manual for leading an organization during a pandemic and the challenges are many, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for all the Council has accomplished and all the many ways people have reached out with their support and kindness. In

the months to come, as we safely reconnect, I invite us all to remember the power of resilience, innovation, and support as we continue the work of creating greater equity and promoting the dignity and empowerment of people throughout Wisconsin living with vision loss. May we carry these positive lessons of the pandemic forward well into the future.

Sincerely,



Denise Jess
CEO/Executive Director ■

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Assistive Technology Now Access Technology

The name of our Assistive Technology services and classes changed to Access Technology. This better represents the Council's core value of uncompromising respect for our clients and helps us stay on the forefront of vision services.

"We want clients to feel empowered to access the information and services they need to succeed," explains Council Access Technology Specialist Jim Denham. "Using the term Access Technology better represents our ability to embolden clients to reach their goals."

Jim continues to offer the same services under his new title, including free monthly access technology classes and one-on-one training sessions for specific devices or software. Dennis Ramberg of rural Westfield, Wisconsin completed about a dozen weekly sessions with Jim this summer. He learned how to use his new iPhone SE2.

"Jim helped me customize the phone to my needs. He introduced me to different ways of using it and different applications for my needs as a visually impaired person," Ramberg explains. "What was so extremely useful is after every lesson Jim sent detailed notes covering the entire lesson." ■

Gallery Night 2021 Call for Artists

The Council proudly displays artwork by people who are blind and visually impaired each fall. This year's exhibit and Gallery Night event will be virtual, and entries are encouraged from all corners of the state.

If you are an artist or know someone who is blind or visually impaired who makes art including photography, ceramics, woodworking, painting, animation, fiber arts or another art form, submit three to five photos of your work to info@WCBlind.org **by August 15, 2021.**

Participating in Gallery Night highlights your work and helps others learn about the diverse talents and significant contributions of people who are blind or visually impaired. Artists can choose if they would like to sell their work. Following the opening gallery reception event on Friday, October 1, we will continue to display the work in a virtual gallery. Art may then be eligible to go on a traveling exhibit with artist permission. ■

BIG SHARE RECAP

A Day in the Life: The Council and The Big Share

On Tuesday, March 2, the Council participated in The Big Share, an online day of giving presented by Community Shares of Wisconsin.

The Council's theme for The Big Share was A Day in the Life. CEO/ Executive Director Denise Jess shared how she incorporates adaptations into her workday and relaxation time. Council client Melinda Dresen walked us through her morning routine using smart appliances and adaptive products.

Over \$7,000 was raised to support in-home rehabilitation visits, educational programs and advocacy efforts. We are truly grateful to the donors who supported the Council through The Big Share. ■



THANK YOU to the 91 donors who gave on March 2nd!

Together, we raised **\$7,080** for people living with vision loss!

-Lohi



Contribute to the White Cane Fund

It is a point of pride for the Council to provide white canes free to people who need them in Wisconsin. More than 500 people each year receive this indispensable tool solely through generous contributions of donors to our White Cane Fund.

The white cane promotes greater independence, dignity and empowerment for those who live with vision loss. The Council provides one white cane every two years to any adult who needs one. Children can receive a new white cane more often to match their growth. We recognize that taking the

You can play an important role in promoting the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired in Wisconsin through a gift to the White Cane Fund. Help keep this work going by making a gift of any size on our website at WCBlind.org/donate.

step to get a white cane can be challenging because of the historic stigma associated with cane use.

“Marion asked for her first white cane today,” recalls Council CEO/Executive Director Denise Jess. “She waited until the support group was nearly ready to get on the bus before she asked (us for a white cane).”

Once a person is ready to get a white cane, it can be critical for identifying that they have vision loss. The type of cane you get should fit with your lifestyle, vision loss and needs.

“She (Marion) intends to use it primarily for ID purposes” says Denise. “She liked the fact that it could easily fold into her purse.”

A white cane provides people with independence and confidence through orientation and mobility (O&M) training. The cane is an important identifier to others that a person is visually impaired. It also is a reminder for drivers to stop 10 feet from a user in compliance with the state’s White Cane Law.

Before acquiring a white cane and instruction on how to use it, Melinda Coulman felt she could not go anywhere by herself.

“The Council recommended an O&M Specialist and he came out to my house,” she says. “He worked with me to plan a route so I could get my son from

the bus stop after school, and showed me how to cross streets safely. A month into the O&M training, I knew I could be successful when I felt comfortable getting my son from the bus stop myself. I now go places with my kids, and I can go anywhere in town by myself.”

Thanks to ongoing donor support, we have been able to continue to provide this valuable resource of white canes to people throughout the pandemic. You can play an important role in promoting the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired in Wisconsin through a gift to the White Cane Fund. Help keep this work going by making a gift of any size on our website at WCBlind.org/donate. Thank you for your generosity.

If you’re looking for a certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist, contact the Council at 1-800-783-5213 or call the state Office for the Blind & Visually Impaired at 1-888-879-0017 ■

Virtual Low Vision Support Group Created

The need to connect people led the Council to start a new, virtual Low Vision Support Group in July 2020. The group is run on Zoom by Council Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Brent Perzentka. It draws about 20 people from across the state each month by phone, computer, or tablet.

“The first half of the meeting is educational with topics that vary from technology to emotional support and ways to stay healthy. The other half is discussion, and we talk about whatever people want,” explains Perzentka.

The Council plans to continue with the group after COVID-19 meeting restrictions are lifted to give access to people who live in rural areas.

That’s great news for participants like Diane Daniel of Bailey’s Harbor, who describes this group as a comfort as she learns to live with age-related macular degeneration.

“Being able to talk with people who have been there and done that and get information first-hand is so reassuring,” Daniel says. “I hope Zoom meetings never go away. It’s my window to the world.” ■

Events



Monthly Access Technology Classes

The Council holds free, monthly virtual access technology classes (previously called assistive technology classes) on a variety of topics. Select a topic, mark the date and sign up for a class by emailing Jim at JDenham@WCBlind.org or calling **608-237-8104**.



Virtual Monthly Low Vision Support Group Second Monday of the month via Zoom

The Council holds a low vision support group monthly, currently via Zoom to assist you or a loved one affected by vision loss. For more information or to sign up, contact Brent Perzentka by email at BPerzentka@WCBlind.org or by phone at **608-237-8112** to get the link/call-in number.



Birding by Ear Starting April 29 Online via Zoom

Join the Council and Madison Audubon for our annual Birding by Ear class. Held virtually, choose from classroom sessions on Thursday, April 29 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. or Saturday, May 1 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.; and field trip sessions on Thursday, May 6 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. or Saturday, May 8 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Cost: \$20. Register at [WCBlind.org/Events](https://www.wcblind.org/Events) or call **1-800-783-5213**.



Webinar: Summer Cooking and Grilling May 18 at 10:00 a.m. Online via Zoom

Join Council Vision Services staff to learn more about outdoor cooking with low or no vision by using adaptive techniques, some adaptive products, safety, and tips for summer grilling.



Scholarship Awards Ceremony June 3 at 4 p.m. Online via YouTube

We will recognize our 2021 scholarship recipients from around the state at a virtual ceremony on Thursday, June 3 at 4 p.m. streamed on our YouTube channel: [youtube.com/wcblind1](https://www.youtube.com/wcblind1).



Low Vision Fair Begins week of July 12

Online via Zoom

Plan to join us this summer in July and August for our annual Low Vision Fair. This year's event will be held virtually, with weekly topics to benefit people with vision impairment as well as their family, friends, and professionals. Find out more on our website at WCBlind.org/events/low-vision-fair.



Gallery Night October 1

Online via YouTube

The Council's Gallery Night features the work of artists from Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired. Submissions are due August 15, 2021. Learn more at WCBlind.org/Gallery-Night.



Macular Degeneration Symposium

October 14

Online via Zoom

Mark your calendar for our 2021 symposium held in partnership with University of Wisconsin Department of Ophthalmology and Vision Sciences and UW Health. The event will be held virtually on Thursday, October 14, 2021, from 4 to 6 p.m. with a panel on the latest research and what you can do today with your remaining vision. People with macular degeneration, their family members and professionals are encouraged to attend. More information can be found at ophth.wisc.edu/event/amd2021 or by calling **1-800-783-5213**.



White Cane Safety Day

October 15

Statewide

Each year the Council celebrates pedestrian safety. Encourage your town or municipality to declare White Cane Safety Day and spread messages about the White Cane Law which encourages drivers to stop 10 feet from people in crosswalks. Learn more at WCBlind.org/White-Cane-Safety-Day. ■



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND
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Make an appointment for vision services or a Sharper Vision Store visit. Vision services include vision rehabilitation, low vision evaluations and access technology training. Store appointments are perfect for finding the right adaptive equipment for you or a loved one. To book an appointment, call **1-800-783-5213** or email us at **info@WCBlind.org**.

Correction:

New board member Melanie Ramey is from Arkansas, not Alabama.

Contact Us

Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired
754 Williamson Street, Madison, WI 53703
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