



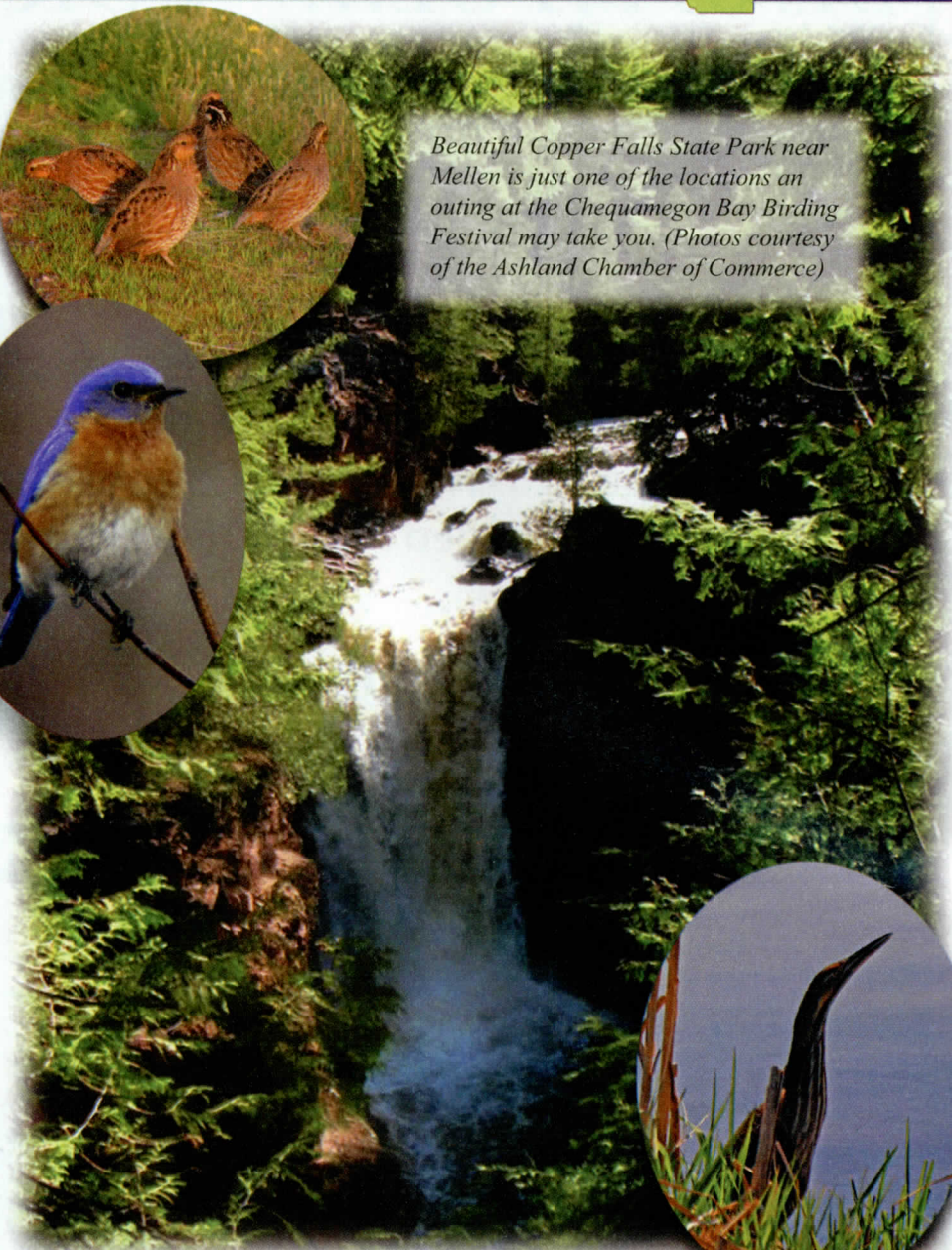
Birds of a Feather

Nature Lovers Flock to Chequamegon Bay for Bird-Watching Festival

Springtime is for the birds! May arrives at the peak of the spring migratory season, when the woodlands and wetlands of Wisconsin are teeming with birds of all types. Fortunately for all nature lovers, Wisconsin is not only blessed with a variety of thriving bird habitats throughout the entire state but also with abundant public land that makes bird-watching an accessible activity for folks of all ages and abilities. All you need is a set of binoculars and a comfortable pair of walking shoes to head outdoors and bask in a day of birding.

If you want to make the most of your bird-watching excursions, you'll want to consider stepping out with a knowledgeable guide who can help you identify the many species by both sight and sound. You can really maximize your bird watching by planning a weekend in Ashland May 20–22 for the fifth annual Chequamegon Bay Birding and Nature Festival.

Located on the south shore of Lake Superior, Ashland is surrounded by some of the richest and most varied bird habitats in the state, and the festival makes full use of them all. Using the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland as a home base, the festival offers a jam-packed schedule of on-site educational programs and field trips by bus into some of the Chequamegon Bay area's most beautiful places. On these field trips, expert guides will help you spot and identify



Beautiful Copper Falls State Park near Mellen is just one of the locations an outing at the Chequamegon Bay Birding Festival may take you. (Photos courtesy of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce)



some of the 300 or so different bird species that are often spotted here.

Take a walk through Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest near Cable and look for thrushes, warblers, and sparrows. Hike along the shorelines of the Chequamegon Bay to seek out the shorebirds, terns, and other waterbirds. Walk through the Whittlesey Creek National Wildlife Refuge to look for wetland waterfowl. Head back inland along Pike's Creek in search of woodpeckers, bald eagles, ruffed grouse, and more. You can even sign up for a

kayak trip along Lake Superior's coast to watch the waterbirds and study the geology along the Fish Creek and Whittlesey Creek estuaries. Other field trips take groups to the Bark Bay Slough State Natural Area, into the Moquah Pine Barrens, to the 70-foot-high Morgan Falls, and along the Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail, a statewide mapped auto trail.

Some trips are more vigorous than others; peruse the program offerings to find a field trip to fit your fitness

level. There's even a nature hike for seniors, a casual field trip aimed for, but not limited to, those with greater vision and hearing needs.

If you're new to the world of birding, you can choose from several field trips tailored specifically for beginners, including a "birding by ear" trip that will teach beginning bird watchers to recognize birds by their unique songs. Other field trips extend beyond birds and focus on frogs, dragonflies, and wildflowers, among others.

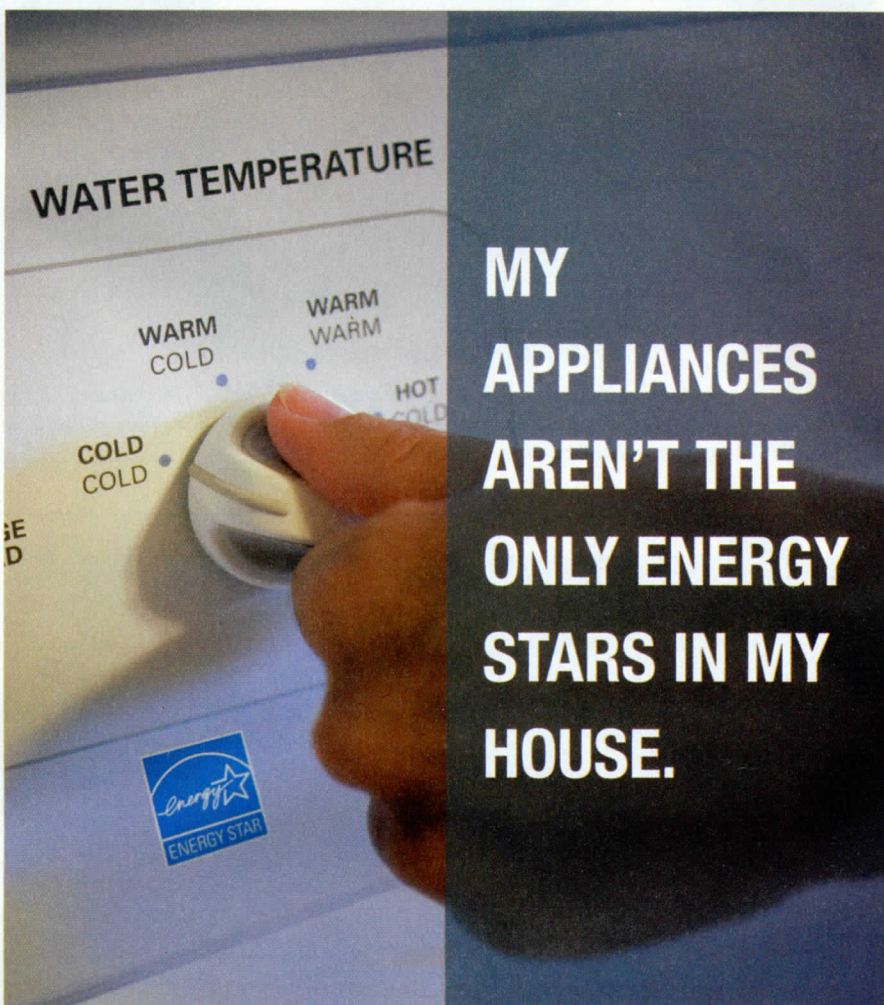
If you'd prefer to stay put, you can choose from plenty of programs held right at the visitor's center that will put you in touch with nature. National award-winning wildlife artist Greg Alexander will teach a couple of "Taking the Mystery Out of Drawing Wildlife" workshops over the weekend. Other workshops will focus on fossils, falcons, bats, and cougars.

In addition, the festival will feature presentations by several renowned naturalists. Serving as keynote speaker is wildlife photographer and writer Stan Tekiela, originator of the popular state-specific field guides of birds, wildflowers, and trees. Also speaking will be Dr. Mike Meyer of the Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Science Services, who has led a 20-year research project on loons.

Of course, there's no need to wait for May 20-22 to taken in bird-watching opportunities in Ashland. If you're busy that weekend, visit the festival's website (www.travelashlandcounty.com), download a free birding map, and plan your own trip to northern

Wisconsin's forests and shorelines. Other areas in the state offer prime bird-watching opportunities this month as well, including the Horicon Marsh Bird Festival May 6-9 (www.horiconmarshbirdfestival.com). A website dedicated to Wisconsin's bird-watching hotspots ([tractions/birding\) is updated regularly with reports of sighted birds in beautiful marshes, forests, and preserves throughout the state.](http://www.wisconline.com/at-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Whichever way you choose, polish up your binoculars, head outdoors, and celebrate spring. It's for the birds!—*Mary Erickson* ■



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For more information about the Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival, including registration materials, a schedule of events, and travel information, visit www.birdandnaturefest.com or call (800) 284-9484 or (715) 682-2500.



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