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Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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Minnesota Birding

Savaloja Grants, 2013

At the spring meeting on March 17, 2013, the MOU Board approved the recommendations of the Savaloja Grants Committee to offer funding for five project proposals, for a total of \$5,034. The recipients of the grants are:

Audubon Center of the North Woods, Sandstone (Jeff Tyson)—\$730 for purchase of an autoclave for sterilizing regurgitated pellets from captive non-releasable education owls; the pellets will be dissected and contents identified by visiting student groups.

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (Kit Healy)—\$900 to purchase native plants (trees, shrubs, wildflowers, grasses) to restore degraded areas at T. S. Roberts Bird Sanctuary (Lake Harriet, Minneapolis), including sites where invasive plant species were removed.

Midwest Peregrine Society (Jackie Fallon, state coordinator)—\$1,000 for purchase of color bands and blood sample analysis of nestling Peregrine Falcons in Minnesota during the 2013 breeding season.

Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society, Bemidji (Jaime Thibodeaux, President)—\$1,404 to purchase binoculars, field guides, and field notebooks for birding kits used in the Young Naturalist Program at the MHAS Neilson Spearhead Center.

Sugarloaf: The North Shore Stewardship Association, Schroeder (Molly Thompson, Executive Director)—\$1,000 for purchase of bird banding equipment (net poles, nets,

and other supplies) for their newly established educational and research banding operation at Sugarloaf Cove Nature Center.

Savaloja Grants, 2014--Individuals or organizations who are undertaking projects in Minnesota such as those above that increase our understanding of birds, promote preservation of birds and their natural habitats, or increase public interest in birds, including in populations currently underrepresented in Minnesota's birding community, may submit grant applications to the MOU. Application information may be obtained by emailing: grants@moumn.org. The deadline for receipt of grant applications is January 31, 2014.

Welcome to our New MOU Members

William Hollander, Iowa City IA
Christina DeBold, Wayzata MN
Annette Dreier, Minneapolis MN
Michael Oetken, New Ulm MN
Richard Bohannon, Cold Spring MN
Brick Fevold, Bemidji MN
Gleora Palm, Loman MN
James Zissler, Montecito CA
Jenna Meier, Lake Elmo MN
Falon Bochniak, Saint Paul MN
Steven Ollie Brown, Eden Prairie MN
Dave Klein, Bloomington MN
Ellen Vancura, New Ulm MN
Daniel Baker, Marshall MN
Kathy Fuller, Little Canada MN
Joel Soma, Saint Paul MN
John Wahlstrom, Sunfish Lake MN
Greg Hunsaker, Chanhassen MN
Paul Ludwig, Watkins MN
Richard J Gibson, Minneapolis MN
Jennifer DeJonghe, Minneapolis MN

A Year of Birds in Minnesota's Smallest County

Robert M. Dunlap

On paper, Ramsey County does not stand out as a birder's paradise. Spanning an area just over 16 miles from north to south and about 12 miles east to west, there doesn't seem to be much room for a large diversity of birds among the predominantly urban landscape (the county has one of the highest population densities of any county in the United States). What little green can be glimpsed on a map exists in mostly small patches among extensive housing communities or in thin strips between industrial areas, and the many lakes are largely surrounded by private residences. Certainly, the birding must be better elsewhere.

When 2012 began, I decided to take up the challenge of seeing as many species of birds as I could find in Minnesota's smallest county. Most of the birds I picked up in January were the usual winter suspects that can be found in just about every neighborhood in southern Minnesota, but nice exceptions were a Merlin and an overwintering Brown Creeper, both in my St. Anthony Park neighborhood. February brought more of the same, although an early migrant Horned Lark flying high above me one morning was a bit unexpected as was a lone White-winged Crossbill feeding high atop a spruce.

An American Woodcock twittering at dusk in a grassy park near my house on March 7 seemed especially early, and Lake Vadnais and White Bear Lake began attracting large rafts of Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, and Redhead among large concentrations of waterfowl as the ice retreated. During the first week of April, three Greater White-fronted Geese flew over me as I scanned the many displaying Red-winged Blackbirds in a small marsh in Reservoir Woods Park in Roseville. Waterfowl continued to move through the northern lakes, with large numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers and a couple of Horned Grebes showing up on Lake Vadnais as a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks surveyed the lake's northern end. In the dense pine stands of nearby Sucker Lake, I found a singing Pine Warbler at the southern extent of this species' range in Minnesota. A walk along the Rice Creek North Regional Trail boasted several

Ring-necked Pheasants, a bird for which there is very little habitat in a county lacking extensive agricultural fields.

May began with an American Bittern that spent the day sulking among the cattails ringing a small pond in Falcon Heights, followed the next day by an Eastern Whip-poor-will that sang for several minutes after sundown in my neighborhood. I found the wooded streets of St. Anthony Park to be just as conducive to migrating songbirds as some of the more "wild" birding hotspots in southern Minnesota; morning walks in mid-May brought a plethora of flycatchers, vireos, and thrushes in addition to many waves of warblers highlighted by a singing Black-throated Blue. Perhaps my biggest surprise was finding a Nelson's Sparrow singing from a cattail marsh in Crosby Farm Park near downtown St. Paul on another mid-May morning; this secretive species is seldom encountered anywhere in the state during spring migration. The receding water line of White Bear Lake attracted a good variety of shorebirds, including Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, and White-rumped Sandpiper.

By the fourth week of May summer residents were beginning to stake out breeding territories. Tamarack Nature Center provided a diversity of habitats suitable to some species found at few (if any) other locations in Ramsey County; its restored prairie attracted the likes of Willow Flycatcher, Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrow, Dickcissel, and Orchard Oriole, while one of its marshes harbored a Virginia Rail. In June, a pair of Black-billed Cuckoos was a welcome find in the Poplar Lake Open Space at the north end of Shoreview. A Bell's Vireo sang from a stand of cottonwoods in front of the Xcel Energy plant along the Mississippi River in downtown St. Paul, and I was excited to see a Black-crowned Night-Heron fly across Bennett Lake in Roseville's Central Park.

When the hot and humid conditions of July and August gave way to cooler, drier weather in September, my frequent forays throughout the county resumed. At White Bear Lake I added a few shorebirds that I had missed during spring migra-

tion, including Sanderling and American Golden-Plover. Tamarack Nature Center continued to be a productive spot, and I was able to weed out several secretive Le Conte's Sparrows in the prairie as American Pipits flew by overhead. October added Franklin's Gull, Cackling Goose, and Northern Pintail to my year list, but the most unexpected bird of the month (and undoubtedly the year) was a visitor from the Rocky Mountains: a Clark's Nutcracker that appeared in Shoreview on October 30. I saw it the very next morning along with many other excited birders, and while looking at the nutcracker I had the honor of observing a small flock of Red Crossbills flying south overhead.

As the days grew significantly shorter and colder, my birding jaunts became less frequent. A Carolina Wren visited a residence in Lauderdale during the first week of November, which resulted in an easy addition only a couple miles from my house. In mid-November a group of Bohemian Waxwings in a crabapple tree in Shoreview caused me to slam on my breaks as I drove by, and later that same morning what would be my last new species of the year, an American Black Duck, was present on Lake Vadnais just prior to ice-over. By the end of December it was apparent that I would add no new birds to my year list, which had halted at a pleasing 210 species.

Other birders had seen more species than this in other counties in past years, of course, and certainly there were some species that others saw in Ramsey County in 2012 that I had missed. But this number was humbling to me. It was comforting to know that even in a highly populous, urban landscape like that of Ramsey County, there exists enough habitat to attract over two-thirds of Minnesota's regularly occurring bird species in a single year, and I had been awarded the privilege of witnessing them. Furthermore, I was able to enjoy my time with other people just as much as I enjoyed sharing it with the birds. Somehow I convinced my girlfriend to tag along on our frequent trips around the county, but I think coming face-to-face with both Long-eared and Northern Saw-whet Owls

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Young Birders

On a cold early March morning an excited group of young birders piled into a van leaving from the Science Museum of Minnesota for the inaugural field trip for the new Minnesota Young Birders Club. They were a mix of boys and girls, some had traveled from far away while others lived close by but all were eager to get on the road, make new friends and most of all see some birds.

The club, open to teenagers ages 13-18 brings together youth interested in birds for year-round field trips and workshops. The youth not only hone their birding skills, they connect with like-minded peers who support and encourage each other in their passion for birds.

The slightly colder than average spring meant less open water than planned and event organizers had to scramble in the days leading up to the event to reroute to sites with open water. It was well worth the effort as the youth were rewarded with great views. The Bass Ponds in Bloomington, part of the Long Meadow Lake unit of the Minnesota River National Wildlife Refuge, produced Trumpeter Swans, Hooded Mergansers and even a rather cold looking Great Blue Heron. Traveling across the river, Black Dog Lake was a favorite with the kids as careful observation though a scope revealed more and more species. Canvasback and Ruddy Ducks were hiding in with Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes and Ring-necked Ducks far out on the lake.

A Year of Birds, continued from page 2

more than made up for it. Erik Collins, a seasoned Ramsey County birder of several years, accompanied me on many mornings throughout the year and eagerly shared his own observations of birds in the county with me for which I am extremely grateful. Finally, I owe a big thank you to many others who provided me with information and encouraged me throughout my year-long travels.

And while other Minnesota counties might prove more popular with birders, Ramsey County deserves no less attention. Certainly, the birds themselves suggest otherwise.

The youth tallied 22 species in just a few hours of cold winter's-end birding and ended the day with raptors including two species of falcons. Ending at the High Bridge in St. Paul, the youth located both the male and female Peregrine Falcons nesting on the bridge while Bald Eagles migrated overhead. A Red-tailed Hawk perched nearby on the river as well. Then, while leaving the site, an early arriving American Kestrel was spotted right along Shepard Road.

After the event, youth participant Philip Meyers went online to the club's private Facebook group to share his photo of one of the Peregrines coming into the bridge with freshly killed prey. Sharing photos and observations online is an important part of building a sense of community with the peers they may have just met.

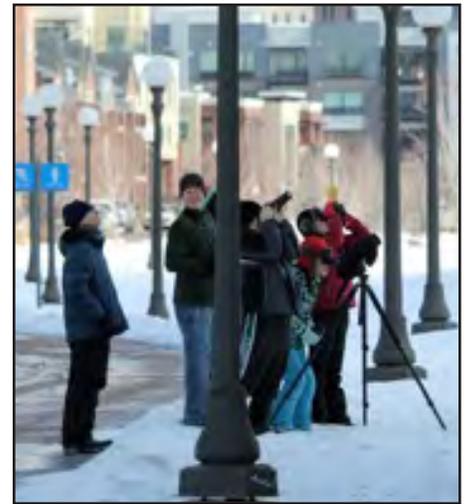
Teens who are interested in birds may find that their schoolmates do not share their interests. There are organized groups and clubs at schools for sports, sciences and arts but birding and the outdoors are usually not part of the mix. Youth interested in birds as a hobby or career may find it difficult to connect with their peers in the birding world. Philip said, "It's fun to go birding with kids my age that share the same passion as me." That is why club organizers want to connect youth through person-to-person experiences like field trips and workshops but then also keep them connected and interacting online. The private online group is a safe space where youth can share photos, ask questions, learn about events and read up on the latest bird news. A big part of the club is building a sense of community and the online presence helps carry that forward between events.

Kirk Carter Mona

Outreach Coordinator

Lee & Rose Warner Nature Center
<http://www.warnernaturecenter.org>
651-433-2427 ext. 13

Youth from the club have formed a team for the Hastings Area Birding Day "Youth Big Day" in April and many will also be attending a workshop on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch pro-



gram. The summer promises to be fun with a field trip to Crosby Farm to look for Prothonotary Warblers with a National Park Service ranger and a week-long intensive birding camp at Warner Nature Center in northern Washington county.

2013 is the pilot year for the program and plans call for expansion to more youth, more events and more regions of the state in future years. Currently, while youth who live further from the metro can connect with other club members in the private online community, getting to workshops and field trips can be a challenge. Club coordinator Kirk Mona says, "Many other states have expanded to having regional chapters to address this issue. The Minnesota club doesn't have the resources to pull that off right now but it is certainly something we are looking at in the future."

To flourish after the pilot year the club needs both increased numbers of youth members and adult sponsors. The cost of running the field trips and workshops is largely supported by donations from adults who want to see a strong future for the birding community in the state. Youth pay just \$20 a year and can then attend most events for free. Adults are asked to give a minimum donation of \$30 to support the programs.

Interested adults and youth can find out about how to donate or become a member, or learn about future events by visiting the club's website at <http://warnernaturecenter.org/youngbirders>



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The Mission of the M.O.U.

We foster the study and conservation of birds by amateurs and professionals. We promote the conservation of birds and their natural habitats. We support these aims primarily by publishing and sharing information, by serving as a repository for records, by conducting field trips, by awarding grants for research, and by supporting programs that educate members and the public about birds.

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