

# Minnesota BIRDING

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# Conservation Column

## The Governor's Pheasant Summit: Why Birders Should Care

by Matt Holland

On December 13, 2014, Governor Dayton convened the first ever Minnesota Pheasant Summit to discuss the plight of Ring-necked Pheasants in Minnesota. Governor Dayton's concern and impetus for convening the summit is the precipitous decline of Ring-necked Pheasants — the past year saw our estimated population 71% below the long-term average. Some 300 people from across the state attended the summit to discuss what can be done in the next 4–5 years to reverse the population decline.

Why should a birder care about such an effort? The Ring-necked Pheasant is an exotic species anyway, right? True enough, yet of the 700 respondents to a pre-summit survey, a resounding majority identified the loss of habitat as the key factor to the decline. If we want to see more birds — pheasants or otherwise — then being engaged in the habitat discussion is for you!

Breakout sessions were held throughout the day where small groups met, discussed, and developed concepts for what should be done. Five action items emerged from the hundreds of comments at the summit: 1) increase bonding funding to accelerate the acquisition of state Wildlife Management Areas, 2) improve buffers and roadside habitats, 3) provide funding for priority habitats (e.g. *Re-Invest in Minnesota* habitat easements), 4) provide incentives to farmers and landowners for voluntary conservation programs, and 5) increase funding for state and local habitat program efforts (e.g. implementing the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan).

The primary reason for birders to support the outcomes of the Governor's Pheasant Summit is the opportunity to impact bird habitat. Simply put, pheasant habitat (grasslands, wetlands, shrubs) can be a solution to clean and protect municipal drinking water, to address the plight of pollinators, to diversify rural economies, and to address many other quality of life issues that Minnesotans generally care about (e.g. habitats and places to bird!).

To be successful, we will need to be engaged with the hard work that lies ahead, finding innovative ways to achieve more habitat on the landscape! Why? We know that temperate grasslands (Northern Tallgrass Prairie) are among the most converted and least protected landscapes in the world. Recent trends in agriculture and land use have resulted in the conversion of hundreds of thousands of acres of Conservation Reserve Program grasslands back into row crop production. Meanwhile, we continue to lose hay land, pasture, wetlands, and wild areas as the intensity of land use continues to ramp up. The pressure on the land is tremendous and if we want to continue to have places for our birds, we need to come together and make habitat work for all of Minnesota.

Margaret Meade once stated, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." It seems there is an opportunity here with the Governor's Minnesota Pheasant Summit to

*continued on next page*

do just that, to change the world for the better. Success will take grass-roots advocacy (call your national and state representatives), technical expertise, innovative ideas, new approaches, funding, landowner buy-in, and program implementation. What can you offer? If we do not involve ourselves in this effort, are we in tacit agreement with the continued loss of habitat from our prairie landscape? Are we leaving the fate of meadowlarks, Dickcissels, Northern Harriers, and Upland Sandpipers to the whims of agricultural policy and economics?

Please consider being a part of the solution. There will be technical teams, work groups, and other means to provide ideas and input and to participate in the efforts undertaken at the Governor's Pheasant Summit. Together, I have no doubt that we can and will make a difference for pheasants, birds, and wildlife!

*Matt Holland is the Director of Grant Development for Pheasants Forever, Inc. and Quail Forever.*

**Editor's note:** News from the DNR Roundtable in January — Governor Dayton proposed 50-foot buffers on all Minnesota rivers and lakes to help the environment, provide habitat for birds and wildlife, and clean our water. For more information about this initiative, go to this Friends of the Mississippi River newsletter at [www.fmr.org/news/current/dayton\\_buffer\\_proposal-2015-01](http://www.fmr.org/news/current/dayton_buffer_proposal-2015-01).

# Education Facility for Sherburne

by Sue Hix

Come spring, construction will begin on an education building at Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. The 4,000-square-foot structure will include two classrooms, restrooms accessible from both inside and outside, outside education spaces, trails, and interpretive signage.

Besides providing space for environmental education, school field trips, teacher workshops, summer camps for students, and refuge programs and events, the new facility will offer a meeting place for wildlife and conservation groups. The refuge is already a destination for birders and photographers. After the education building is completed next fall, the refuge could also become the destination for programs and meetings of the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union.

In the meantime, the Friends of Sherburne NWR will be raising funds to furnish the building and enhance the adjacent outdoor education spaces. There will be many ways that interested organizations and individuals will be able to support this fundraising campaign. For more information and updates, consider joining the Friends of Sherburne or check the Friends' website or Facebook page — ExploreSherburne.org or Facebook.com/SherburneRefugeFans.

## Birding in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness A Canoe Camping Adventure in Northern Minnesota

Join Wilderness Canoe Guide Rob Kesselring and Naturalist Sue Planks on the 4th annual canoe trip where we focus on birding. We explore by canoe the waterways and portages of the BWCAAW seeking breeding birds of this beautiful wilderness area. Birds we have seen in previous years: many warbler species including Black-throated Blue Warbler and Northern Water Thrush; Great-Horned, Barred and Northern Saw-Whet Owls; Common Loon; Black-backed Woodpecker; Winter Wren; Veery; Merlin and Bald Eagles.

- Complete class about birds, habitats, behaviors, identification and song
- Day trip outings for bird sightings and explorations of various habitats
- Learn by experience how to do a BWCA canoe trip
- Overnight canoes, deluxe tents and wholesome meals

Dates: Session 1: May 22 - 25, 2015  
Session 2: May 27 - 30, 2015

Fee: \$495 - all inclusive - canoes and canoeing equipment, tents, meals, BWCA permits

Contact: Rob Kesselring: [rob@robkesselring.com](mailto:rob@robkesselring.com) (952) 432-8384  
Sue Planks: [splanks@gmail.com](mailto:splanks@gmail.com) (952) 201-6062



Rob has led 17 Arctic canoe expeditions, 61 BWCAAWAUGA trips, has paddled 100 rivers worldwide and is a USFS Licensed Wilderness Guide. Sue has been a Canadian Style and Freestyle Canoe Instructor, is an avid birder, has a good ear for bird songs and assists in bird banding.

For more information of trip offerings visit: [www.robkesselring.com](http://www.robkesselring.com)

# Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz, Take Two

by Alyssa DeRubeis



*Rusty Blackbird photo by Alyssa DeRubeis*

Almost a year has passed since Rusty Blackbirds started their spring migration northward from the southeastern United States, through the Upper Midwest, and onward to the boreal wetland breeding grounds of Canada and Alaska. At this time last year, I was working as a wetland bird surveyor in Iowa. I covered a lot of ground scouring entire townships for waterfowl and shorebirds. In addition to these birds, I strained my ears for a squeaky Killdeer call and my eyes for yellow irises and rusty feathers on a dark blue-black songbird. I managed to see hundreds of Rusty Blackbirds in Spring 2014. I entered all my Rusty Blackbird sightings on to [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org) as part of the first-ever Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz (RBSMB). The time has come for RBSMB 2015 and we are again in need of your help.

For a species whose population has decreased between 85% and 95% over the past 50 years, surprisingly little is known about the Rusty Blackbird's migration ecology. But that is about to change. From the suggested survey period of approximately mid-March through mid-April, the Minnesota state coordinators of RBSMB ask that you share your Rusty Blackbird observations to eBird.

The RBSMB is a coordinated effort led by the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group (IRBWG), along with eBird, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. Participants will be collecting data throughout the migratory range of the species, from the southern United States, through the Midwest and Atlantic Coast, all the way into Canada. The objectives of the RBSMB are to 1) determine important migratory stopover sites, 2) assess consistency of use and timing at stopover locations, 3) strengthen relationships with other conservation organizations and enhance the conservation of Rusty Blackbirds, and 4) increase awareness of Rusty Blackbirds

among the birding community and general public.

This year, RBSMB wishes to target "Areas of Interest" as outlined on this web page: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/2015-areas-of-interest/>. In Minnesota, the areas of highest interest include Mississippi River Lock and Dam #4 and the Superior National Forest. Several areas of interest also exist in the Twin Cities Metro, as well as Rochester, Brainerd, and an area east of Fargo, North Dakota. The Minnesota state coordinators encourage you to explore these areas and to discover new "Areas of Interest" on your own.

I am aware that some Minnesota birders are unfamiliar with eBird. However, we still want to include your Rusty Blackbird observations to be part of IRBWG's data analyses. So if you want to know how to enter data into eBird, or if you want me to enter your Rusty Blackbird observations for you, please contact me (see below). When you do enter your Rusty Blackbird sightings on eBird, be sure to select "Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz" next to the "Other" category on the "Date and Effort" page. The data will have more value to IRBWG if identified as the RBSMB option on eBird.

Not only could you be helping out with this citizen science project, but you would also be part of a continuing rivalry between Minnesota and Wisconsin. Last year, the state coordinators organized a competition to see which state reported more Rusty Blackbirds to eBird and we are doing it again this year. As last year, the winning state will get a Rusty Blackbird carving by Bruce Ankeny. Wisconsin won the 2014 competition, submitting 618 Rusty Blackbird checklists to eBird. Although Minnesota only submitted 139 Rusty Blackbird checklists, we improved significantly from Spring 2013 Rusty Blackbird checklists (+74%) and we have a chance to improve even more this year. Let's make it happen!

If you'd like to learn more about how you can participate in the RBSMB, or if you're looking for some pointers on Rusty Blackbird identification, visit the IRBWG website: <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>. Also feel free to contact the RBSMB Minnesota state coordinators: Alyssa DeRubeis ([alderubeis@gmail.com](mailto:alderubeis@gmail.com)), Brittney Larson ([brittneylarson27@gmail.com](mailto:brittneylarson27@gmail.com)), or Steve Winter ([stephen.winter@okstate.edu](mailto:stephen.winter@okstate.edu)). With your help, we can advance our knowledge in Rusty Blackbird migration ecology so that I (and you) can enjoy these squeaky Killdeer birds for many years to come.

# MOU Calendar

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## **March 1: Masters of the Sky**

Organization: Carpenter Nature Center

Details: The World Bird Sanctuary staff, St. Louis, MO, will present their program on birds of prey. 11 a.m., 1 p.m., & 3 p.m. Reservations and prepayment required. [www.CarpenterNatureCenter.org](http://www.CarpenterNatureCenter.org).

## **March 3: Climate Change and Birds**

Organization: Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Details: Presenter is Matt Anderson, Executive Director, Audubon Minnesota. 7:00 p.m.  
Beth El Synagogue, 5224 W 26th Street, St Louis Park.

## **March 7: The Woodpecker Bird Walk**

Organization: Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Details: Led by Terry & Joyce Grier  
Quarry Hill Nature Center, 9 a.m.

## **March 12: Golden Eagles in Minnesota**

Organization: Saint Paul Audubon Society

Details: Presenter is Mark Martell, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Minnesota. 7:00 p.m. Fairview Community Center, 1910 W. County Road B, Roseville.

## **March 14: Early Spring Migrants**

Organization: Anoka County Parks

Details: Bunker Hills Regional Park; meet in front of the Activity Center. 8:30–10:30 a.m. Cost: \$5/person (+tax). Preregistration required by noon, March 12.

## **March 14, 21, 23, 30; April 4: Old Cedar Avenue Bridge MVNWR Field Trip**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Leader is Craig Mandel. 8 a.m. Call 952-240-7647 for details.

## **March 26–27: SW Minnesota Birding Days Field Trip**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Leader is Craig Mandel. Cost: \$25/\$35. 7 a.m., Windom. Call 952-240-7647 for details.

## **March 28: Birding Ham Lake Park**

Organization: Anoka County Parks

Details: Meet at Ham Lake Park, north side of 153rd Ave. NE., about 1/3 mile east of Hwy. 65. 8:30-10:30 a.m. \$5 per person (+ tax). Pre-registration required by noon, March 26.

## **April 2: Ramsey County Birding Day**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Leader is Craig Mandel. 7 a.m. Call 952-240-7647 for details.

## **April 4, 11, 18, 25: Spring Birding at the Garden**

Organization: Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Details: Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden, 9:30–11 a.m. <https://apm.activecommunities.com/minneapolisparks/>.

## **April 4: The Robin Bird Walk**

Organization: Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Details: Led by Terry & Joyce Grier, Quarry Hill Nature Center, 9 a.m.

## **April 7: Birding in Minnesota**

Organization: Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Details: Presenter is Kim R. Eckert, birding guide and Minnesota Birding Weekends leader. 7 p.m. Brookdale Library, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway.

## **April 10: Birding the Old Arsenal Area**

Organization: Anoka County Parks

Details: 8:30–10:30 a.m. Meet at Arden Hills Army Training Site parking lot on Hamline Ave. (Hwy. 96 to Hamline Ave and go north.) Cost: \$5/person (+ tax).

## **April 11: Rapids Lake Unit MVNWR**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Leader is Craig Mandel. 8 a.m., Carver. Call 952-240-7647 for details.

## **April 12: A Bird's Eye View:**

### **A Microscopic Look at Contour Feathers**

Organization: Saint Paul Audubon Society

Details: Mike Billington, Interpretive Naturalist at The Raptor Center, University of Minnesota will explore the form and function of contour feathers down to the microscopic level. 7 p.m. Fairview Community Center, 1910 West County Road B, Roseville.

## **April 16: Field Trip to Chester Woods**

Organization: Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Details: Jim Peterson will lead a Woodcock watch. Meet near the entrance at Chester Woods County Park, 7:30 p.m., or in the horse corral parking lot.

## **April 16–17: Central Minnesota Birding Days Field Trip**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Leader is Craig Mandel. Cost: \$25/\$35. 6:30 a.m., Little Falls. Call 952-240-7647 for details.

## **April 18: Crex Meadows Field Trip**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Leader is Randy Hills. 7 a.m., Windom. Call 952-953-3613 for details.

### **April 18: Hastings Area Birding Day**

Organization: Hastings Environmental Protectors, City of Hastings, & Carpenter Nature Center

Details: Youth Big Day Birding Competition; Monarch Presentation; classes on “Introduction to Birding,” “Raptors 101,” and “How to Keep Your Bird List”; bird banding demonstrations; and guided field trips Cost: \$5 per person; \$15 with box lunch. [carpenternaturecenter.org/earth-day-birding-festival/](http://carpenternaturecenter.org/earth-day-birding-festival/) or 651-437-4359. Advance registration required.

### **April 18: Walking and Waterfowl Birding**

Organization: Anoka County Parks

Details: Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Park Reserve. Walk at the Heritage Lab, then carpool to Marshan Lake. Meet at the Heritage Lab entrance, east side of Co. Rd. 14 across from entrance to Wargo Nature Center. 8–11 a.m. Pre-registration required by noon, April 16. Cost: \$5 per person (+ tax).

### **April 18: Bald Eagle Watching Field Trip**

Organization: National Eagle Center, Wabasha

Details: Leader is Scott Mehus, National Eagle Center Education Director. Cost: \$35.

[www.nationaleaglecenter.org/eagle-viewing](http://www.nationaleaglecenter.org/eagle-viewing).

### **April 19: Whitewater Valley Field Trip**

Organization: Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Details: Whitewater State Park and Wildlife Refuge. Leader is Joel Dunnette. 6:30 a.m. on the east side of the Heintz Center, Rochester; will bird until mid-afternoon.

### **April 24–26: Salt Lake Birding Weekend**

Organization: MOU

Details: Guided trips of Salt Lake, Big Stone Refuge and the lakes, wetlands, and native prairies in Lac qui Parle and southern Big Stone counties. Free. No pre-registration required. Detailed information and map at <http://moumn.org/saltlake/>.

### **April 25: Bird Walk**

Organization: Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Details: Root River County Park south of Rochester near Simpson. Meet at the Heintz Center, 7:30 a.m.

### **April 27: Beginning Birding Class**

Organization: Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Details: Instructors are George Skinner & Anne Hanley. Cost: \$27. Four sessions, 6:30 p.m., Hopkins Community Ed. Call 952-988-4070 for details.

### **April 28: Birding in Panama**

Organization: Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Details: Terry Grier on birding in Panama. Quarry Hill Nature Center, 7 p.m.

### **May 14–17, 2015: 18th Annual Detroit Lakes Festival of Birds**

Details: Featuring Carrol Henderson and Bob Janssen, *Birds of the MN State Parks*, and Paul Baicich and Carrol Henderson, *Bird Feeding in America*. Keynote presenter is professional photographer Melissa Groo from Ithaca, NY. Sparrow Workshop by Doug Buri and overnight field trip to Manitoba. New headquarters at Detroit Mountain Recreation Area. [www.visitdetroitlakes.com/events/festival-of-birds](http://www.visitdetroitlakes.com/events/festival-of-birds).

## **Salt Lake Birding Weekend**

*by Ken Larson*

Spring is just around the corner and so is the 40th annual Salt Lake Birding Weekend. On Saturday, April 25, birders will explore Salt Lake, Big Stone Refuge, and the lakes, wetlands, and native prairies in Lac qui Parle and southern Big Stone counties. This event is free and open to all who are interested. No pre-registration is needed.

Last year, in spite of poor weather predictions, over 90 birders found 124 different species of birds with an additional 6 on Friday and 7 on Sunday for a total of 137. We had good luck with waterfowl, including Common Goldeneye and American Black Duck, and found 16 species of shorebirds, including Snowy and Cattle egrets and White-faced Ibis. Birders located Bald Eagles and Great Horned Owls on nests as well as three birds usually found later in the year — Black Tern, Least Flycatcher, and Black-and-white Warbler — and a Say’s Phoebe, a first for Salt Lake birders.

Meet on Saturday, April 25, at 7 a.m. at the Marietta American Legion (1 block west of County Road 7 and State Highway 40 intersection, 11 miles west of Madison). Guided car caravans will leave between 7 and 8 a.m. Stop back at the Legion at noon for lunch (available at a modest cost) and to compare notes. Dinner (\$10) will be served at 7:30 p.m., Sons of Norway Hall on Highway 75 in Madison. Reservations are necessary for dinner; please contact Julie Claffin at [JulieClaffin@gmail.com](mailto:JulieClaffin@gmail.com). A short program and the species count for the day will be recorded after dinner. Sunday birding is on your own; stop at Prairie Marsh Farm for advice and directions to local sites.

Local lodging is available at Lou’s Lodge, Madison (320-598-7518); Vali Vu Motel, Ortonville (320-839-2558); Prairie Waters Inn, Appleton (320-289-2500); and Country Inn by Carlson, Montevideo (320-269-8000). Free camping is available at Prairie Marsh Farm, 1770 151st Ave, Marietta, 7 miles west of US Highway 75 and 1.5 miles south of Highway 212. Contact Ken Larson for more information or to reserve a camping site: home 952-595-9265, cell 612-210-8486, or email [prairiemarshfarm@comcast.net](mailto:prairiemarshfarm@comcast.net). Information and map are available at <http://moumn.org/saltlake/>.

# Minnesota Birder Bio: Josh Wallestad

*Name:* Josh Wallestad

*Born:* 1979 in Sidney, Montana

*Currently living:* Kandiyohi, MN (the city)

*Occupation:* High School Math Teacher for Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City Schools since 2005

*Serious about birding since:* Summer of 2012. I was driving a 4-wheeler in northern Minnesota when I heard a beautiful bird song above the noise of the engine. I had to see what it was. I hopped off the 4-wheeler and quickly located the source which I was able to identify in my dad's tattered 1960s Peterson Field Guide as a male Chestnut-sided Warbler. I have been hooked ever since.

*Favorite bird or bird family:* Whatever my last life bird was, but warblers and owls have a special pull.

*Favorite places to bird in Minnesota:* Anywhere in northeastern Minnesota. I grew up on Pelican Lake by Orr, so this part of the state will always be home. Plus the birds "up north" are incredible and the scenery is unmatched.

*Favorite place to bird outside of Minnesota:* I hit the jackpot when my parents recently decided to winter in Maricopa, AZ. Now we take annual visits there to escape the cold, see their amazing bird life, and I suppose visit my folks, too.

*Birding style (i.e. by yourself, with others, etc):* For a long-distance chase I much prefer going with a partner. Locally in west-central Minnesota, I'm content to go birding alone or with 1-2 others. Regardless, I really enjoy birding local, under-birded areas and documenting the "story" of those areas for eBird.

*Best advice on how to be a better birder:* I'm still very much a greenhorn and continue to learn a lot from experienced birders, but if I could offer some advice, it would be to get curious, follow hunches, and do some intrepid birding off the beaten path. Good birds can be found anywhere and often close to home. Also, share your interest with non-birder



*Josh Wallestad and son, Evan. Photo by Melissa Wallestad*

friends. You'll be amazed at what your network will turn up and you may even turn them on to birding.

*The main attraction or joy of birding for you:* 1) Serendipity, discovery, and endless surprises. These can take the form of a rare bird for location or timing or they can be any of the incredible people you meet in this hobby. Many times involve both, like sharing a lifer Garganey with Ron Erpelding. 2) As someone who was once an avid hunter turned birder, I now get to experience the thrill of the hunt on a daily basis with no restrictions on limits, seasons, or geographical boundaries!

*Interests/hobbies when you're not birding:* Spending time with my wife and kids (ages 5 and 8) and doing outdoor activities together like camping and fishing. I have a son and two aging yellow labs that are always eager to go pheasant and Ruffed Grouse hunting, so occasionally I oblige them.

*What new bird you would like to see the most:* Tough question. For Minnesota, it would have to be Short-eared Owl. For Arizona, it's a tie between Elegant Trogon and Painted Redstart. However, I'm really looking forward to seeing Greater Sage Grouse for the first time in Montana this April with my dad, Rick Wallestad, who studied them extensively in the 1970s as a research biologist for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Biologists from the Bureau of Land Management will be tracking down my dad's original study leks and setting up blinds for us to view the males on the strutting grounds. It will be a very special life bird. I can't wait!

## New MOU Members

Anne Biebl, *New Ulm*

Karla Caspari, *Minneapolis*

Alexander Egan, *Minneapolis*

Kimberly Emerson, *Little Falls*

Ernest Peaslee, *Duluth*

Radcliffe Science Library, *Oxford, UK*

# Phenology Corner: Welcome Waterfowl

by *Bob Dunlap*

Although they are not the first avian migrants to enter Minnesota from parts south, waterfowl are certainly among the most welcome signs of spring for birders and non-birders alike. Just as the first flock of Canada Geese flying north is a herald of warmer weather to even the most unobservant layperson, so is the increasing diversity of ducks at a local pond an assured sign that our birding escapes are about to increase.

In most years, the first push into southern Minnesota begins with geese. On balmy days in early March when the wind originates from a southerly direction, watch and listen for high-flying flocks of not only the ubiquitous Canada Geese but also Cackling, Snow, and Greater White-fronted (the latter three become more common the farther west you go). Even from a distance, it is possible to tell the flocks apart. Canada and Cackling geese favor the classic “V” shape with a single bird leading the flock, while the other species tend toward less organized, shallow “U” shapes. Sometimes you’re able to hear the birds well before you see them and, with practice, sound can be useful in separating them. Cackling Geese sound similar to our familiar Canada Geese but with higher-pitched honks; Snow Geese give single-note honks of a more nasal quality; and Greater White-fronted Geese project sharp, two-note “hee-hee” calls. Of course, the species often travel in mixed flocks, making it rather difficult to single out a particular call among the raucous migrants! And within the groups of Snow Geese be sure to check for the smaller Ross’s Goose if you have the chance (this species has become increasingly more common in spring). By mid- to late March, goose numbers peak in southwestern Minnesota with daily counts numbering well into the tens of thousands.

Several ducks also begin to trickle in with this early pulse. Watch especially for Northern Pintail as March is arguably the best time to see this species in Minnesota. As the month progresses and more of our wetlands offer ice-free surface water, look for large concentrations of both diving and dabbling ducks, although in March it is the divers — Canvasbacks, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, both Greater and Lesser scaup, and Buffleheads — that seem to comprise the more plentiful group. During the last week of March, listen for the yodeling flocks of Tundra Swans as they fly high overhead (even well after dark!). If there has been widespread flooding of streams and rivers as a result of snowmelt, a drive through agricultural lands along county roads can present a vast array of swans, geese, and ducks feeding in the temporarily inundated fields at the end of the month.

By the first week of April, the hoards of geese and swans have pushed into the northern half of the state. At this

same time, numbers of dabbling ducks begin to swell in southern Minnesota and Blue-winged and Green-winged teals, Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls, and American Wigeons become particularly plentiful on shallow lakes and ponds. Not to be forgotten among the escalating excitement, Red-breasted Mergansers and Ruddy Ducks join the diverse flocks of divers out in the larger and deeper wetlands. In fact, if you’re persistent enough, you might find almost all of Minnesota’s 21 regular species of non-sea ducks in a single day during the first half of the month! In the latter half of April, you can do the same in the northern half of the state as the birds continue their journey north. At the end of April, the migration for many species has already peaked as Trumpeter Swans, Canada Geese, Wood Ducks, Mallards, and Hooded Mergansers are patiently sitting on their nests.

It is important to note, however, that the timing of waterfowl migration is largely dependent on the weather. If it has been a particularly cold spring, the first goose flocks might not appear until mid-March in southern Minnesota, equating to a shift in the aforementioned pulses by a week or more. In addition, cold springs often keep wetlands frozen longer in the northern half of the state, resulting in a backlog of waterfowl in the southern half as new arrivals join the earlier ones that have yet to depart. Conversely, unusually warm springs might hasten these events, with larger numbers of waterfowl migrating through Minnesota in a shorter period of time. Warm weather early in March may also cause a greater dispersal of waterfowl if there is abundant habitat (i.e., more ice-free wetlands and lakes), making it more difficult to come across significant concentrations of waterfowl at a single location.

Whatever the weather conditions might be, observant birders would do well to pay attention to their local waterfowl haunts to ensure that they “get out while the gettin’s good.” Waterfowl numbers and diversity can change overnight, so don’t expect that the Cinnamon Teal or Eurasian Wigeon reported today will still be present tomorrow. After all, migration at its most basic level is about moving from one place to another, not unlike us humans moving from indoors to outdoors as winter fades. And isn’t that why we all welcome spring?



*Blue-winged Teal photo by Bob Dunlap*



# Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

University of Minnesota  
Bell Museum of Natural History  
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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.

### MOU Officers

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Diana Rankin and Alyssa DeRubeis

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**The Loon editor:** editor@moumn.org  
**Web site:** http://moumn.org  
**CBC compiler:** cbc@moumn.org  
**Statewide RBA compiler:** rba@moumn.org  
**MOU Records Committee:** mourc@moumn.org  
**Conservation Chair:** conservation@moumn.org  
**Grants:** grants@moumn.org  
**Youth Mentorship:** mentorship@moumn.org  
**Field Trips:** fieldtrips@moumn.org  
**All other MOU functions:** mou@moumn.org

## MOU Membership: New/Renewal

Name \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

County \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Categories

- Youth (under 18) \$15.00
- Individual \$25.00
- Foreign (including Canada) U.S. \$35.00
- Family \$35.00
- Supporting \$75.00
- Corporate \$100.00
- Life, single \$500.00
- Life, joint \$700.00

Send to: Cindy Smith, MOU Membership Secretary  
19885 Lillehei Avenue  
Hastings MN 55033-9354

### Please make a contribution to the Savaloja Grants

The Savaloja Grants supports research and other projects selected by the MOU for special attention. Your contributions help fund a better future for birds in Minnesota. You can add a contribution to your membership check.

Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_