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Conservation Column: Conserving Minnesota's Golden Treasure

by Sean Peterson

The lakes, forests, plains, and wetlands of Minnesota are home to approximately 225 species of breeding birds. For each of these species, the natural areas of Minnesota are important, but when you look at a list of birds that breed here, there is one that stands out as being particularly dependent on our state. According to Breeding Bird Survey data, Minnesota has the distinction of being home to over half of the Golden-winged Warblers on the planet.

The Golden-winged Warbler is traditionally viewed as an early-successional specialist and has thrived in Minnesota's shrubby wetlands and managed forests. However, outside of northern Minnesota and parts of Wisconsin and Canada, Golden-winged Warbler populations are declining precipitously. Range-wide, populations have declined 2.3% per year since 1966 — an overall population decrease of nearly 70%. There is likely no single cause of this decline, but it has been linked to habitat loss and competition from the closely related Blue-winged Warbler.

From 2010–2013, Drs. Henry Streby and David Andersen and I at the U.S. Geological Survey Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit through the University of Minnesota led a project to study Golden-winged Warblers. Specifically, we set out to answer important questions about demography and habitat use of Golden-winged Warblers in some of the last places that their population was increasing. To answer these questions, we attached tiny radio transmit-

ters to both adult and juvenile Golden-winged Warblers. We tracked these birds to find nests and monitor behavior, survival, and habitat use.

Over three years, our team monitored 216 nests and 190 fledglings in Minnesota and Manitoba. Using radio transmitters, we learned that Golden-winged Warblers aren't exactly the early-successional specialists that everyone has historically considered them to be. In fact, 30% of Golden-winged Warblers nested inside older forests and fledglings from those nests were more likely to survive than fledglings from nests in early-successional forest stands. Fledglings from all nests almost immediately moved away from early-successional stands and into older forests, seeking out dense shrubby understories within a closed canopy — a perfect place to hide from predators. By the time fledglings were two weeks old, they began to move from shrubs to higher parts of the forest structure as they learned to forage for themselves.

Interestingly, parents divided their brood as soon as they left the nest. Each parent cared for half of the fledglings from a nest. These "sub-broods" rarely interacted with each other and never traded members. Males and females were both equally attentive parents and moved their broods to similar forest types. The biggest difference between parenting strategies was that females moved their fledglings almost three times farther from the nest than males did, suggesting that when we plan Golden-

continued on next page

winged Warbler management, we should account for female Golden-winged Warblers potentially using a much larger area of post-fledging habitat than males.

After thousands of hours of monitoring nests and following fledglings through dense patches of hazel, we learned a great deal about the ecology of Golden-winged Warblers. This songbird has a complex relationship with several different types of forest. Without shrubby cover, there would likely be no Golden-winged Warblers. However, our results clearly demonstrated that older forests are an important part of the post-fledging life of Golden-winged Warblers. Rather than calling Golden-winged Warblers “early-successional specialists,” perhaps a more appropriate term is “diverse forest obligates” — a species that thrives when it has several different age classes and types of forest to use at different stages of its life.



Golden Winged Warbler, by Alyssa DeRubeis

Golden-winged Warblers depend on the decisions Minnesotans make regarding forest management. In the last few decades, Minnesota has done an excellent job of creating high-quality Golden-winged Warbler habitat, often as a part of projects designed to help other species that thrive in a mosaic of young and old forests, such as American Woodcock and Ruffed Grouse. However, Minnesota can't afford to ignore Golden-winged Warbler conservation. A healthy, diverse forest maintained with the support of Minnesotans across the state is crucial for the survival of the species.

Sean Peterson has studied songbirds since 2006 and received his Master's Degree in Natural Resources Science and Management at the University of Minnesota in 2014.

New MOU Members

Wyatt Anderson, *Princeton, MN*
Gerald & Jill Binstock, *Good Thunder, MN*
J. Braun, *New Brighton, MN*
Lila Cargill, *Plymouth, MN*
Sara Donaldson, *Minneapolis, MN*
Patrick Doyle, *Minneapolis, MN*
Ben Fielden, *Cottage Grove, MN*
Sydney Fielden, *Cottage Grove, MN*
Joan Furlong, *St. Paul, MN*
Keith and Cathy Hanson, *Rochester, MN*
Charles Heller, *Burnsville, MN*
Kale'a Kjolhaug, *Excelsior, MN*
Jean Landon, *St. Paul, MN*
Timothy Lee, *Duluth, MN*
Jan and Susan Mattson, *Backus, MN*
Nancy Miller, *St. Paul, MN*
Todd Mitchell, *Rushford, MN*
Andrew Naber & Dora Miller, *St. Paul, MN*
Dennis Nelson, *Andover, MN*
Jeff Newman, *Duluth, MN*
Jeff & Jean Reed, *Hastings, MN*
Linda Slagter, *Moorhead, MN*
Serenna Svanoë, *Osceola, WI*
Theo Svanoë, *Osceola, WI*
Samuel Taylor, *Woodbury, MN*
Julien Ueda, *Edina, MN*
Patricia Yovonovitz, *Maplewood, MN*

Bluebird Recovery

by Cindy Thury Smith

The Bluebird Recovery Program, part of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, held its annual Bluebird Expo at the Northfield Middle School on April 11th. This all-day event featured speakers on how to prepare for the returning bluebirds, maximize reproduction success, and keep bluebirds safe from predators. There were also presentations on Monarch Butterflies, beekeeping in Minnesota, and planting for wildlife. Al Batt provided a light touch. Kevin Smith, the M.O.U.'s Youth Mentor Coordinator, did a talk on the many ways to enjoy birding and put in a plug for the Mentorship Program. There was a silent auction, vendors, and several informational displays scattered about, including one on avoiding Wild Parsnip (all birders and hikers should be aware of this plant). A catered lunch was available. For more information about the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program, visit the website at www.bbrp.org.

Burroughs Club Inspires Next Generation of Birders

by Julie Brophy

As soon as school lets out, 14 students at Burroughs Community School run from their classrooms to the school yard and collectively drop their backpacks. After a quick snack, they rush to strap on their binoculars and start looking outward and upward. “Bird! Look there’s a bird!” they shout, and one parent couldn’t be happier.

Amy Simso Dean is a mother of two and founder of the Burroughs Birding Club which had its inaugural meeting this April. Each week during April and May, her flock of 14 kids (two of which are hers) meet to learn and have fun discovering birds.

The idea for the club was hatched when she was giving talks about raptors to students at Burroughs as part of their bird study unit. Whenever she’d give the talks, she saw so much interest and wonder in her audience. “So many kids had stories about birds they had seen. I can’t count the number of times that kids (and parents) would stop/e-mail/text me to identify a bird. I kicked the idea around for a while. Fourth grade seemed like a good age to be able to manage a group of kids in the field.”

Thanks to grants from the MOU and the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter and additional support from Birds and Stuff, Eagle Optics, Realtor Bob Williams, The Raptor Center, and Fort Snelling State Park, each club member is equipped with binoculars, checklists, a field guide, and a notebook. Some students sketch the birds they see, while others mark them off on a checklist as they enthusiastically explore the grounds and sky along Minnehaha Creek.

Bald Eagle, check! Northern Cardinal, check! But fish? During the first meeting, Simso Dean had two students demonstrate a skill-building exercise. It taught kids to watch for movement and then point their binoculars in that direction. As club members walked along the creek that first after-

noon, they saw a total of nine bird species (and one fish — a Northern Pike.) At the second meeting, they walked to Lake Harriet. Many species of waterfowl had stopped on the lake to rest and refuel before continuing their migration north. It was a great opportunity for the kids to get up close and see the birds in detail — even their feet. As Simso Dean suggested in her note to parents that evening, “Google ‘American Coot feet’ and find out what color the kids saw.” Walking back along the creek, the kids spotted some early spring flowers and saw a Mourning Cloak butterfly on the wing. Even some parents strapped on binoculars that afternoon.

At a time when some city kids lack easy access to outdoor spaces, and others are spending more screen time than ever in front of smartphones and tablets, the Burroughs Birders are making new connections. As spring unfolds, it’s all about the kids connecting with nature and the outdoors. Simso Dean remarked, “We may not be able to change the world, but maybe we can inspire a few kids who can then change the world.”



Next generation birders spotted in south Minneapolis. Matching plumage confirms this species as 4th Grade Burroughs Birders. Thanks to all who have offered their support, include MOU, MRVAC, Eagle Optics, Raptor Center, B. Williams, J. Brophy, H & L Simso, M & E Senninter.

MOU Calendar



Anoka County Parks and Recreation

Pre-registration required. Information at 651-429-8007 or www.anokacounty.us/2256/Year-of-the-Bird

July 11: Bird Walk Series

Details: 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park.

July 11: Birding Bunker Hills Regional Park

Details: 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Cost: \$5/person.

July 31: Bird Walk Series

Details: 8 a.m.-10:30 a.m. Arden Hills Army Training Site.

August 22: Bird Walk Series

Details: 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Lake George Regional Park.

August 28: Birding by Boat

Details: 9 a.m.-12 p.m. Wargo Nature Center. Ages 15 and under need to be accompanied in a boat by an adult. Cost: \$10/adult; ages 17 and under are free.

August 29: Bird Walk Series

Details: 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Rum River Central Regional Park.

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

<http://audubonchapterofminneapolis.org/programs>

July 22: Raptor Resource Project

Details: 7 p.m. Speaker is Bob Anderson, falconer and Director, Raptor Resource Project. Beth El Synagogue, St. Louis Park.

August 26: BirdSafe – Bird-Window Collisions

Details: 7 p.m. Speaker is Joanna Eckles, BirdSafe/Lights Out Coordinator, Audubon Minnesota. Beth El Synagogue, St. Louis Park.

Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center

Information at www.CarpenterNatureCenter.org

July 22: Evening Prairie & Birding Hike

Details: 7 p.m.-9 p.m. CNC's Wisconsin Campus (300 E. Cove Road, Hudson WI 54106). Cost: \$6 per person or \$4 for "Friends of CNC."

July 24: Public Bird Banding Demonstrations

Details: 8 a.m.-12 p.m. CNC's MN Campus (12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN 55033). No cost. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359.

August 28: Public Bird Banding Demonstrations

Details: 8 a.m.-12 p.m. CNC's MN Campus (12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN 55033). No cost. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359.

Maplewood Nature Center

July 23: Bat Survey

Details: 8:30 p.m.-10 p.m. For adults and children ages 7 and older with adult. Prepay: \$4/person by July 20. Information: 651-249-2170 or www.maplewoodnaturecenter.org.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

July 4, 11, 18, 25: Birding at Bear Head

Details: 8 a.m.-10 a.m. Bear Head Lake State Park. Information: 218-365-7229 or bearhead.statepark@state.mn.us.

July 5, 19; August 2, 16, 30: Bird Banding Demonstration

Details: 12:30 p.m.-2 p.m. Led by Greg Munson, Master Bird Bander. White Water State Park. Information: 507-932-3007.

July 18: The People's Bat Count

Details: 8:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park. Information: 507-352-5111 or 507-937-3251.

July 23: Birding in Minnesota State Parks

Details: 6:30 p.m. Fort Snelling State Park Visitor Center. Speaker is Bob Janssen, author of the new book *Birding in Minnesota State Parks*. Information: 612-279-3550 or 612-725-2724.

July 27, August 1, 6, 10: Batty About Bats

Details: 7:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Lake Vermillion-Soudan Underground Mine State Park. Information: James Pointer at 218-300-7005 or by email at lakevermillion-soudan.statepark@state.mn.us.

August 1: Birding in Minnesota State Parks

Details: 6:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. Tettegouche State Park. Speaker is Bob Janssen, author of the new book *Birding in Minnesota State Parks*. Information: Kurt Mead at 218-353-8809 or kurt.mead@state.mn.us.

August 8: Birding Itasca State Park Field Trip

Details: 7 a.m.-12 p.m. Bob Janssen, leader. Information: 218-699-7251 or itasca.statepark@state.mn.us.

August 8: *Birds of Minnesota State Parks* Talk and Book Signing with Bob Janssen

Details: 1 p.m.-2:30 p.m. Itasca State Park. Information: 218-699-7251 or itasca.statepark@state.mn.us.

August 22: Birding in Minnesota State Parks

Details: 6:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. Whitewater State Park. Speaker is Bob Janssen, author of the new *Birding in Minnesota State Parks*. Information: 507-932-3007.

Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter Field Trips

July 11

Details: 8:30 a.m. Louisville Swamp Unit, MVNWR, Shakopee. Led by George Skinner. Information: 952-936-0811.

July 16-17

Details: 6:30 a.m. Myre Big Island State Park, Albert Lea. Led by Craig Mandel. Cost: \$25/35. Information: 952-240-7647.

August 1

Details: 8:30 a.m. Rapid Lake Unit, MVNWR, Education Center, Carver. Led by George Skinner. Information: 952-936-0811.

August 6-7

Details: 6:30 a.m. Crow Wing State Park, Baxter. Led by Craig Mandel. Cost: \$25/35. Information: 952-240-7647.

August 22

Details: 8 a.m. Rapids Lake Unit, MVNWR, Carver. Led by Craig Mandel. Information: 952-240-7647.

August 23

Details: 8 a.m. Cannon River Bottoms. Led by Steve Weston. Call 612-978-3993 for details.

August 24

Details: 8 a.m. Bloomington Ferry Unit, MVNWR, Bloomington. Led by Craig Mandel. Information: 952-240-7647.

Three Rivers Parks

Information: www.threeriversparks.org

July 18, August 15: Bird Banding

Details: 9 a.m.-12 p.m., Lowry Nature Center.

August 22: Nature's Engineers: Flight

Details: 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m. Richardson Nature Center. Children 17 years and younger must be accompanied by a registered adult. Reservations required. Cost: \$5.

August 29: Bird Banding at Kroening

Details: 8 a.m.-12 p.m. Carl Kroening Interpretive Center. No cost.

Zumbro Valley Audubon Society

Unless otherwise noted, events start at Quarry Hill Nature Center, 701 Silver Creek Road NE, Rochester, MN. Information: www.zumbrovalleyaudubon.org/programs

July 4: Bluebird Bird Walk

Details: 9 a.m. Leaders are Terry & Joyce Grier.

July 18: 17th Annual Butterfly Count

Details: All day event with specific times to be determined. Contact Joel Dunnette at jdunnette@gmail.com if interested in participating. (County Park Sticker or daily pass may be required).

July 26: Bug Out at Chester Woods Park

Details: 3 p.m.-5 p.m. Chester Woods County Park. (County Park Sticker or daily pass required.)

August 1: Blue Jay Bird Walk

Details: 9 a.m. Leaders are Terry & Joyce Grier.

August 8: Restored Rushford Prairie sites field trip

Details: 8 a.m.-mid-afternoon. Scott Leddy will provide a guided tour of two sites that Meadowlark Restorations has worked on in the Rushford area. Meet east parking lot, Heintz Center, Rochester.

August 25: Tagging Monarch Butterflies

Details: 6:30 p.m. Led by Pam Meyer.

Minnesota Birder Bio: Tony Lau



Born: St. Louis Park, MN in 1965; grew up in Minnetonka.
Currently living: Otsego, MN

Occupation: Frozen Foods Manager at Coborn's

Serious about birding since: 2012. I went along on a couple bird surveys with Bob Janssen for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe; then I got a job with the band as a Wildlife Technician. We did monthly surveys and I learned a lot from that.

Favorite bird or bird family: Purple Martin

Favorite places to bird in Minnesota: Duluth, Sax-Zim Bog, and Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge

Favorite place to bird outside of Minnesota: Rio Grande Valley, TX

Birding style (i.e. by yourself, with others, etc): I prefer to bird with others, but not in large groups.

Best advice on how to be a better birder: Admit when you are wrong.

The main attraction or joy of birding for you: I have always been interested in birds. I love getting to see new birds and have new experiences along the way.

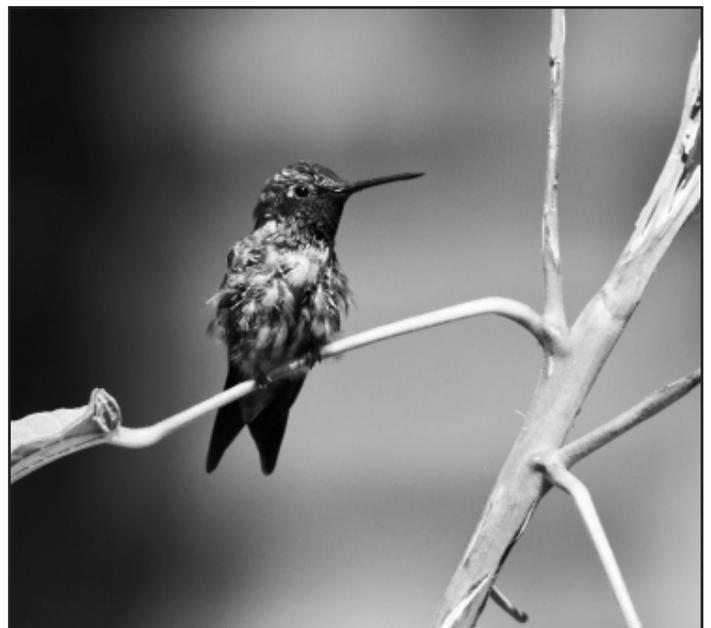
Interests/hobbies when you're not birding: My main hobby is still with birds. I have a large nesting colony of Purple Martins. Last year I had 55 pairs that fledged 250 young. I also like to garden and occasionally fish.

What new bird you would like to see the most: Burrowing Owl.

Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah

by Brenda Kotasek

The Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah will be held on August 15th from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Henderson, Minnesota. Produced by Henderson Feathers and sponsored by the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter, this annual one-day birding festival offers opportunities to learn about these amazing little birds, how to attract them and keep them happy, and much more. A licensed hummingbird bander will catch and band birds, allowing you to see them up close and learn about hummingbird research. There will also be a garden tour, speakers, book signing sessions, a Hummingbird Mall, and children's activities — all for



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, by Bob Dunlap

FREE! For more information, check out www.henderson-hummingbirdhurrah.com or visit us on Facebook.

From Gray Jay to Timberjay

by Erik Collins

To date, 439 bird species have been found in Minnesota. As a whole they have fine names fitting their plumage, song, or range. A special few, like Gyrfalcon, possess a name that is simply sublime. But there are several poor souls whose names lack the slightest bit of thought or inspiration. I sifted through our state checklist to find the three birds most in need of a change.

First, I established some ground rules. Any bird whose name is a single word is safe from change, especially if that word is the same as its song or call. Veery, Willet — those are among my favorites. Even though I may curse a Killdeer whose silhouette I had hoped belonged to one of its cousins, I believe its name is a good one.

Second — excuse my provincialism — but any name that contains the word American is safe. That's 17 of our birds, of which my personal favorite is American Avocet. It's too bad we don't have a bird named after Minnesota. Can we wrestle Connecticut Warbler away from the state it doesn't even touch on a range map?

Third, if a bird is named after a person, it is on shaky ground. This is especially true if I am still not sure how to pronounce it. Yes, I'm talking about you, Sabine's Gull. At least 46 of our birds have a namesake and for every one that rolls off the tongue, like Le Conte's Sparrow, we have several others like Baird's Sandpiper and Smith's Longspur which do not. Only one bird in this category has a perfect name and, honestly, I was surprised to learn that it was not named after its flaming throat and black and orange head. Well done, Ashton and Anna Blackburn.

Fourth, I feel a bit of sympathy for any bird whose name begins with "least" or "lesser." Sometimes "common" doesn't sit quite right with me either. For these birds I wish their naming had been more of an art than a science. Common Redpolls are indeed widespread, but we would still know that fact if they were called something else. In contrast, whoever named Hoary Redpolls put some thought into it.

It took some time, but I whittled a list of 20 prime candidates down to three. Honorable mention goes to Swainson's Thrush, Common Loon, and the aforementioned Baird's Sandpiper. But even those were better than this trio:

Wilson's Snipe. This bird has such an incredibly bad name, people do not believe it exists. On an episode of the television show "Cheers" the guys played a prank on Fraiser by taking him on a snipe hunt. Later, when Sam explained that snipe aren't real, even Cliff Clavin, who almost won Jeopardy, did not point out that a snipe is indeed a bird. I'm sure the Father of American Ornithology, Alexander Wil-

son, can get by with Wilson's Plover, Wilson's Warbler, and Wilson's Phalarope.

Rock Pigeon. The species gets very little respect. Most people, including me, place it alongside House Sparrow and House Finch at the bottom rung of our birds. Cornell's website bluntly describes them as "tubby birds with small heads and short legs." The best thing I can say about them is that they increase all of our lists by one. Still, they deserve a better name. They are adaptable enough to live in all 50 states. They can (sometimes) escape a Peregrine Falcon with moves straight out of Top Gun. I'm not asking for much. Even going back to Rock Dove would be an improvement.

Gray Jay. The Gray Jack takes the prize of having my least favorite name of the 400+ birds recorded in the state. True, it is gray and it is a jay, but its name seems to be little more than a simple rhyme. Ironically, it is the bird with the best nicknames: Camp Robber, Whiskey Jack, Timberjay, Moose Bird, Venison Hawk, and several others. They are all infinitely better than Gray Jay and many of them conjure up thoughts of the northwoods.



Gray Jay photo by Erik Collins

So the next time I report from the feeders in Sax-Zim Bog, I will be writing about Boreal Chickadees, Pine Grosbeaks, and Timberjays. Who's with me?



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.

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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.

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