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Conservation Column: Glass Menagerie

by Elise Morton and Stephanie Beard

As cities are commonly situated on migratory bird corridors, many Neotropical migrants will pass through at least one major metropolitan area during their biannual journeys. Green cities like Minneapolis, central to the largest North American flyway, provide essential habitat and resources for birds in need of refueling along their arduous cross-continental flight¹. Although this influx of migratory birds transforms our cities into birders' bliss, these urban landscapes are defined by many dangerous and often deadly features, to which birds have no adaptive defenses.

In addition to cats, pesticides, and disappearing habitat, one of the major dangers associated with cities is glass². Unlike humans, birds are not able to detect transparent or reflective glass as a solid surface. Thus, in urban environments, it's often the case that what birds perceive as a safe passageway is just the reflection of sky or trees in mirrored windows or crossed by an imperceptible barrier such as a skyway.

Although it's difficult to accurately assess the impact of window collisions on bird populations, conservative estimates for collision-induced bird mortality suggest hundreds of millions of birds are killed annually in the United States alone². Some calculations indicate we lose approximately 5% of the fall migratory population to window collisions³. To make matters worse, glass is an indiscriminate killer, taking the healthy and strong as often as the less fit. Furthermore, these estimates do not account for the probable long-term negative impacts to birds that strike windows but survive.

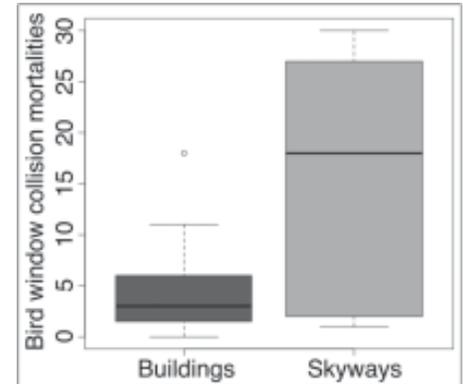


Figure 1. Median bird window collision mortalities for 9 skyways and 23 buildings on the UMN campuses.

Since 2010, Stephanie Beard, a Veterinary Technician with the University of Minnesota (UMN), has been leading her own window collision mortality surveys around 32 structures (23 buildings and 9 skyways) on the UMN campuses. Four years of data (eight migratory events: March 15 – May 31 and August 15 – October 31) revealed that the four deadliest structures were skyways, with the median mortality per skyway being over four-fold what it was per building (see Figure 1). This supports another study conducted at Pontifical Xavierian University in Colombia that, in surveying six buildings and one skyway, the single skyway accounted for 50% of window collisions⁴. Although UMN campus victims included 52 species, those over-represented include Nashville Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, White-throated Sparrows, and Ovenbirds.

For Minneapolis, a city containing eight miles of skyways, this pattern is particularly relevant. After deliberate evasion of the Minnesota Sustainable Building Guidelines requiring bird-

continued on next page

friendly building design on the new Vikings stadium, the Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority (MSFA) also rejected inclusion of bird-safe glass on connecting skyways. This, coupled with the empirical evidence presented above, has motivated Minneapolis City Councilmembers Cam Gordon and Linnea Palmisano to introduce an amendment to the Minneapolis skyway ordinance requiring bird-friendly design on all new skyways. The language for the amendment would be based on that of other leading environmentally conscious cities and would present developers with a variety of aesthetically pleasing and economically feasible options.

People love to watch birds. Although a single city skyway or stadium can independently kill a large number of birds, many are also killed at the windows of private homes³. This is a cumulative effect (many more individual homes than any other type of building), exacerbated by bird feeders that lure them to windows. People with feeders should remember the 3-foot and 30-foot rule and either position feeders within 3 feet of windows (birds may still collide, but hopefully without enough momentum to cause harm) or over 30 feet away. Additional affordable and easy solutions for bird-safing home windows include the “Zen Wind Curtains” (www.birdsavers.com) or BirdTape made by the American Bird Conservancy (www.abcbirdtape.org). It is important to keep in mind that, with any solution, birds are adept at flying through small spaces, so curtain cords or bird tape must be applied in horizontal lines no more than two inches apart or vertical lines no more than four inches apart.

Rapid human population growth, the expansion of cities, and technological advances that allow for larger uninterrupted expanses of glass are driving increased numbers of collision-induced bird mortalities. At the same time, awareness of the problem is growing as people begin to recognize that these birds we love today might not be here tomorrow. In addition, we are seeing increased development of novel products aimed at creating a bird-friendlier urban environment. This should give us hope that this unintended yet major threat is one that we can, and will, greatly reduce.

1. Mehlman, D. W., S. E. Mabey, D. N. Ewert, C. Duncan, B. Abel, D. Cimprich, R. D. Sutter, and M. Woodrey. 2005. Conserving stopover sites for forest-dwelling migratory land birds. *Auk* 122:1281–1290.

2. Klem Jr, D. 1990. Collisions between birds and windows: mortality and prevention. *Journal of Field Ornithology* 61:120–128.

3. Klem Jr, D., D. C. Keck, K. L. Marty, A. J. Miller Ball, E. E. Niciu, and C. T. Platt. 2004. Effects of window angling, feeder placement, and scavengers on avian mortality

at plate glass. *Wilson Bulletin* 116:69–73

4. Agudelo-Álvarez et al., 2010. Colisiones de aves contra ventanales en un campus Universitario de Bogota, Colombia. *Ornitología Colombiana* 10:3–10.

Stephanie Beard is a Veterinary Assistant at the University of Minnesota Animal Hospital. She volunteered with Audubon Minnesota’s Project BirdSafe for 7 years and now leads her own window collision monitoring program. She is also an active member of the Minnesota Citizens for the Protection of Migratory Birds.

Elise Morton a postdoctoral associate at the University of Minnesota researching animal microbiota. She is also the Conservation Chair and a Board member for the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis.

MN Birding Goes Digital

Fellow MOU members,

After much discussion, the editors of Minnesota Birding, in consultation with members of the board and the newsletter designer, have decided to publish the newsletter in digital format, beginning with the November/December 2015 issue. Those in charge of the website and the MOU listserv will send out an email blast to let you know that the newsletter can be downloaded from the Members only section of the website.

We think you will enjoy having the newsletter come to you in digital format. First of all, the photographs will be in color. Second, we will not be confined to 8 pages and will be able to publish more content, especially photographs. Third, this will save significant dollars in the MOU budget because there will be virtually no printing or mailing costs. Fourth, the newsletters will be archived for you, avoiding the dilemma of “shall I save or recycle” the paper copy.

We realize that there are a few members who do NOT have an email address. If we do not have an email address for you in our membership or listserv records, you will still receive a mailed copy of the newsletter. We anticipate that this will affect only a dozen or so members.

If you have questions or concerns, please send an email to newsletter@moumn.org or call Diana Rankin, Co-Editor of Minnesota Birding at 320-384-0474.

We expect this to go smoothly, but please be patient with us if there are some glitches.

Thank you!
Alyssa DeRubeis and Diana Rankin,
Co-Editors, Minnesota Birding

Organizing a County Big Day

by *Wayne Feder*

A county big day can add spice, variety, and even excitement to your birding. If you haven't organized or participated in a big day you should give it a try.

Big days always begin with a dream and a plan. The dream is always the same — to catch a perfect weather day at the peak of the year's migration.

Typically your big day will coincide with the transition between Minnesota's spring and summer seasons, which may entail not-so-perfect weather. This weather pattern usually results in wind. Morning wind, afternoon wind, all day wind, wind and rain, and even wind and snow. All is not lost if the birds have arrived; they have to be somewhere, probably congregated in sheltered areas. Two of my recent big days have provided excellent birding in spite of one having strong morning rain and the other gale-force winds in which trees were literally crashing down in the woods around me. On a more positive note, there are warm calm days waiting as well.

Now for the plan. One of the first steps is to put together a birding team. A good team is one in which everyone has fun together. It can range from a group of low-key birders who just want an excuse for a good day of birding to a highly competitive team intent on setting a county record. It is interesting how members of a team contribute different strengths to the effort. Each provides a different level of hearing, vision, identification skill, and enthusiasm; all are important.

A big day forces you to become extremely familiar with the birding habitat in your county. It is a good idea to do some scouting and serious birding in the days leading up to your count day. Check out your county for surviving mud flats, active feeders, and birdhouses. See if local lakes and wetlands hold any birds that might be expected to stay around until count day. Knowing what is already out there will help you prioritize places to visit on your big day.

Next plan a route and a time schedule that will take you to the best sites in your county. Make sure to include all the different habitats that are available. Be prepared to be flexible. On count day, some sites are going to be better than you expected and will take more time than you planned for. Some sites will be disappointing and can be passed by quickly. Weather, especially wind speed and direction, may cause some last minute changes in your route and may determine in which habitats you begin or end your day. Put one member in charge of time. That person will make the team move on, even when a great time is being had and a new bird is surely just down the trail.

Remind your birders to get out of the car. Each time you get out of the car and walk around your chances of

seeing, hearing, or flushing an unexpected bird increases.

Remember to look up. It is easy to focus on the habitat itself and not what's above it. Keep reminding each other to scan the sky. A lot of the migration is taking place up there and can easily be missed.

Be aware that birding is hard work. Your team members will probably get physically and mentally tired as the day goes on. The first few hours are exciting as birds are everywhere and the checklist fills quickly. By noon the law of diminishing returns begins to set in and new birds become harder and harder to find. Will you, the birds, or the day give out before you reach your record? Highly motivated groups, however, may want to get out early and stay up late listening for predawn or late evening owls.

The rules of Big Day Counts are simple. Team members must remain in voice contact, all members of the team must attempt to identify each new bird, and birds must not be counted if there is any doubt of its identity. Google the ABA Big Day Count Rules and the ABA Big Day Report Form to read over the official rules. If you and the group just want to keep your count as a fun annual event among yourselves, modify the rules to fit your needs. It's your count.

Finally, bring plenty of good food, beverages, sunscreen, and warm clothes. It can be a long day and you may not be near a town or home if you get cold or hungry. It's okay to slow down, take a break, or quit a little early.

Big days always end with a dream and a plan. Expect to work hard, find a few good or unexpected birds, learn more about your county, and have great fun with your friends. The things you find out this year will help you organize an even more successful and enjoyable count next year.

New MOU Members

Thomas Casey, Mound, MN
Benjamin Douglas, Oakdale, MN
Jane & Mark Gottwald, Duluth, MN
Ian Hunter, St. Paul, MN
Joseph Lindell, St. Louis Park, MN
Kathleen Park, Bloomington, MN
Dan Versaw, Hastings, MN

MOU Calendar



Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis – Information at <http://audubonchapterofminneapolis.org/programs>

September 1: Winter Finches

Details: Presented by Sparky Stensaas. 7 p.m. Beth El Synagogue, 5224 W. 26th Street, St. Louis Park.

October 6: Dragonflies of Minnesota

Details: Presented by Ron Lawrenz, president, Minnesota Dragonfly Society. 7 p.m. Brookdale Library, 6125 Shingle Creek Parkway, Minneapolis.

Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center – Information at www.CarpenterNatureCenter.org

September 25 and October 23:

Public Bird Banding

Details: 8:30 a.m.–12 p.m. Donations of birdseed or suet are greatly appreciated.

September 26: Fall Raptor Release

Details: Release of rehabilitated raptors by University of Minnesota's Raptor Center. 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

October 10: Birds through the Seasons Hike

Details: The first of a 12-month series of bird hikes. At the Wisconsin Campus. 8-10 a.m. Free to SCVBC members and Friends of CNC; \$6 per hike for the general public. RSVP with Carpenter Nature Center at 651-437-4359.

Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory – Information: www.hawkridge.org/events/calendar/

September 6, 7: Magnificent Migration

Details: Sept 6, 1–8 p.m.; Sept 7, 7 a.m.–3 p.m. Two-day workshop explores how this corridor developed and the forces behind this migratory corridor. Participants will observe the migration, follow daily trends on how the 2015 migration season is progressing, and observe the research efforts in place at Hawk Ridge. Cost: \$120 Hawk Ridge Members; \$150 non-members; covers materials and resources.

September 18–20: Hawk Weekend Festival

Details: Watch the website for details.

October 11–12:

When the Large Birds Soar!

Details: Oct 11, 1–8 p.m.; Oct 12, 7 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Two-day workshop explores how this corridor developed and the forces behind this migratory corridor. Participants will observe the migration, follow daily trends on how the 2015 migration season is progressing, and observe the research efforts in place at Hawk Ridge, including the passerine, raptor and owl banding stations. Cost: \$120 Hawk Ridge Members; \$150 non-members; covers materials and resources.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

September 6, 13, 20, 27:

Bird Banding Demonstration

Details: 12:30-2 p.m. Led by Greg Munson. White-water State Park. Information: www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks/whitewater/index.html.

Minnesota Landscape Arboretum

October 18: Raptor Photography:

Exclusive Camera Access

Details: 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Carlyn Iverson, instructor, University of Minnesota Raptor Center. Participants will learn how to control the camera for images from distances of 5–20 feet away (in class) as well as longer distances (in the field). Recommended: 90 mm and higher focal-length lenses. Cost: \$109 members; \$129 non-members; includes Arboretum admission. A portion of the class fees go to benefit the Raptor Center. Information: www.arboretum.umn.edu/photography-classes.aspx.

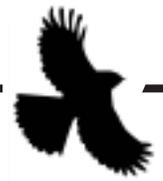
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

September 24: If You Were a Marbled Godwit, Where Would You Be?

Details: Presented by Bridget Olson, Deputy Refuge Manager, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. 7 p.m. Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Visitor Center. Information: <http://mrvac.org/2015/06/27/if-you-were-a-marbled-godwit/>.

Prairie Lakes Audubon Chapter – Information:

tony_warner_06@hotmail.com



September 1: Chapter First Anniversary Meeting

Details: “Hummingbirds: A photographic extravaganza of the Hummingbirds of the World,” by Dr. Carrol Henderson. 7 p.m. with silent auction at 6 p.m. Grand Arbor Community Room, 4403, Pioneer Road S, Alexandria.

September 8: Bird Trip Group Activity

Details: Carlos State Park. 7:30 a.m.; expected duration – 3 hours. Meet at Travellers Inn, Broadway, Alexandria.

October 6: Chapter Meeting

Details: “Climate Change and Minnesota’s Birds,” by Audubon Minnesota. 7 p.m. Alexandria Senior Community Center, 414, Hawthorne Street, Alexandria.

October 20: Bird Trip Group Activity

Details: Sherburne NWR. 12 noon; expected duration 9 hours. Meet at Holiday Inn, Alexandria.

Saint Paul Audubon Society – Information: Contact Linda Goodspeed, 651-647-1452.

September 10: The Science and Compassion of Wildlife Medicine

Details: Presented by Philip M. Jenni, Executive Director, Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. 7 p.m. Fairview Community Center, 1910 West County Road B, Roseville.

October 8: Amphibians and Reptiles in Minnesota

Details: Presented by John Moriarty. 7 p.m. Fairview Community Center, 1910 West County Road B, Roseville.

Three Rivers Parks – Information: www.threeriver-sparks.org

September 7: Fall Migration Bird Hike

Details: 9:30–11 a.m. Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Drive, Victoria, MN.

September 12: Bird Banding

Details: 9 a.m.–12 p.m. Eastman Nature Center, 13351 Elm Creek Road, Dayton, MN.

September 19; October 17: Bird Banding

Details: 9 a.m.–12 p.m. Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Drive, Victoria, MN.

October 16, 17: Saw-whet Owl Banding

Details: 8–11 p.m. Drive within Carver Park to observe master banders safely trapping and banding saw-whet owls. Reservations required. Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Drive, Victoria, MN.

Zumbro Valley Audubon Society – Unless otherwise noted, events start at Quarry Hill Nature Center, 701 Silver Creek Road NE, Rochester, MN. Information: <http://www.zumbrovalleyaudubon.org/programs.html>

September 22: Storyteller Al Batt

Details: 7–8 p.m. Quarry Hill Nature Center, 701 Silver Creek Road NE, Rochester, MN.

October 27: Birds, Writing and the Importance of Humor

Details: Presented by Jan Dunlap, author of the Bob White Birder Murder Mysteries. 7–8 p.m. Quarry Hill Nature Center, 701 Silver Creek Road NE, Rochester, MN.

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars on Saturday December 5th for the 2015 MOU Paper Session. The event will be held again this year at the Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota.

An updated registration form will appear on the MOU website sometime in late September and will also be included in the November/December issue of *Minnesota Birding*. The exhibitors and presentations are being finalized and no doubt will be interesting and informative for all attendees.

Phenology Corner: Mid- to Late Fall Shorebirding

by Bob Dunlap

When we last discussed shorebirds, it was the end of August and we were noticing that the adults were molting (or had already molted) into their winter plumages. We were also beginning to notice some juveniles among the flocks looking somewhat brighter in their fresh plumage than the drabber adults, but otherwise causing mass confusion for us birders. Are those large grayish plovers? Black-bellied or are they American Golden-Plovers? Shouldn't Baird's Sandpipers be gone by the end of September?! I thought I only had to worry about dowitchers in spring!!! GAAHHH! My head!

Well, since this isn't intended to be an article about bird identification, I'll leave the finer points of identifying fall shorebirds to the field guides. But despair not! There are still some things you should know about the timing of shorebird migration from the beginning of September through mid-November that might help alleviate some of your headaches and, dare I say, might even make you look like a shorebirding guru among your birding friends!

For the most part, the same species seen in July and August can be seen at least through the beginning of October, although many species become increasingly less common during this time. Spotted, Solitary, Stilt, Baird's, Least, Buff-breasted, Pectoral, and Semipalmated sandpipers are all species whose numbers usually peak before or very close to the first day of September. Similarly, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes have usually peaked by the first week or two of September. All of these species can be found into October, but generally you'll see fewer of them than you did in early fall.

As individuals of these species become less numerous, those of other species actually increase in abundance. Black-bellied Plovers, American Golden-Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, and Sanderlings are among the species with their greatest fall abundances in Minnesota occurring during the second half of

September. Others peak even later in October and these include Dunlin and Long-billed Dowitcher.

American Golden-Plovers and Black-bellied Plovers are sometimes found together in the same flock and these two species don't look all that different in their winter plumages. Some of the better field guides point out subtle differences between the two at this time of year, such as the black axillaries or "armpits" of Black-bellied Plovers seen in flight. But disregarding plumage, Black-bellied Plovers tend to be found in smaller numbers, usually not more than a few dozen individuals, whereas American Golden-Plovers can form huge flocks numbering into the hundreds (often found feeding in plowed agricultural fields). Both species, however, can appear singly or in small numbers at shorebird locations.

A godwit seen past the first week of September is more likely to be a Hudsonian than a Marbled. Most Marbleds vacate the state in August, whereas Hudsonians can be found in small numbers through October. Willets are exceptionally rare past the first week of September, so if you think you're seeing one of the "jumbo" shorebirds later in the fall it likely isn't this species. But check twice to make sure its bill isn't downcurved, as there are records of the unexpected Whimbrel all the way through October.

Long-billed Dowitchers can be reliably found well into November most years. Most Short-billed Dowitchers have migrated through Minnesota by the second week of September, so a dowitcher seen in late September through mid-November is almost guaranteed to be a Long-billed. But take extra caution to separate their grayish winter plumage from that of the similarly shaped Wilson's Snipes; the snipes become increasingly common toward the middle of October.

Lastly, a few notes about rarities. A phalarope with a thick, dark eye-line is just as likely to be a Red Phalarope in mid-October as it is a Red-necked Phalarope. In fact, as November approaches, the odds

continued on next page

Minnesota Birder Bio: Madeleine Linck

Born: Massachusetts and moved to Minnesota in 1985.

Currently living: Medina, Hennepin County, but will be moving to Rehoboth, Massachusetts, in spring 2016.

Occupation Wildlife Technician for Three Rivers Park District; retiring in 2016.

Serious about birding since: About 8 or 9 years old with my very own Golden Guide!

Favorite bird or bird family: I enjoy them all and can spend as much time watching a chickadee or a nuthatch as a rare bird.

Favorite places to bird in Minnesota: The state parks and Murphy Hanrehan and Crow-Hassan Parks.

Favorite place to bird outside of Minnesota: Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Birding style (i.e. by yourself, with others, etc.): I enjoy birding both alone and with friends and leading



bird walks for the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis.

Best advice on how to be a better birder: Get out there to look and listen! Go with a group of experienced birders. Find the bird that is singing and watch it while it is opening its mouth to imprint it into your brain. Listening to too many songs and calls on CDs can lead to a major overdose!

The main attraction or joy of birding for you: For me, it's to spend time in nature and find there is always something new to learn. I do not keep a list, although I do keep track of the birds seen or heard from my yard. I enjoy sharing the excitement of birding with those folks new to birding.

Interests/hobbies when you're not birding: Conservation of reptiles and amphibians, tennis, hiking, and being in the woods with my grandkids.

What new bird you would like to see the most: Various species of hummingbirds in the western U.S.



tilt more in favor of it being a Red Phalarope! And your best chances of finding a Purple Sandpiper in the state occur between the second and final weeks of October; be sure to check out rocky or pebbly edges of lakes, which is the habitat this easterly vagrant seems to prefer.

As ice begins to form on lakes and wetlands throughout much of Minnesota by mid-November, so go the shorebirds and so ends the fall shorebird migration. In many ways Minnesota birders are spoiled to be privileged with five months of fall shorebirding, although it can take considerable effort on your part to identify them. But by using some of the temporal tendencies I've provided above, your chances of avoiding that headache might just turn out to be a little better than your chances of finding a Purple Sandpiper in mid-October.



*Yellow-headed Blackbird,
photo by Earl Orf*



Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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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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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.

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