

Minnesota BIRDING

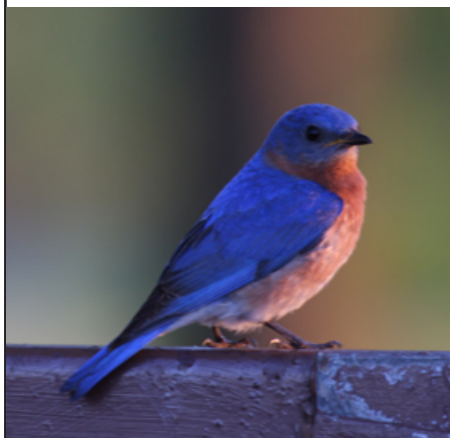
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Eastern Bluebird
by Stefanie Moss

Loons in the Spotlight

by Carol Henderson

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010 initiated a new era of concern as the contamination occurring in the Gulf of Mexico fouled important wintering habitat used by Minnesota's loons. Even though the problems in the Gulf seemed far away, they were another reminder that in nature, everything is interconnected.

At the time, Senator Amy Klobuchar convened a meeting of state conservation organizations, agencies, and concerned individuals to discuss the potential impacts of the oil spill on Minnesota's migratory wildlife. Following the meeting, a working group was organized to determine which species might be at the most risk from the oil spill. The Common Loon and the American White Pelican were identified as most vulnerable, in part because the Gulf of Mexico is their primary wintering habitat. Another consideration was that juvenile loons generally do not return to Minnesota from the Gulf until the spring of their 3rd year, and pelicans do not return until the spring of their 2nd year. We believed this made them particularly susceptible to extended exposure to petroleum contaminants resulting from the oil spill.

The working group decided to request funding for a research plan for both species from the Legislative-Citizens' Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), which allocates funds from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The plan involved a collaborative effort among the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Nongame Wildlife Program; the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS); the University of Minnesota Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Biology; the University of Connecticut Center for Environmental Sciences and Engineering; the North Dakota State University De-

partment of Biological Sciences; and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Since 2010 the partnership has received \$641,000 in three different allocations from the LCCMR to carry out investigations of loons and pelicans.

What have we learned?

The loon research, thanks to the extraordinary talents of the U.S. Geological Survey crew headed by researcher Kevin Kenow, has provided some amazing advancements in the understanding of loon ecology, migration, and wintering activities. The research has also helped us understand the extent to which the loons have been contaminated from exposure to petroleum and dispersant contaminants related to the Deepwater Horizons oil spill.

Satellite transmitters were surgically placed in the abdominal cavities of 15 adult loons and 22 juvenile loons to monitor their local breeding season movements, spring and fall migrations, and wintering locations. This data can be found on the web by Googling "USGS, loon tracking". Much of the area identified as prime wintering locations for loons were also where the oil spill settled.

In addition to the telemetry research, 96 loons were outfitted with geolocators attached to their leg bands and monitored for three data sets: location, pressure, and temperature. Analysis of this information revealed migration chronology as well as diving behavior and ambient temperature. A total of 51 of those loons were recaptured and 37 geolocators (72%) were retrieved and their data was downloaded. Among the more dramatic revelations from the geolocators was that loons in Lake Michigan were diving to

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the bottom to depths of 45 to 135 feet and feeding on small fish—including an exotic invasive species called the round goby. Data from their wintering activities in the Gulf of Mexico revealed the loons there fed on the bottom from depths of 50 to 110 feet. This put them in areas where oil would have settled to the bottom and contaminated the food chain.

Samples from loon feathers, blood, fat, and unhatched eggs were tested for petroleum contaminants—specifically polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). These contaminants are known for their carcinogenic, mutagenic, and teratogenic effects. In addition to loons that were killed outright by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, these contaminants may also cause sublethal effects like shortened lifespan, lower hatchability of eggs, lower survival rate for chicks, or behavioral abnormalities. Contamination rates ranged from 14.3 to 35.0 percent in the samples tested.

PAH Contamination

Sample	# specimens	percent
Blood	17/48	35.0%
Fat	7/26	26.9%
Feathers	5/35	14.3%
Eggs	10/56	17.9%

In Wisconsin, USGS biologists collected loon feathers from eight loons before the oil spill (2010), and the same 8 loons were sampled after the oil spill (six were recaptured in 2011 and two in 2013). They were tested for PAH and dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate (DOSS). DOSS was an ingredient in the dispersant used after the Deepwater Horizon spill. Five of the eight loons contained PAH contamination after the oil spill but none had PAH before the spill. No comparable before and after samples were available from Minnesota.

Approximately 800,000 to 1,000,000 gallons of DOSS were spread onto the oil slick in the Gulf

Pre- and Post-Oil Spill Feather Samples From 8 Loons

loon #	pre-spill PAH	post-spill PAH
705	ND	87.1 ng/g
242	ND	88.7 ng/g
230	ND	54.0 ng/g
246	ND	92.5 ng/g
237	ND	72.2 ng/g
006	ND	ND
016	ND	ND
65	ND	ND

during the spill. The chemical did not break down the oil, but made the oil slick sink from the surface so the size and extent of the spill could not be monitored by air. DOSS is a serious contaminant in its own right, causing respiratory, nervous system, liver, kidney, and blood disorders. It is carcinogenic, causes hormone disruption, and the EPA has declared it an “acute health hazard.”

DOSS Contamination

Sample	# specimens	percent
Blood	7/48	14.6%
Fat	2/19	10.9%
Feathers	3/35	8.6%
Eggs	1/56	1.8%

Contaminant occurrence rates ranged from 1.8% in eggs to 14.6% in loon blood.

Loon feather, blood, fat, and unhatched egg samples were collected through the summer of 2016, and the radio-marked loons will continue to be monitored until the transmitters die. Two juvenile loons (one hatched in 2014 and one from 2015) were still on the air as of this writing on August 24, 2016. The LCCMR research project will end on June 30, 2017.

What next?

Next on the agenda is to await instructions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on what kind of work program they need to proceed

with allocating BP oil spill funds for loon recovery. The work program should be requested this fall or winter, and funds could be allocated by next summer. Potential projects could include protection and management of prime northern loon lakes—designated as “deepwater cisco lakes”—that have the greatest resilience to climate change effects; collaborative efforts with lake associations for development and implementation of Common Loon conservation, management, and monitoring plans; and renewing our “get the lead out” program for fishing tackle to encourage anglers to voluntarily use nontoxic jigs and sinkers since lead jigs and sinkers can poison loons.

As we approach the conclusion of this research project, we would like to extend our appreciation to the MOU members who have participated in the annual Minnesota Loon Monitoring Program, to volunteers who have monitored the outcome of loon nesting pairs and managed loon nesting rafts, and volunteers who have retrieved dead loons and unhatched loon eggs to enhance our sampling efforts for the contaminant analyses.

I am deeply grateful to the Legislative Citizen’s Commission on Minnesota Resources for funding this extensive loon research project. In the long term, however, we need to remember that our primary funding source for conservation of loons and other Minnesota nongame wildlife comes from donations to the Nongame Wildlife Checkoff. Those donations are now matched equally with funds from the sale of Reinvest In Minnesota Conservation License Plates. I sincerely appreciate the support we receive from the Minnesota Ornithologists’ Union to help promote our Nongame Wildlife Program and participate in our conservation efforts.

Carrol Henderson is the Nongame Wildlife Program supervisor who is now in his 43rd year with the DNR, and still loving his work!

Request for Awards & Recognition Nominees

by *Kim Richard Eckert, Awards & Recognitions Committee Chairman*

It's again that time of year when the MOU Awards and Recognition Committee is considering nominees to be recognized for their contributions to the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union. This annual tradition of recognition takes the form of presenting the Thomas S. Roberts, Brother Theodore Voelker, and Young Birder awards at the MOU Papers Session on December 3, 2016.

Since 1963, the Thomas S. Roberts Award has traditionally been our lifetime achievement award: "For Outstanding Contributions to Minnesota Ornithology and Birding," as stated on the plaque. Previous recipients have contributed to MOU in many different ways, which were sometimes not directly related to ornithology or birding. (Note that our unofficial poli-

cy has been that a person should only receive the Roberts Award once, so please check the link below to see if the person you have in mind is a previous recipient.)

The Brother Theodore Voelker Award is "For Special Achievement in Field Ornithology" during this year. The original intent in 1988 was that this recipient's achievement would be related to field ornithology in one of three categories: significant bird sighting(s), something written (e.g., journal article, book, or technical paper), or a field research project. (In some years, involvements in special events, conservation, mentoring, and education have also been included in the criteria for this award, and note that a person can receive the Voelker Award more than once.)

The Young Birder Award is for someone under 25 years contributing to knowledge of Minnesota birds or to MOU; as it reads on the plaque: "For Contributions to Birding in Minnesota." This is our newest award, presented for the first time in 2005.

The names of all previous recipients of these awards can be found on the MOU website: www.moumn.org/awards.html. Please contact me if you have someone in mind for any of these awards (eckertkr@gmail.com), and include his or her qualifications and contributions which you feel would qualify your nominee as one of our recipients. If possible, I would like to receive all nominations no later than September 25, and the committee thanks you in advance for your interest and input in these awards.

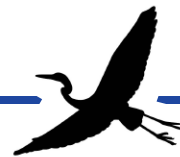
New MOU Members

Ben Anderson, *Duluth, MN*
David Bredehoft, *Hudson, WI*
Joel Dale, *St. Cloud, MN*
Michael Degerstrom, *Rochester, MN*
Jane Eastes, *Battle Lake, MN*
Joseph Fragodt, *Morris, MN*
Lauren Haynes, *Colorado Springs, CO*
David Hetrick, *Elk River, MN*
Susan Keator, *Edina, MN*
Mark Kjolhaug, *Shorewood, MN*
Margaret Kuchenreuther, *Morris, MN*
Denise Remick, *Stillwater, MN*
Joseph Schmit, *Eden Prairie, MN*
John & Sharon Simpson, *Lake Elmo, MN*
Donna Van Stralen, *Bloomington, MN*
Laurie Wachholz, *Plymouth, MN*
Pamela Walz, *St. Paul, MN*



*Great Crested Flycatcher
by Father Paul Kammen*

MOU Calendar



September / October 2016

WOOD LAKE NATURE CENTER

September 26 and October 3: Bird Hikes

Details: Fall is an exciting time to spot migrating birds. Enjoy an educational and leisurely walk through the nature center on a guided bird hike from 6pm-7:30pm. Both amateur and advanced bird watchers are welcome! Binoculars and field guides are available for loan. Please call 612-861-9365 to register; pre-registration is required. Classes will be canceled for inclement weather. Cost is \$5 per hike or free for members.

SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

October 11: Sandhill Crane Migration Field Trip

Details: Meet at the Crex Meadows Visitor's Center to carpool to a field trip highlighting Sandhill Crane migration. The trip will begin at 4pm and go until dusk. Please contact Louise ahead of time at eidsmoel@comcast.net or 651-645-6821. Details can be found on the October calendar page of www.saintpaulaudubon.org/events

WARGO NATURE CENTER

September 3 and October 8: Bird and Nature Walk

Details: Join a naturalist for a guided bird walk around Islands of Peace County Park from 9am-10am. We will cover the basics of bird identification and binocular use at the Visitor's Center before hitting the trail. Binoculars and bird identification guides will be available for use. Pre-registration is required, and the cost is \$5 per person.

September 14: Birding by Boat

Details: Are you looking for a new way to see a variety of bird? On this unique birding program, we will use canoes and kayaks to access areas most birders can't. We'll look for waterfowl, shorebirds, and upland bird species from 9am-12pm. Participants 15 and under need to be accompanied by an adult. No experience in boats or birding is required, and all boating equipment is provided. Binoculars are also available for use. Pre-registration is required and the trip costs \$10 per adult or free for ages 15 and under.

September 17: Birding on the Mississippi

Details: Stroll along the Mississippi River at Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park with a naturalist while you look for migrating fall birds. A checklist of Minnesota birds, a map of the area, and binoculars will be provided. This program is suitable for all experience levels and runs from 9 am-10 am. Pre-registration is required and the walk is \$5 per person.

SPRINGBROOK NATURE CENTER

September 4: Bird Banding

Details: We love having people of all ages and birding abilities drop in, so come check out the new Springbrook Nature Center building and then see some birds! The center is open to the public every day at 9am.

MAPLEWOOD NATURE CENTER

September 22, October 6, and October 20:

Bird Walk Series

Details: Join a naturalist for three bird walk sessions to see and hear migrating songbirds as well as waterfowl. Bring your own binoculars or borrow a pair from the nature center. Participants will learn how to identify birds by sight and sound as well as keep a record of birds observed during the hike. The first session runs from 8:30am-10:20am at Maplewood Nature Center, and the second session runs from 8:30am-11:00am at Joy Park (participants will meet at the north end of the park in the west parking lot). The last session will be at Lake Phalen (with participants meeting in the north parking lot) from 8:30am-11:00am. Pre-pay \$5. To register, go to maplewoodnaturecenter.com and click on the Register Online Go button. Call 651-249-2170 if you need help.

October 1: Bird Banding Day

Details: Fall warblers can be hard to identify. Come from 9:30am-12pm to watch licensed biologists capture, band, and release wild birds to learn about age, migration, and populations. If conditions allow, take a short hike to the floating boardwalk and borrow a pair of binoculars to observe birds. Bring a camera to this free, drop-in event.

October 28: Outstanding Owls

Details: Visit us from 4:30pm-7:30pm to meet an owl up close and learn what makes these creatures such a hoot! Events will run throughout the evening, with a Halloween Hijinks puppet show and a treat at 4:30pm and a Raptor Center presentation at 5pm. At 6pm-7:30pm, older kids can dissect owl pellets and younger ones can make an owl craft. Learn owl calls and go on a night hike around the pond in search for our featured friends. Dress for the weather. Treats and beverages are provided. Pre-pay \$5 by October 26. To register, go to maplewoodnaturecenter.com and click on the Register Online Go button. Call 651-249-2170 if you need help.

Watch Out for Wild Parsnip

by Cindy Thury Smith, MOU Membership Secretary

Most experienced birders recognize poison ivy and stinging nettles, but there is another toxic weed spreading across Minnesota. Wild Parsnip is an invasive noxious weed which can outcompete native vegetation. It is commonly seen along Minnesota roads, railroads, and ditches, but can also be found invading pastures, natural areas, gravel pits, forest harvest areas, idle lands, and any other landscapes subject to disturbance. Wild Parsnip is especially common in the southeast quarter of the state.

Wild Parsnip typically grows four to six feet tall and reproduces by seed. Seedlings emerge in the spring and spend their first years of growth as rosettes of leaves. Eventually the rosettes “bolt” and produce a stout branching stem with alternating leaves and 5-15 oval-shaped, sharply toothed leaflets. Flowers are flat-topped umbels at the end of long stems. Wild Parsnip typically blooms from late May to July in Minnesota.

The sap of Wild Parsnip is toxic to humans, but not immediately so. Parsnip sap contains chemicals that are

activated by sunlight and can cause serious burns and blisters. Blisters will appear a day or two after sun exposure. One of Wild Parsnip’s signature effects is a dark red or brownish discoloration of the skin in the area where the burn occurred. This hyperpigmentation can persist for as long as two years.

I encountered Wild Parsnip while out birding one Wednesday. By Friday night I had blisters running up my legs and was so uncomfortable I couldn’t sleep. It took three trips to the Emergency Clinic, several unhelpful prescriptions, and a rash that worsened when I was in the sun gardening for a doctor to finally identify my problem. She had Wild Parsnip growing on the fringes of her property for years and had never physically encountered it until the previous summer. Over a year later, she still had marks on her legs.

She told me about the connection between the Parsnip sap and sunlight, offering an explanation for why my legs got more irritated when I left the house. The doctor was also (finally!)



able to recommend something to control it. Sarna lotion is an inexpensive, fragrance free, anti-itch lotion available at Walgreens, CVS, and Cub stores. I spread it on several times a day to calm my skin. I also kept the affected area out of sunlight for several months. Now, 15 months later, the spots are finally fading.

As birders, we sometimes are so focused on a bird we may not realize what we are walking through. I can guarantee that if you encounter Wild Parsnip once, you will be very alert for it from that point on!

Great Egret by Diane Gulbrandson



Minnesota Birder Bio: Sparky Sensaas

I was born in LeMars, Iowa, raised in New Hope, Minnesota, and moved north to Duluth in 1981 to attend UMD (for three reasons . . . Hawk Ridge, closeness to wolves in the wild, and the best year-round birding in the state). I now live with my wife Bridget and two sons, Birk (7) and Bjorn (6), on our five acres near Jay Cooke State Park.

As my wife says, I have about six half-time jobs: I'm Executive Director of Friends of Sax-Zim Bog, a wildlife photographer/videographer, a writer, a speaker, a bird guide, and have two small publishing companies (Stone Ridge Press and Kollath-Stensaas Publishing). I also worked nine Junes for Steve Stucker and the Minnesota County Biological Survey doing bird surveys around the state.

Serious about birding since . . .

Collecting things as a kid was my gateway to birding. I collected baseball cards, bottle caps, beer cans, and barbed wire—and that was just the B's! Then one day I spotted a strange bird outside our front window . . . it was striped and spotted, and sported red and black and yellow feathers. I was 14 years old and had to know what it was. Identifying that Yellow-shafted Flicker (that was its name in 1978) spurred me on to “collect” more bird sightings. A birder was born!

Favorite Places to Bird in Minnesota

I'm obviously biased to the Sax-Zim Bog, but other favorite birding spots include Blue Mounds State Park, Superior National Forest, Felton Prairie, and Thief Lake WMA.

Favorite Places to Bird Outside of Minnesota

Wow . . . hard question. Churchill, Manitoba (Ross's Gull in 1987, shorebirds in trees, breeding Smith's Longspurs), Kenai Fjords National Park (Alaska! Enough said?), Crex Mead-



ows (the crane spectacle in October), Wisconsin Point (less crowded than Park Point and where I found Wisconsin's first state record Wilson's Plover), Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas (exotic birds and awesome butterflies).

Best Advice on how to be a Better Birder

The best way to bring your birding to a higher level is to become a naturalist; learn everything you can about the habits, habitats, and natural history of Minnesota's birds. This can be through reading and going in the field with better birders. And don't forget the wealth of articles in MOU's *The Loon* archives online!

Interests/Hobbies When Not Birding

My interest these days is not so much in hardcore listing, but taking creative wildlife photos and getting HD video of North America's birds and wildlife, with an emphasis on boreal/bog species. Also cross-country skiing, reading non-fiction, and traveling with my wife and sons.

Favorite Birding Style

Since I often guide birders and lead birding field trips, when I find a bit of time in my schedule I often prefer to bird by myself.

What New Bird Would You Like to See Most

Finding a Boreal Owl nest deep in the wilds of the Superior National Forest would probably be very high on my list of “most-wanted” Minnesota birding experiences. I have seen many in winter but never found one in summer.



Boreal Owl
by Thomas Benjamin Hertzell



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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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