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Conservation Column Tropical Birds of Minnesota: An Introduction to our International Avian Connection

by Andy Forbes

As I stare out my back window watching hardy chickadees and woodpeckers at my bird feeders through a filter of snowflakes, my thoughts often drift to warmer places. I truly enjoy winter's quiet beauty, as well as the avian visitors from the north that it brings to Minnesota, but I can't help but think that the thrushes, warblers, orioles, and other Neotropical migrants have really figured it out, living in a land of perpetual warmth and abundance, always moving to where summer is. Not a bad way to live!

Of course, it's not that easy. The journey required is long and full of peril. Even though food may be abundant, life isn't a cakewalk for any wild animal, especially when there are other things that find you to be a tasty morsel. Sadly, even if migrating birds are able to dodge the storms, obstacles, and predators of migration and arrive in the tropics to spend the winter, the human-caused pressures on them continue. The tropical ecology of our shared birds is a fascinating subject and is still a relatively

new frontier for research, filled with knowledge gaps. What I offer here is just a brief introduction to the topic that I've been enjoying learning about, as well as a summary of some of the threats to bird populations once they head south of the border.

What is a "Neotropical Migrant"?

Traditionally, ornithologists and other biologists have classified the earth into eight primary biogeographic realms, as first proposed by ornithologist Philip Sclater in the 1850s. These realms are defined by broadly similar flora, fauna, and evolutionary histories and generally align with barriers to bird dispersal. In many cases, families of birds are found within just one realm, but not always. Most of North America is contained within the "Nearctic" realm, whereas everything from Mexico south (including the Caribbean and southern Florida) is contained within the "Neotropical" realm. Simply put, Neotropical migrants are birds that migrate between the Neotropical and Nearctic Realms.

Minnesota Birds, Tropical Worlds

My first trip to the Neotropics in the winter of 2017-2018 was an eye-opening experience. I was fortunate enough to get to travel to Nicaragua and work as a volunteer assistant. It's one thing to read about the wintering behavior of "our" birds; it's entirely another thing to see it for yourself. Watching Crimson-collared Tanagers sparring with Baltimore Orioles at a fruit feeder while eating breakfast outside in the cool morning mist reminds me of the goldfinches and siskins jockeying for position at my feeder in Minnesota. Following a mixed species flock moving through the cloud forest undergrowth as they feed on insects escaping swarms of army ants—including Wood Thrushes and Wilson's Warblers alongside the resident Slaty Antwrens and Red-crowned Ant-Tanagers—recalls chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers moving through the leafless trees of winter, searching for seeds and dormant insects. It's an experience that really changes your mindset: many of "our" birds are every bit as much at home in the tropics as they are in our temperate forests in Minnesota. If anything, they might be better understood as tropical species that we are fortunate enough to host for only a few months of the year.

Where do Minnesota Birds Go?

The wintering ranges and habitats of Minnesota Neotropical migrants are as many and varied as their habitats and life histories in the summer, stretching all the way from northern Mexico to Argentina and encompassing a wide variety of habitats. It would be impossible to cover all of that in an article of this length, so I'll focus here on the Central and South American Highlands (hereafter "highlands"), as defined in the Partners In Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan, and the species, habitats, and challenges that occur within this zone.

The highlands zone covers everything higher than 1,000 meters (3,281ft) above sea level and is huge, stretching from southern Mexico through northern Nicaragua, central Costa Rica, and Panama, and from Venezuela and Colombia south down to the northern Andes just over the northern border of Peru. The overall area of this zone is approximately 523,000 square kilometers (201,931 square miles). Prior to conversion, much of this zone was blanketed in extremely productive forested habitat. While much still remains (approximately 24% of the area is protected in some sort of status), the bulk of highland forests have been converted to other habitats, and much of what remains is under threat.

There is a strong link between birds of Minnesota and the highlands. Fifty Minnesota breeding species spend the nonbreeding season in highland forested habitats, including many common ones like Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Baltimore Oriole, and Gray Catbird (see Table 1 for a list).



Author and colleagues observing birds at a coffee plantation/cloud forest reserve in Nicaragua, by Jeff Koch

Seventeen species of warblers that breed in Minnesota also depend on forests in this zone. While some species, such as Yellow-billed and Black-billed cuckoo, merely pass through this area as they journey to points even further south, many stay for over half the year. The Golden-winged Warbler is an example. While the species typically spends less than four months each year in Minnesota—early May through early August—it spends about twice that much time—from mid-September through mid-April—in tropical cloud forests, and it is just as much at home in that habitat as it is in our temperate forests.

Recently, new models have further highlighted the importance of wintering habitat for Neotropical migrants based upon the differences in their density between the breeding season and winter. Wood Thrushes provide a great example of this. These woodland songsters breed across almost the entirety of the eastern United States but during winter concentrate in an area just from southern Mexico through Panama. From a numbers standpoint, an estimated 75% of the Wood Thrush population is contained within about 860,690 square kilometers (332,314 square miles) in the summer, but only a comparatively miniscule 36,678 square kilometers (14,161 square miles) in the winter. Therefore, they are estimated to be 24 times more concentrated on the wintering grounds than they are in their breeding range. Think about



*Baltimore Oriole visiting a fruit feeder in Nicaragua,
by Jeff Koch*

this for a second, and ponder the population-level impact on Wood Thrushes of an acre of forest lost on the wintering grounds vs. here. While the species needs habitat in both places (and in between) to survive, the urgency of protecting habitat on the wintering grounds can't be overstated.

Disappearing Habitat

Intact natural habitats are under immense pressure for conversion to other uses in the Neotropics just as they are here. From 2001–2010 an estimated 69,000 square miles of forest habitat was lost across the entirety of Central and South America. For context, that's an area the size of Wisconsin in just ten years. Sadly, protected areas are not immune to this trend. A forest inventory conducted in Nicaragua in 2009 estimated that protected areas have lost 48% of their original forest cover. While there are many threats to bird populations beyond this, habitat loss and degradation are by far the most pressing.

Agricultural conversion, particularly to intensive non-shade crops (more on that in a bit), and pastureland for cat-

tle are the biggest drivers of forest habitat loss in this part of the world. As human populations grow across the globe and demand for food increases, natural habitats feel the squeeze. Smaller and smaller forest fragments become less able to support many species of birds and other wildlife that require larger tracts of intact forest, and even those that remain in smaller fragments are vulnerable to pressures such as illegal poaching and capture for the pet trade.

In addition to plantations of tropical fruits such as pineapples and bananas, as well as other crops like African oil palm, intensive “sun” coffee plantations continue to replace tropical forests at an alarming rate. While traditional methods of cultivating coffee involve growing it under a canopy in the shade of trees, sun coffee grows in full sun, in a row-crop environment. Sun coffee plantations can produce more coffee per acre; however, they require massive amounts of pesticides and fertilizers, and they provide very little in the way of habitat for birds or any other wildlife.

So . . . we all want to help ensure the continued survival of warblers, thrushes, and other Neotropical migrants, but without habitat on their wintering grounds their existence becomes very uncertain. What, in addition to working here on the breeding grounds, can we, living a world away in Minnesota, do to help these birds survive? The good news is we can do a lot. Here are just a few ideas:

1. We can support local and/or international conservation organizations that are doing good things for birds in the Neotropics.
2. If you're up for an adventure, do your research, and take a trip to do some birding in Central or South America. Ecotourism can have a massive positive impact on conservation efforts in economically depressed areas by generating income for local communities. There are many amazing birding trips to take in the Neotropics. There are many established guides and companies that can provide you with an amazing trip. From personal experience, I can tell you without a doubt that you will be blown away by the beauty of tropical birds and habitats.
3. We can practice responsible consumerism by purchasing shade-grown, bird-friendly products. I'll focus more on one of these options here.

Bird Friendly Coffee

As I mentioned above, traditional “shade” coffee plantations grow coffee under a canopy of trees. Most “Arabica” varieties of coffee are grown with some kind of shade or canopy, which provides better habitat for birds than sun coffee. However, not all varieties of Arabica coffee are equal, and even coffee marketed as “shade-grown” may not neces-

Table 1: Minnesota Breeding Species/Central and South American Highlands Overlap

Species Name	Countries of Occurrence
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Throughout (passage migrant)
Black-billed Cuckoo	Throughout (passage migrant)
Eastern Whip-poor-will	Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras
Chimney Swift	Throughout (passage migrant)
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Central America, south to Costa Rica
Broad-winged Hawk	Throughout
Swainson's Hawk	Throughout (passage migrant)
American Kestrel	Throughout
Merlin	Throughout
Eastern Kingbird	Throughout (passage migrant)
Olive-sided Flycatcher	Throughout (migrant in Central America)
Eastern Wood-Pewee	Throughout (migrant in Central America)
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Central America, south to Panama
Least Flycatcher	Mexico through Nicaragua
Yellow-throated Vireo	Throughout
Blue-headed Vireo	Mexico through Nicaragua
Philadelphia Vireo	Guatemala through Panama
Warbling Vireo	Mexico through Honduras
Red-eyed Vireo	Throughout (migrant in Central America)
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Central America, south to Panama
Barn Swallow	Throughout
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Mexico through Honduras
Veery	Throughout (passage migrant)
Swainson's Thrush	Throughout
Wood Thrush	Central America, south to Panama
Gray Catbird	Central America, south to Panama
Yellow-breasted Chat	Central America, south to Panama
Orchard Oriole	Central America, Colombia, Venezuela
Baltimore Oriole	Throughout
Ovenbird	Central America, south to Panama
Louisiana Waterthrush	Central America, south to Panama
Northern Waterthrush	Throughout
Golden-winged Warbler	Central America, Colombia, Venezuela
Blue-winged Warbler	Central America, south to Panama
Black-and-white Warbler	Throughout
Tennessee Warbler	Throughout
Nashville Warbler	Mexico, Guatemala, Belize
Mourning Warbler	Throughout (migrant only from central Nicaragua north)
Common Yellowthroat	Central America, south to Panama
American Redstart	Throughout
Cerulean Warbler	Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru (migrant elsewhere)
Magnolia Warbler	Central America, south to Panama
Blackburnian Warbler	Costa Rica, Panama, northern South America
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Central America, south to Panama
Yellow-rumped Warbler	Central America, south to Panama
Black-throated Green Warbler	Central America, Colombia, Venezuela
Canada Warbler	Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru (migrant elsewhere)
Scarlet Tanager	Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru (migrant elsewhere)
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	Throughout
Indigo Bunting	Central America, south to Panama

sarily provide the best habitat for birds.

Fortunately, there is a gold standard for coffee certification, and it is the Smithsonian Institute's Bird Friendly Certified Coffee. To receive this certification, coffee must be grown organically under U.S. Department of Agriculture certification standards, as well as meet strict standards for tree canopy height, native plant species composition and diversity, and waterway protection. Look for the Smithsonian Bird Friendly seal to ensure that the coffee that you are buying meets these standards (see the link at the end of this article for more). Bird Friendly-certified farms provide habitat for forest birds that is exceeded only by undisturbed forest.

Bird friendly coffee is generally more expensive than other varieties and is not as easy to find in grocery stores (although it is getting easier, and it is available online), which may make consumers (you) hesitant to make the switch. However, I submit the following scenario for your consideration as you ponder making a different choice in your coffee drinking habits: An accidental species shows up in Minnesota about 100 miles away from your home. This bird would be a lifer or state bird for you, and you would really like to add it your list. You decide to make the trip and are fortunate enough to see the bird, as it sticks around long enough. You return from your trip feeling great, check the bird off on your list, and look back fondly on the experience over the years. Consider the cost of that single trip for a moment. To see that bird, you drove about 200 miles total and spent almost a full day on the adventure. You probably also grabbed a meal or two along the way—maybe even a celebratory dinner with some friends after successfully seeing the bird. Let's be conservative, though, and say you were frugal and spent only about \$15 on food altogether. Then consider the cost of gas and wear and tear on your vehicle. The 2018 federal reimbursement for mileage is 54 cents per mile, so that adds up to approximately \$108. All told, you spent about \$123 on that trip (not including any potential hotel stay), and the better part of a day, doing something that brings you great joy, even though there are many of things in your life that you could have been doing. If you're like me, you do this on multiple occasions every year, and you don't think twice about it.

Now think about how making the switch to Bird Friendly coffee would immediately help conserve crucial habitat for Minnesota birds, as well as amazing tropical residents like parrots, toucans, and trogons. If you're like me, it would bring you great joy with every sip of coffee (most people find that it tastes much better also). Bird Friendly Certified Coffee costs approximately 5–10 cents more per cup. The average American drinks about three cups of coffee a day, which means switching to Bird Friendly coffee would only add about \$5–10 a month to your coffee budget. You probably wouldn't notice that.

In this article I can offer only a very broad overview of the ecology and conservation of Neotropical migrant birds.

There is a lot more information available for those who are interested, both about what we do know as well as what we still don't know. I offer some links for further reading below. My hope is that this article has made you look at our Neotropical migrants a little bit differently and has deepened your fascination with them.

Links for More Information

Information on Bird Friendly Coffee Certification:

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/bird-friendly-coffee>

eBird animation of Wood Thrush abundance through the year:

<https://ebird.org/science/status-and-trends/woothr/abundance-map>

Neotropical Birds Online (Cornell):

<https://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/Species-Account/nb/home>

Andy Forbes is the coordinator for the Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes Region Joint Venture. He is currently a member of the MOU Records Committee.

New MOU Members

Dylan Bartels, *New Brighton, MN*

Judith Benka, *Shorewood, MN*

John Berthiaume, *Stillwater, MN*

Denise Cumming, *Minneapolis, MN*

DRM Miracle Sales, *White Bear Lake, MN*

Cheryl Duff, *Blaine, MN*

Jane Eaton, *Minneapolis, MN*

Amy Forslund, *St. Paul, MN*

Charlotte Goedsche & Cynthia Janes, *Brainerd, MN*

Steven Hennes, *Mahtomedi, MN*

Bruce and Alison Jarvis, *Minneapolis, MN*

Cynthia Johnson, *New Brighton, MN*

Susan McCarthy, *Arden Hills, MN*

Ann McKlinsky, *Clinton Township, MI*

Laurie & Thomas Polesak, *Alexandria, MN*

Elizabeth Rasmussen, *Bloomington, MN*

Kurk Rusterholz, *St. Paul, MN*

Heidi Schneider, *Elk River, MN*

Neil Skoog, *Minneapolis, MN*

Debra Strike, *St. Paul, MN*

Michael Thompson, *Rosemount, MN*

Elizabeth Tiller, *Farmington, MN*

Mary Baynes & Michael Mannion, *Circle Pines, MN*

Steve Dietz, *Shorewood, MN*

Sherry Gray, *St. Paul, MN*

Tony Lau, *Otsego, MN*

Message from the President

As I look back on 2018 I'm encouraged by all the progress that the MOU has made. At the beginning of the year I mentioned that changes are necessary for an organization to grow, and we indeed made some changes in the MOU in 2018 that I believe will help push us into the future and guide the organization for years to come.

First and foremost, it appears that we have found a new permanent home for the Paper Session at the St. Paul Student Center of the University of Minnesota. Its Northstar Ballroom was very well received by the presenters, exhibitors, and audience members alike at the December 1 meeting, and there is plenty of room to allow for more attendees as we see our annual event becoming more popular and attracting more attendees. In addition, our lineup of presenters—from Keith Barker updating us on the newest frontiers in bird phylogenies to Alexis Grinde highlighting the exciting new technology of migration-tracking Motus towers—very much solidified the scientific and conservation focus of the meeting as it relates to ornithology in Minnesota. I also need to mention the streamlined online registration process that Dave Cahlander developed, which saved the event planners many hours of tedious work.

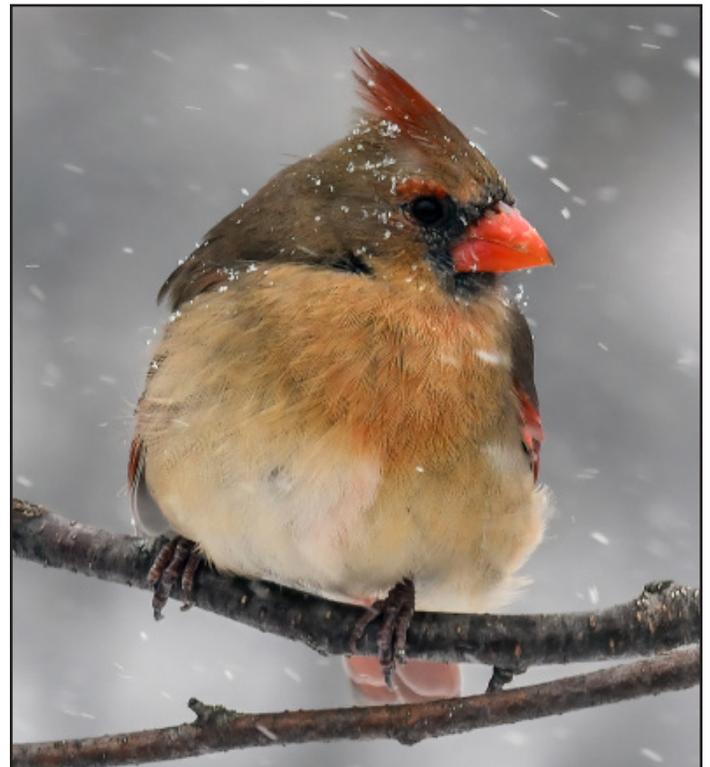
Certainly our success with the Paper Session is due in part to our continued relationship with the Bell Museum and its dedicated staff. The MOU has always enjoyed a special relationship with the Bell, and this relationship has been, in no uncertain terms, renewed and expanded. We've been working closely with Holly Menninger, Director of Public Engagement and Science Learning at the Bell, on new directions for our partnership, and this includes the planned creation of a bird-feeding station that can be viewed right outside the museum's Touch & See Lab that will be maintained by MOU volunteers. We also plan to start leading MOU-guided public bird walks from the Bell grounds, showcasing the variety of species that can be found even in an urban setting throughout the seasons.

The MOU has taken the first steps in developing and marketing products that use our data on Minnesota's birds, with the goal of further disseminating information to a wider audience. For the Paper Session, we printed 2019 Birding Journals that serve as daily planners and provide a wealth of information on birds including migration dates, various maps, and bird topography. The majority were sold at the Paper Session, and the rest were sold within 24 hours of being made available online; due to the popularity of the journals, we then made them available to be printed on demand from Amazon. In 2019, we plan to make posters of county checklists available among other printed materials for sale and distribution, and we're hoping for MOU apparel to be available later this year as well.

Finally, we've seen some changes in the MOU's Board of Directors over the past year or so, and I could not be more thankful for the work they and the rest of the Board members have done and the guidance they have provided me. If you're reading this, it's due to the diligence of Gerry Hoekstra, our newsletter editor; his dedicated work on reaching out to the Minnesota birding community and soliciting articles has been nothing short of inspiring. Josh Wallestad has done an equally fine job organizing and coordinating field trips for the MOU; stay tuned for more great trips offered in 2019! Carrol Henderson is our new Conservation Committee chair and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience on bird conservation to the MOU, having already brought our organization to the forefront of investigating hemp seed as an alternative bird food in the United States. Ann Kessen is our new MOU Treasurer, and although she has held this position previously, her perspective on the MOU from then to now is invaluable as we go forward. And of course Dick King has been an outstanding vice president to work with; to say that I have learned from his leadership is a vast understatement.

I very much look forward to additional changes in 2019 and working not only with MOU members but also those in the greater Minnesota birding community.

Humbly yours, Bob Dunlap, *MOU President*



Northern Cardinal, by Richard Gotz

My Favorite Home Patch(es): Christiania Waterfowl Production Area and Kilen Woods State Park

by Kimberly Emerson

Birding can be challenging in an agriculture-dominated landscape. Having lived and worked in Windom for three years now, I have gotten to know the area fairly well, though, and have found some excellent birding spots in the midst of all the farm fields. Most of these sites have been on government-managed lands, either federal, state, or county.

One of my favorites is a newly expanded wetland complex not far from Windom called Christiania Waterfowl Production Area (WPA). A shallow, 70-acre cattail marsh, this WPA has yielded some impressive birds in just a few short years. A gravel road divides the WPA in half, allowing for great viewing and close-up encounters. I have seen the entire wetland filled with Greater White-fronted Geese during spring migration. The deafening sound of 5,000 geese calling is welcome after months of desolation! Although the depth of the marsh averages only about 18 inches, diving ducks flock to it in the spring, since it is the first water in the area to open. Puddle ducks can be found right up next to the road, allowing for excellent photo opportunities. Two nesting pairs of Trumpeter Swans called the WPA home this past summer, and both had successful broods.

In 2016, Christiania WPA was the site of the first Jackson County breeding record of Black-necked Stilt. Birders were able to admire the stilts for over a month. In late August I watched as the pair and their four young took flight. During a trip to see these birds, John Hockema and Milt Blomberg also found a Henslow's Sparrow on the north end of the WPA.

This past spring I spent some time observing a male American Bittern courting his lady friend at this WPA. He stood in the middle of the gravel road trying to impress her for over 20 minutes. Eventually she slinked off into the cattails, and he quickly followed. In late May, I came upon a single non-breeding White-faced Ibis, but it stayed for only a day. If you sit still long enough, you can hear multiple Soras whinnying back and forth during late spring and summer. As you creep along in your car, you might spot a Virginia Rail darting into the cattails. Black-crowned Night-Herons can also be seen from time to time, usually when you flush them out of the vegetation.

Like much of the state, southwest Minnesota has experienced very wet conditions during the past few years,



Kilen Woods State Park prairie, by Kimberly Emerson

resulting in tremendous flooding. The saturated farm fields surrounding Christiania WPA have turned up a variety of shorebirds. I have seen, and other birders have reported, Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Snipes, Stilt Sandpipers, phalaropes, dowitchers, White-rumped Sandpipers, Least Sandpipers, and other peeps just within a half-mile radius of the WPA.

Although birding is a little more exciting during the open water season, winter can turn up some great birds in the area as well. Driving the gravel roads to the east of Christiania WPA, I have come across Snowy Owls, Lapland Longspurs, Rough-legged Hawks, Common Redpolls, and Snow Buntings.

To find Christiania WPA, head south out of Windom on



Black-necked Stilt, by Kimberly Emerson

U.S. Highway 71 for 2.5 miles, then take a left onto Jackson County Road 36. The WPA will be two miles east, on the south side of the road. The north-south road that bisects the wetland is 520th Avenue.

Another of my favorite local birding spots, Kilen Woods State Park, lies about 15 minutes south of Windom. This state park is easily one of the least visited parks in the state. It also happens to be in my top ten favorites. When I want to rid myself of winter blues and really feel spring migration, I hit the trails at Kilen Woods. I've found Kilen to have one of the most impressive spring warbler migrations in the area: Northern Parulas sing in the upper canopy, Magnolia Warblers search for bugs in the mid to lower canopy, Ovenbirds strut in the underbrush, and Golden-winged Warblers buzz along the river.

From the parking lot, trails descend down a moderately steep grade through deciduous forests, finally leveling off along the banks of the Des Moines River, where you may spot a Wood Duck or Spotted Sandpiper. Brushy areas along the river are normally full of sparrows during spring and fall migration. I usually find my first White-throated, White-crowned, Fox, and Harris's Sparrows of the year in these areas. The occasional Black-billed Cuckoo and Gray Catbird can be found lurking in the shrubs. Near the river, trails crisscross and head off in multiple directions (it's easy to get lost the first time you come here). As you follow the trails through the valleys, keep an eye out for Barred Owls, thrushes, and Winter Wrens. Heading toward the southern portion of the park, you start climbing again, this time to the

prairie-dominated areas. Here you will encounter Grasshopper, Clay-colored, and Field sparrows. Wild Turkeys can sometimes be seen wandering the trails in the prairie; more often than not I see them running away toward the safety of the trees.

If you also enjoy spring wildflowers, Kilen State Park offers blankets of Bloodroot and Trout Lilies in late April. I can really feel my soul refresh when I enter the woods and slowly meander my way along the trails, looking for the first White-throated Sparrow to pop up out of the brush. I feel giddy and renewed when I finally hear the season's first "drink-your-tea!" from an Eastern Towhee. Their favorite spot to frequent is in the brush around the campground and along the river.

If you've overlooked Kilen Woods State Park, it's definitely worth a stop between late April and mid-May. A stroll through the prairie offers beautiful views of the forested river valley below. This isolated little park is a wildlife oasis in an agricultural landscape. It will pleasantly surprise you.

To get to the park, head south from Windom on U.S. Highway 71 for ¼ mile and turn right on County Road 17. Travel south for 9.5 miles and turn left on County Road 24. Kilen Woods will be at the end of the road. Look for brown "State Park" signs at every turn.

Kimberly Emerson is a Wildlife Biologist for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service out of Windom, MN.



American Bittern, by Kimberly Emerson

2018 Thomas S. Roberts Award

Written by Larry Sirvio and Elizabeth Bell; presented by Larry Sirvio

Our recipient: Mentor, Motivator, Educator, Instigator, Traveler, Adventurer, Story Teller, Legislative Liaison, Bird Bander, Conservationist . . .

As a youngster he was frequently exploring the river and countryside around his home town in southwestern Minnesota. One of his favorite memories is walking over the prairie pothole rises and hearing the call of the Upland Sandpiper.

His dad was a World War I veteran, county sheriff, and a naturalist at heart. He had a great respect and love for the outdoors and passed that on to his son with whom he started hunting when he turned 5. This led to learning to identify ducks and other game birds and what you could and could not shoot. He had friends he hunted with as he grew older, but his dad was his absolute favorite hunting companion. He absorbed the natural environment he lived and played in. He was a Cub Scout, Boy Scout, and advanced to becoming an Eagle Scout.

He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a biology degree and started teaching students from District 833 (which is South Washington County). He loved teaching biology and environmental science and taught for 36 years.

In his classes he was known to entertain his students by playing bird songs in the class room as the students entered... and, mind you, he was using a record player since this was well before digital music.

Over the years he often sees students in his travels, and he still receives “Hallmark” greetings from students. It’s a rare trip when he is not greeted by a former student with fond memories.

After retirement, his interest in birds deepened and he started banding birds at Carpenter Nature Center, where, since 1992 he has volunteered more than 3000 hours. In 2002 he was named Carpenter’s Volunteer of the Year. As years passed he became a mentor to others interested in learning more about birds and the environment, plants, and any other bits of natural history he could impart. He and his wife, whom he met at Hawk Ridge and married in 1982, have enjoyed traveling and birding all over the United States and in several foreign countries. He is still an active birder with a congenial group of Monday Morning Birders every week, and still bands at Carpenter every Friday morning.

One of his favorite pastimes there is to quiz the summer interns about scientific names of the plants – and then ask them again later in the summer to see if they have been paying attention. Another favorite pastime at Carpenter is eating donuts. Every Friday someone brings the treats. In all his years of banding I’m not sure how many birds he has

banded, but we do know that he holds the record for most donuts eaten by a bander at Carpenter.

He may also hold another record, set just recently. On a very busy Friday a few weeks ago he was kneeling on the ground, removing a bird from a low part of the net. Another bander accidentally stepped on his foot. X-rays revealed a broken bone. This could be the first time in history that anyone has had a serious injury while banding.

When he began teaching he lived in St. Paul Park, later moving to Grey Cloud Island satisfy his need to live on a river and in natural surroundings. As he grew older, he became less enamored with hunting and more interested in identifying birds and what they need to survive. It became evident in the late 1970s that species numbers were dwindling and environmental damage was becoming rampant. He became active in a number of organizations interested in preserving and improving the environment, including Friends of the Mississippi.

One of his most significant accomplishments was his involvement in the donation of some property owned by Ashland Oil Refinery to the Minnesota DNR. Ashland and the DNR were in favor of the deal but the Cottage Grove City Council had to approve, and all they saw were dollar signs from a proposed housing development on the site. But he convinced them that the property was not an appropriate place for housing, and the transfer occurred.

The property is now known as Gray Cloud Dunes Scientific and Natural Area. For that, the birding community is extremely grateful.

He was recently awarded the Tecla Karpen Award by the Hastings Environmental Protectors for his contributions in educating many, influencing decision makers, and volunteering to study, preserve, and protect the local natural environment. November 8, 2018 was even declared Tom Bell Day in Hastings, Minnesota!

And, finally, there’s this from Bonnie Mulligan: “I recall he showed up faithfully for every board meeting when I was MOU president — even when he wasn’t on the board. But he was always committed to the good of the organization.

I also recall the remark he made on a trip, I think it was Arizona, that we still use today after a good bird goes by: “Did you see it well enough for me to count?” He also had a habit of wandering from the group. We had been using the music from Rawhide to chant, ‘*Coffee coffee coffee, gotta get some coffee!*’ Then, during one of his wanderings, I think it was Peder Svingen who changed it to “*Tom Bell Tom Bell Tom Bell, where the hell is Tom Bell?*”

Well, he’s right here, our recipient of the 2018 Thomas S. Roberts Award – **TOM BELL.**

Poem for Tom Bell

Listen, my birders, and you shall hear
Of the exploits of someone we've come to revere,
For now in November, 2018,
There's hardly a worthier man on the scene.

A high school biology teacher well-known,
Liked and remembered by many full-grown;
Of flora and fauna, especially birds,
He broadcast his knowledge in erudite words.

He brought many people to learning outside
And caring for habitat far and wide;
After an inspiring teaching career
He took up the interest that brings us all here.

He did lots of birding and bird-banding too
And works to help MOU's mission come true;
While raising a family, he traveled as well,
With many an outdoor adventure to tell.

So now we are gathered for just a brief spell
To honor the life of our Tom Bell!

Linda Whyte



Tom Bell, by Larry Sirvio

2018 Young Birder Award

Written and presented by Margie Menzies

Patience, persistence, and passion are standard birder traits. What does it take to rise above and beyond? Our recipient can teach you! Her interest in birds began early in the third grade. Her mother recalls that about the age of 11 she began tempting chickadees and nuthatches to eat out of her hand. Christmas Bird Counts began for her in 2009 in Carlton County, and she has participated every year since. One year, as she wrote down the birds she had seen for the count, a chickadee landed on her pen to supervise. Chickadees always know what's worth watching!

Her dad helped her build numerous nesting boxes for songbirds and kestrels and established them all over her family's property and the neighbor's too. She fed wild birds, raised chickens, pigeons, and quail, and sold eggs from their home.

In 2011, at the age of 14, she began volunteering at Hawk Ridge in Duluth. Too young to drive there on her own, she was joined by Mom who volunteered with her. She made her way to passerine banding in 2012. You know what they say: "A bird in the hand..." The 4:45 a.m. meet-

ing time for banding never seemed to be a problem. At first, her parents would drop her off and snooze in the car, or run errands and return to pick her up.

Once she had a driver's license, she regularly drove the big red pick-up to early morning dates at the station. Through those years she developed identification skills, learned aging and sexing of dozens of species of songbirds, and before long was also a talented "net picker"—one of those critical and not-for-everyone skills necessary for banding. She helped with all aspects of passerine banding at the Ridge, the summer MAPS breeding bird study, and an EPA study of mercury levels in birds along the St. Louis River. Definitely not your typical young adult skill set!

In 2015 she began getting involved with raptor banding at Hawk Ridge. Miranda Durbin, one of the banders, recalls it was easy teaching her the skills of handling the raptors, making measurements, and safely extracting them from the nets. Demonstrate and instruct just once, and she had the idea and quickly became a pro. She is great company in the blind, fun to get to know, and even

became relaxed enough to get a little snarky with us—fits right in!

She will graduate in December from the University of Northwestern in St. Paul with a degree in biology. Her advisor, and head of the Biology and Biochemistry Department, Dr. Dale Gentry, recalls that she declared her interest in birds at their first meeting, quickly became part of his research team, and was a standout—enduring long hours in the cold documenting woodpecker-foraging behavior in response to an emerald ash borer outbreak. He calls her an excellent student, an avid birder with tremendous potential as an ornithologist, and a future leader in field ornithology.

We are proud to be able to present the MOU's Young Birder Award for 2018 to **ABBIE VALINE**.



Abbie Valine, by Kate Nicoletti

2018 Brother Theodore Voelker Award

Written by Todd Kreymeyer and Kim Eckert; presented by Kim Eckert

Todd Kreymeyer has known the recipients of this year's award for 22 years and has been birding with them for the last 15. Todd first met this couple as co-workers who were just starting to get into birding. They both loved it and developed a passion for the hobby. They have amassed a substantial Minnesota list in their own right: he is at 340 and she at 339. The difference is a Prairie Falcon that he saw without her. So, if you happen to find a Prairie Falcon, be sure to call her—not him.

Todd reports how excited they get seeing a bird for the first time. For instance, this year they got great looks at a Yellow-billed Cuckoo at the Bass Ponds—the first good looks they ever had of this species. They watched it for 20–30 minutes, and she made sure to point out the bird to anyone walking by. I'm sure all of these non-birders were wondering why this crazy woman was so excited over a “pigeon” sitting at the top of a tree.

Which brings us to the afternoon of August 26. They frantically called Todd to put the news on Facebook: they were at the Old Cedar Avenue bridge looking at a Roseate Spoonbill! They are not on Facebook (which I think is reason enough to receive an award), but had posted it on the MOU-NET listserv but weren't sure if that post went

through, and they wanted to make sure that other birders knew about this first state record.

Although they might not be well known in the birding community, Todd hopes that some of you recognized them on the boardwalk that day, and he congratulates them for their dedication and birding expertise.

Our recipients had gone down to Old Cedar Avenue just to see how the construction on the new bridge was coming. They were not looking for spoonbills and had no knowledge of Kevin Smith's sighting of the spoonbill earlier that day near Hastings (which unfortunately flew off after just a few minutes).

As far as I know, this had to be the biggest birding spectacle ever in Minnesota. At least I can't think of any other rarity seen by so many birders in one day... and a big, beautiful, pink first state record at that! So can I now ask you to stand if you were one of the dozens—or probably hundreds?—who were there on August 26 and saw that Roseate Spoonbill thanks to Jim and Jean's sighting and prompt reporting of their find?

And while you're standing, with your applause please congratulate and thank **JIM PIFHER** and **JEAN RANWELER**, this year's recipients of the Bro. Theodore Voelker Award.

January

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
		1 Annual Whitewater River Valley CBC, DNR Afton State Park CBC, DNR	2	3	4	5 Bird Walk, Wilkie Unit, MRVAC ZVAS monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
6	7	8	9	10	11 MN Campus Owl Prowl, Carpenter Nat. Ctr. Golden Eagle Program, Whitewater SP, DNR	12 WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr. "Birding Nicaragua," MN Global Birders
13	14	15	16	17 Sax-Zim Birding Days, MRVAC	18 Sax-Zim Birding Days, MRVAC	19 Bird Banding, Eastman Nat. Ctr, 3RPD Bird Banding, Lowry Nat. Ctr, 3RPD
20	21	22	23	24 "Birding Santa Marta, Colombia," MRVAC	25 Bird Banding, Carpenter Nat. Ctr.	26
27	28 Bird Walk, Wilkie Unit, MRVAC	29	30	31		

February

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					1 WI Campus Owl Prowl, Carpenter Nat. Ctr.	2
3	4	6	6	7	8 MN Campus Owl Prowl, Carpenter Nat. Ctr. Winter Finches Field Trip, Sax-Zim Bog	9 Winter Finches Field Trip, Sax-Zim Bog WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr. ZVAS monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
10	11	12	13	14	15 Sax-Zim Festival, Sax-Zim Bog	16 Sax-Zim Festival, Sax-Zim Bog
17 Sax-Zim Festival, Sax-Zim Bog	18	19	20	21	22 Bird Banding, Carpenter Nat. Ctr.	23 "Birding Botswana," MN Global Birders
24	55	26 "How Charismatic Cranes....," ZVAS	27	28		



MOU Calendar

January / February 2019



CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Minnesota Campus: 12805 St. Croix Trail S.,
Hastings, MN

Wisconsin Campus: 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

Jan 11: MN Campus Owl Prowl

Details: 7 pm – 9 pm. This time of the year, many of the Midwest's 12 owl species are vocalizing to attract mates. Explore CNC on a guided night hike to look and listen for these owls. If there is enough snow cover, snowshoes will be provided or you may bring your own. Program Fee: \$6.00 per person or \$4.00 for "Friends of CNC." Please call 651-437-4359 register. Location: Minnesota Campus

Jan 12: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 9 am – 11 am. Join the St. Croix Valley Bird Club on a morning hike on our beautiful WI campus. Learn to identify birds by sight and sound. Program fee: \$6.00 or free for "Friends of CNC", Hastings Environmental Protectors, Hastings High School students, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359 and let us know you are coming. Location: Wisconsin Campus

Jan 25: Bird Banding

Details: 8:30 am – 12 pm. Bird Banding records help us learn how long birds live, where they travel, when they migrate and many other interesting facts. CNC has been banding birds for over 30 years. Our bird banders welcome you to see songbirds up close and learn about the birds who share our ecosystem. Banding runs continuously for the full 3 ½ hours but visitors may come and go at any time. Please call ahead so we know you are coming. Donations of bird seed or suet will be greatly appreciated in lieu of a program fee. Location: Minnesota Campus

Feb 1: WI Campus Owl Prowl

Details: 7 pm – 9 pm. This time of the year, many of the Midwest's 12 owl species are vocalizing to attract mates. Explore CNC on a guided night hike to look and listen for these owls. If there is enough snow cover, snowshoes will be provided or you may bring your own. Program Fee: \$6.00 per person or \$4.00 for "Friends of CNC." Please call 651-437-4359 register. Location: Wisconsin Campus

Feb 8: MN Campus Owl Prowl

Details: 7 pm – 9 pm. This time of the year, many of the Midwest's 12 owl species are vocalizing to attract mates. Explore CNC on a guided night hike to look and listen for these owls. If there is enough snow cover, snowshoes will be provided or you may bring your own. Program Fee: \$6.00 per person or \$4.00 for "Friends of CNC." Please call 651-437-4359 register. Location: Minnesota Campus



Boreal Owl, by Allan Meadows

Feb 9: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 9 am – 11 am. Join the St. Croix Valley Bird Club on a morning hike on our beautiful WI campus. Learn to identify birds by sight and sound. Program fee: \$6.00 or free for "Friends of CNC," Hastings Environmental Protectors, Hastings High School students, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359 and let us know you are coming. Location: Wisconsin Campus

Feb 22: Bird Banding

Details: 8:30 am – 12 pm. Bird Banding records help us learn how long birds live, where they travel, when they migrate and many other interesting facts. CNC has been banding birds for over 30 years. Our bird banders welcome you to see songbirds up close and learn about the birds who share our ecosystem. Banding runs continuously for the full 3 ½ hours but visitors may come and go at any time. Please call ahead so we know you are coming. Donations of bird seed or suet will be greatly appreciated in lieu of a program fee. Location: Minnesota Campus

DNR

(See www.dnr.state.mn.us for directions to locations)

Jan 1: Annual Whitewater River Valley Christmas Bird Count

Details: 8 am – 12 pm. Kick off the New Year at **Whitewater State Park** by helping with the Annual Whitewater River Valley Christmas Bird Count! Birders of all skill levels are welcome. You will work in small groups to survey locations within our count circle. There will be warm beverages, homemade treats and a fire in the wood stove. Reservations are required. To sign up, email sara.holger@state.mn.us or call 507-312-2308. Location: Whitewater State Park

Jan 1: First Day Hike and Christmas Bird Count

Details: 10:30 am – 11:30 am. This nationwide walk at **Afton State Park** on January 1 is a great way to start off the new year. Join the park naturalist on this walk while counting birds for the Christmas Bird Count—a 2 for 1! For more information call 651-231-6968 or send email to Linda.Radimecky@state.mn.us. Location: Afton State Park

Jan 11: Live Golden Eagle Program

Details: 8:30 am – 11:30 am. Find out about Golden Eagles in the blufflands from the man who knows them best. Scott Mehus, National Eagle Center Education Director and Golden Eagle Project Co-coordinator, will share his years of experience observing golden eagles in southeast Minnesota and Wisconsin. You'll learn how to identify golden eagles in the wild and discover some of the best places in the state to look for these elusive raptors. For more information call 507-312-2300. Location: Whitewater State Park

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

Jan 19: Bird Banding

Details: 9 am – 12 pm. See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and tagged with numbered rings. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Eastman Nature Center, 13341 Elm Creek Rd, Osseo, MN

Jan 19: Bird Banding

Details: 9 – 12 pm. See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and tagged with numbered rings. Groups of ten or more, please call 763-694-7700 to reserve a time slot. Don't forget to bring your camera. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Carver Park Reserve – Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria, MN

MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

Saturday, January 12: Birding Nicaragua

Details: 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm. Keith Olstad will focus on the varied habitats in the western half of Nicaragua and feature photos of birds, habitat, and accommodations. Keith has led seven delegations to Nicaragua, using migratory birds as a theme for connecting our life here to the local efforts to create sustainable “avitoirism” in Nicaragua. For more information and register online, go to tinyurl.com/globalbirding16. Free Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Ave S (at Lagoon), Minneapolis

Saturday, February 23: Birding Botswana

Details: 1 pm – 3 pm. Steven Goldberg will present photos of birds and wildlife from trips to Botswana, from the edge of the Kalahari Desert to the marshes of the Okavango delta. For more information and to register online, go to tinyurl.com/globalbirding17. Free. Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Ave S (at Lagoon), Minneapolis

MRVAC

Jan. 5 and 28: MN Valley Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Bird Walk at Bass Ponds

Details: 8 am – 10:30 a.m. Join us for a winter season bird walk. Trumpeter Swans, a mix of ducks, Rough-legged Hawks, Bald Eagles and Northern Shrikes are a few of the species that have over-wintered on the refuge. Bring your binoculars, favorite field guide and dress appropriately for the weather. Craig Mandel, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist. Location: Bass Ponds Trailhead: 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington, MN

Jan 17 – 18: Field Trips to Sax/Zim Birding Days

Details: To register, contact Craig Mandel at 952-240-7647. Cost: \$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members. On Thursday we will meet in Duluth and travel to one of the best birding spots in the nation, the Sax/Zim Bog. Recent reports of Great Gray and Northern Hawk Owls, along with numerous other species should get your 2019 birding checklist off to a great start. On Friday we will again start in Duluth and possibly bird in Duluth, Two Harbors, or make our way up to Lake and/or Aitkin County, depending on what is being seen.

Jan 24: MRVAC Program: Birding Santa Marta, Colombia

Details: 7 – 9 pm. Presentation of birding trip by William Marengo & Paul Egeland. Location: MVNWR Visitor Center, 3815 American Blvd. E., Bloomington, MN

SAX-ZIM BOG

Feb 9: Winter Finches Field Trip

Details: 9 am – 2 pm. Sax-Zim Bog Welcome Center, 8793 Owl Avenue, Toivola, MN. Join us on a this field trip looking for some of the bright winter visitors, such as Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, and Crossbills. We will also introduce the natural history of these boreal wanderers. RSVP is required. If you have any questions and to RSVP, please contact Head Naturalist Clinton Nienhaus via email at naturalist@saxzim.org.

Feb 15, 16, 17: Sax-Zim Festival (12th annual)

Sax-Zim Bog Welcome Center, 8793 Owl Avenue, Toivola, MN. A warm welcome to all of our birding friends from the members of the Toivola-Meadowlands Development Board, Friends of the Sax-Zim Bog, and the residents of Meadowlands and neighboring communities. The festival is sponsored by the Toivola-Meadowlands Development Board in cooperation with the Friends of the Sax-Zim Bog. We encourage local residents to join us at the Friday and Saturday night programs so they too might get to meet some of the folks who come here to enjoy our avian population and enjoy our wonderful evening programs. Over the past eight years, visitors have come from 39 states, as well as Australia, the UK, the Philippines, and Italy. Register at <http://www.saxzimbirdingfestival.com> As we have limited space in which to gather, we limit registrations to 150.

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON

Jan 5: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9 am – 10 am. Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk through Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public—no registration required. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester, MN

Feb 9: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9 am – 10 am. Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk through Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public—no registration required. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester, MN

Feb 26: ZVAS Monthly Program: How Charismatic Cranes Inspire Peace and Harmony

Details: 7 pm – 8 pm. Presented by Andy Bingle. Cranes are symbols of peace yet populations are declining. Andy will talk about the roll the International Crane Foundation plays in bringing together partners from around the world to better the areas where cranes and humans inhabit. He'll also discuss our two North American Cranes, the abundant Sandhill and not so abundant Whooping Crane. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester, MN



Common Redpoll, by Richard Gotz

Savaloja Grant Applications Due

This is the last call for Savaloja grant proposals for 2019. Grants can be awarded for projects that increase our understanding of birds, promote preservation of birds and their natural habitats, or increase public interest in birds. Proposals that include those currently underrepresented in Minnesota's birding community are welcome as a means of broadening public support for birds and their habitat.

Details on past projects and how to apply can be found at <http://moumn.org/grants.html>. The deadline for receipt of grant applications is January 20, 2019. Grant recipients will be notified by April 1, 2019.

A record \$17,000 is available for 2019 grants, thanks to the MOU Board's decision at their November 30 meeting and the generosity of our members over the past year. To continue this level of support, though, we'll need to up our game in 2019. If you'd like to become a supporter of Savaloja projects that benefit birds in 2019, please go to <http://moumn.org/signup.html>, click on the Donate link and contribute what you can. Just be sure to put "Savaloja Donation" in the "Add Special Instructions to Seller" box.

Steve Wilson
Chair, MOU Savaloja Committee

Minutes, Board Meeting, Nov 30, 2018

The November 30 MOU Board meeting was attended by President Bob Dunlap, Vice-President Richard King, Outgoing Treasurer Mark Lystig, Incoming Treasurer Ann Kessen, Membership Secretary Cindy Smith, Recording Secretary Susan Barnes Elliott, and Board Members Jen Vieth, Bob Bossert, Dave Cahlander, Bob Janssen, Gerry Hoekstra, and Carrol Henderson.

After many years of dedicated service, Mark Lystig has resigned as MOU Treasurer (but will stay on as Chair of the Finance Committee), and Kim Eckert has resigned as Chair of the Awards Committee. Ann Kessen has graciously agreed to take on the Treasurer position. MOU members with an interest in the Chairmanship of the Awards Committee should contact Bob Dunlap or Dick King. Carrol Henderson has accepted the position of Chair of the Conservation Committee. Welcome to Ann and to Carrol, and a huge thank you to Mark and Kim!

Bob Dunlap, Dick King, and other MOU members have labored tirelessly to ensure a successful 2018 Paper Session. This year's session will take place at the University of Minnesota St. Paul Student Center, with plenty of room for exhibitor tables, the book sale, and seating for attendees. Lunches will be provided by the Colossal Cafe. Optional tours of the Raptor Center and Bell Museum will follow the Paper Session. Many thanks to our excellent speakers, exhibitors, and book sale volunteers.

Carrol Henderson, our new Conservation Chair, described the origins of the Hemp Seed Study and reported that this summer's hemp seed trials (funded in part by the MOU) were very successful. Winter feeding trials are now

December 2018 Paper Session

The 2018 MOU Papers Session was held at a new location: the second floor Ballroom at the St. Paul Student Center on the University of MN campus. We had 58 walk-in attendees plus 181 pre-registrations (thanks to Dave Cahlander's on-line registration process) for a total of 239 attendees.

The MOU Board would like to hear your comments about the 2018 Paper Session. We use these in our planning process for the next year's session. Please email your comments to membership@moumn.org.

in place and ongoing throughout the state. Membership Secretary Cindy Smith reported that the MOU has 74 new members and an increase in Life Memberships. (Thanks and welcome, new members.)

It's the time of year to consider new Savaloja Grants proposals, and to address any issues with the program. Although most Savaloja Grant Recipients have fully complied with expectations, Steve Wilson reported that a couple of grant recipients have yet to meet their commitments. In order to avoid such issues going forward, the Board determined to provide grant money to grantees in stages: the bulk at the outset of the project and the remainder once the project is completed.

The MOU continues to explore partnership ideas with the Bell Museum. Currently under discussion are plans for the MOU to install and maintain bird feeders and for MOU members to lead guided bird walks from the Museum.

Planning for the 2019 MOU Spring Birding Primer is in full swing. The Spring Birding Primer (which sold out last year) will be held on March 30, location to be determined. Speakers will include Bob Janssen and Kim Eckert. Mark your calendars and stay tuned.

Susan Barnes Elliott
MOU secretary

Summary of the Treasurer's Report

At the most recent MOU Board meeting, on November 30, 2018, Treasurer Mark Lystig presented the Annual Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year November 1, 2017 to October 31, 2018.

The report showed total assets of \$303,732.26. Total income for the fiscal year was \$38,837.48, with the largest sources of income being membership dues and donations. Expenditures for the year totaled \$45,673.72; the greatest expenses were grants and publications.

Any questions regarding the treasurer's report can be directed to the current Treasurer, Ann Kessen, at kess0010@umn.edu.

Ann Kessen
December 18, 2018

Savaloja Grant Report

The Friends of the Mississippi River project, “Breeding Bird Surveys at Restored and Native Prairies in Dakota and Washington Counties: A Multi-year Comparison,” was partially funded with a Savaloja Grant. The primary objective of this project was to obtain comparative data on breeding birds at restored and native prairie sites in order to observe long-term trends.

The following is excerpted from the project report:

“While the primary objective for this project was simply to gather data as part of a longer-term project, because most of our sites now have several years of data, the information from 2018 helps us to see clear trends at our prairie restoration sites.

The data indicate that:

- Species richness of prairie birds increases as prairie vegetation is established, either in old fields or in unused cropland.
- Numbers of SGCN [Species in Greatest Need of Conservation] species also increase considerably.
- Native remnant prairies may benefit from adjacent prairie restorations, with increased species richness and SGCNs.
- Even relatively small sites (e.g. 25 acres) demonstrate important value for prairie-dependent bird species, including endangered species.
- On-going habitat management seems to be important; sites where woody plant cover has increased show declines in prairie bird species.



Emrick Prairie, one of the prairies studied in the project

While these data provide good preliminary evidence that FMRs prairie restoration projects are successful in providing habitat for prairie-dependent bird species, additional research is needed to evaluate nest success and determine actual population effects. Additional data analysis of bird guilds or other parameters could also be done to better understand more specific habitat niches that are being utilized and potential gaps.”

Bohemian Waxwings, by Dana Sterner





Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

Carpenter Nature Center
12805 Saint Croix Trail South
Hastings, MN 55033

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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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Thomas Benjamin Hertzell

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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: \$ _____