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Bob Janssen ROCKS: An Epic Adventure to Reach 225 Species in Rock County

John Hockema & Kimberly Emerson

In May of 2014 John's childhood friend of rural Spring Valley, Darin Ness, shared a photo of a Summer Tanager that had been coming to his feeders. That tanager started a wonderful birding odyssey in the very township where John's birding had begun many years before. When Bob Janssen later came to see the bird, it was his 225th species in Fillmore County. Now, five

years later, in April of this year, we were hoping to help Bob reach that number in Rock County, the last remaining county in his lifelong goal to get 225 birds in all 87 Minnesota counties..

John recalls that his first memory of Bob was over the telephone. The boy calling was an awkward teenage birder with tons of novice questions



Bob enjoying the American Avocet, by Kimberly Emerson



John, Bob, and Kimberly, by Jerry Pruett

for the already legendary birder operating the birding hotline. The voice on the other end of the line was very patient and kind and eventually helped unravel the mystery of a strange bird John heard calling on his grandparents' farm. It turned out to be an Upland Sandpiper.

It was those and other memories of Bob from John's adolescence that inspired him to make a phone call during the summer of 2017 with an offer to help Bob reach 225 in the few remaining counties where he still needed birds. During the next few months we scheduled trips to four of them: Cass, Red Lake, Wadena, and Koochiching. With help from Shawn Conrad, Becca Engdahl, Alex Burchard, Kimberly Emerson, Josh Watson, and Chris Hockema, we were able to help Bob get to 225 in those counties. That left Rock County. We set about organizing a birding trip for April of this year and issued an invitation for others to join in the effort.

On the weekend before the planned outing, the two of us scouted Rock County, searching the hot spots and looking for birds Bob still needed. Within six hours we managed to find three of them. The best was an American Avocet tucked away on the far shore of a flooded farm pond. We hoped it would stick around for the week.

When we stopped later at the Luverne Chamber of Commerce to meet with Jane Wildung Lanphere in order to clear up some last minute details about the trip, we learned that a massive snowstorm was predicted for the following weekend. More than a foot of snow was forecasted. Our hearts sank. During the week we checked the forecast daily, sometimes hourly, hoping for a change. We had to decide by Wednesday whether the outing was on or not. After much deliberation between us and with Bob, we decided to go

ahead with our plans. In fact, we speculated that the birding might actually be very good following a snowstorm. We pushed the meeting time back to Friday evening, though, so people could travel in before the storm arrived.

When the storm did hit, it was not what was expected. Instead of a foot of snow, Rock County was covered in a ½" of ice. Power poles were snapped off all across the southern third of the state. Even with these poor conditions, though, only two people backed out. It was evidence of everyone's dedication and love for Bob. Shawn Conrad came all the way from Grand Rapids, driving through the heavy snow as the storm shifted north. Josh Watson made the even longer trek from Grand Marais!

By late afternoon on Friday many of the birders had trickled into Luverne, and we were having dinner. Just as we were about to eat the Howling Dog Saloon out of all-you-can-eat fish, we got a call from Ron Erpelding. He, Milt Blomberg, and Dan Orr had just spotted Wild Turkeys next



Cake with meadowlark, the bird that got Bob into birding, by Kimberly Emerson

to I-90 one mile before the Luverne exit. Bob jumped into the nearest car, and we were on our way for his first county bird of the weekend. We were relieved and thrilled to see the turkeys still there, displaying in full view.

Saturday morning started out slow. Everyone got great views of a Common Loon and several Red-breasted Mergansers in Schoeman Park. Near the village of Ash Creek John dazzled us with his Eurasian Collared-Dove call; it actually did attract a confused Collared-Dove. Then John managed to find a couple Brewer's Blackbirds in a stock yard. This put Bob at 224, only one bird short of his lifetime goal.

We then headed over to the flooded farm pond where we had seen the American Avocet the weekend before, feeling anxious yet hopeful. The party arrived at the ponds and scanned for about ten minutes. We saw Harris's Sparrows, Greater Yellowlegs, Green-winged Teal, and Wilson's Snipe. Kim scanned the spot with her binoculars where we had earlier seen the avocet. There it was! She may have uttered an expletive as she yelled "THE AVOCET IS STILL HERE!" and ran to get her scope. When she had it set up, Bob quickly walked over and took a look. Everyone watched as he admired the avocet. It was a perfect bird to mark his goal. Rock County was now officially at 225. Everyone cheered and laughed. Bob turned to Kim and hugged her, kissed her on the cheek, and said, "I love you." We had tears in our eyes.

The feeling in the group was electric. It was only 10:00 a.m., and we had already reached our goal. We were now "in the bonus round." Just down the road, Jeff Stephenson spotted a Marbled Godwit, another great find. Later we got Baird's Sandpipers at the Hills sewage ponds and Lapland Longspurs in the grazed pastures near Touch the Sky Prairie. We saw a Great Horned Owl on the outskirts of Luverne and heard an Eastern Screech-Owl at Blue Mounds State Park.

When we regrouped for dinner, we presented Bob with his favorite cake (lemon), beautifully decorated with a meadowlark, the bird that started it all for him. We felt a great sense of camaraderie; that this group of people would travel from all corners of the state to help this kind man reach his life goal was moving. It was humbling to be a part of such a great bunch of birders. John was delighted to be able to return the kindness that he had received as a teenager when making those calls to Bob on the hotline with his questions.

To the 18 birders who joined us in a weekend of adventure, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. It means everything that you would make the trip to the far southwest corner of the state to help our favorite birding icon.

Bob Janssen officially became the first person to see 225 species in all of Minnesota's 87 counties on April 13, 2019.



*The group at the American Avocet spot,
by Kimberly Emerson*

Message from the President

The MOU throughout its history has always enjoyed a close relationship with the Bell Museum. For several decades much of the lab work done by ornithologists that contributed to our knowledge of Minnesota's birds was done at the Bell at its former location on the Minneapolis side of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. And if you were a member of the MOU prior to 2017, you know that our annual meeting, the Paper Session, was always held at the Bell. The Bell Museum, of course, has since been relocated to its new location on the St. Paul side of the university, and although we now hold the Paper Session just a few blocks away in the Northstar Ballroom in the Student Center, our relationship with the Bell continues, as both organizations look to further our relationship and push the science and enjoyment of birds into the future.

Over the past year I've had the privilege of working with several MOU members and Bell staff on collaborative efforts, and two of those efforts have now come to fruition. On Monday morning, June 3, the MOU and three of its bird feeding partners—Cardinal Corners, MN Backyard Birds, and All Seasons Wild Bird Stores—erected a bird feeding station on the south side of the Bell building comprising three different pole-mounted feeder setups. This feeding station is located just feet from the Touch & See Lab inside the Bell and can be easily viewed through the museum's wide, bird-safe windows. The Touch & See Lab is a popular spot in the museum for all groups but especially for families and kids, and the addition of the feeding station in this location furthers the goals of both the Bell and the MOU to promote curiosity and interest in the natural world to a wider



From left to right: Judd Brink, Bob Dunlap, Dick King (MOU vice president), Amy Kaufenberg, and Heather Cummins (Gallery Programs Coordinator, Bell Museum) standing behind the new feeding station.



From left to right: Bob Dunlap (MOU president), Amy Kaufenberg (Cardinal Corners), and Judd Brink (MN Backyard Birds) filling feeders at the new bird feeding station on the south side of the Bell Museum. By Dick King.

audience. In addition, MOU volunteers have been tasked with keeping the feeders full so that birds are attracted to the variety of feeders and seed year-round for the enjoyment and education of all visitors. Discussions with the Bell are ongoing on the creation of an educational display for the feeders.

On Saturday June 15 the MOU led its first monthly morning birdwalk from the Bell with a full roster of 20 participants, starting at the museum and over the next hour or so walking the wooded trail that runs from Cleveland Avenue on the east end to the Lauderdale Hollows just east of Highway 280 on the west end. With a total distance of just over a mile (walks can be shorter, depending on bird activity and interest), these walks give participants opportunities to see a variety of nesting birds (including Great Horned Owls), and a myriad of species during migration, in a wooded corridor long known to the university as a great place for watching birds. These family-friendly walks are oriented toward beginners, with the intent to provide new experiences for those who might be new to the outdoors and birding, and they are led by MOU volunteers. We've scheduled monthly walks through November this year and look forward to offering more in 2020 and for years to come.

The Bell Museum continues to be an integral part of what the MOU does to promote birds and birding to a variety of audiences. We're very proud to be able to continue this relationship, as both organizations look to increase their reach to a wider audience and more diverse population.

– Bob Dunlap

Conservation Column: Conservation Update, Hemp on the Horizon, etc.

by Carrol Henderson, MOU Conservation Committee Chair

During the summer of 2018 and winter of 2019 the MOU collaborated with Dr. David L. Horn of Millikin University, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, All Seasons Wild Bird Stores, staff of the Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center, Larry Sirvio, Kara Snow, Nathan Grosse, Sue Keator, Melissa Block, and additional volunteers who conducted a backyard survey of hemp use by wild birds. They compared its use relative to use of black oil seeds and white proso millet. This is the first study of its kind that has been conducted in recent times.

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture was a participant in a pilot program to test production of industrial hemp under the guidance of US Department of Agriculture. Margaret Wiatrowski of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture was interested in learning of the potential for use of industrial hemp as a wild bird seed in addition to the many other uses of this hemp as a source of cannabidiol (CBD) oil, fibers, and other products. The funding necessary to carry out this study in two different bird feeding seasons was provided by the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, All Seasons Wild Bird Stores, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

Dr. David L. Horn set up the research protocol for both summer and winter for analysis of feeding preferences of birds among feeders at three different locations that were randomly stocked with hemp, black oil seeds, and white proso millet. Volunteers at those three sites carried out 30 forty-five-minute observation sessions at each of the three locations. In addition, I recruited additional volunteers for more informal observations at their backyard bird feeders. Following are some of the results published by Dr. Horn's wild bird food preference study:

- Hemp was analyzed by Dr. Horn, and he found that the hemp had high levels of fat, fiber, and protein content, suggesting a strong potential for renewed use of industrial hemp as wild bird food.

- Thirteen bird species fed on hemp at the research feeders in the summer study: American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, Chipping Sparrow, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Towhee, House Finch, House Sparrow, House Wren, Indigo Bunting, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, and White-breasted Nuthatch. The four species feeding most on hemp were American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, House Finch, and White-breasted Nuthatch. No European Starlings were reported at the feed-

ers, and House Sparrows fed on hemp at only nine out of 297 feeding observations. Additional birds observed feeding on hemp by the backyard observers included Blue Jay, Common Grackle, Gray Catbird, Purple Finch, Red-winged Blackbird, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

- Twelve bird species were observed feeding on hemp during the winter study. New species observed in the winter study were Dark-eyed Junco, Hairy Woodpecker, Pine Siskin, and Red-bellied Woodpecker. The main species observed feeding on hemp included Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco, White-breasted Nuthatch, and House Finch. Additional birds observed feeding on hemp by volunteers in their backyards in the winter included Carolina Wren, Evening Grosbeak, and Fox Sparrow, among others. In total, 31 wild birds were observed feeding on hemp during this two-season study.

I think the bottom line of this study is that industrial hemp has shown its potential for regaining its role as wild bird food. The high fat, fiber, and protein content of the hemp makes it a nutritious addition for bird feeding.

The US Department of Agriculture is developing national guidelines for hemp farming production, distribution, and marketing this year and plans to implement those plans for 2020. In addition to use of hemp as a wild bird food, there is an additional benefit for farmland. Industrial hemp does not require use of pesticides or insecticides. Also, when hemp is harvested in September, some seeds shatter and fall to the ground, where it can be consumed by wild birds. In addition, some hemp fields will be combined at a height of about two feet, leaving a residual stand of cover for wildlife in winter.

Congratulations all around to the Bob Dunlap of the MOU, Dave Netten of the All Seasons Wild Bird Stores, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and to Dr. David Horn for making this pioneering study possible.

Restoring America's Wildlife Act (RAWA)

Legislation that would dramatically alter the capacity of state fish and wildlife agencies to conserve and monitor at-risk species is pending introduction in the US House of Representatives, hopefully before their summer recess in July. A bill number has not yet been assigned. The bill would amend the federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act to make additional funds available for the management and conservation of fish and wildlife species determined by

states to be at risk or in need of additional monitoring.

These additional funds would come from a combination of offshore energy and onshore mineral extraction royalties to create a dedicated fund of 1.3 billion dollars annually. Priority projects would be determined by states by consulting their State Wildlife Action Plan, a document updated by each state every ten years which identifies at-risk species—known as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)—as well as the goals and objectives for monitoring and recovery.

Stay tuned for further developments on this legislation. We will need Minnesota’s congressional delegation to sign on to this bill. Some of them had previously signed on to the previous version of this bill, but it failed to pass before the close of the previous session of Congress.

Audubon Minnesota Bird City Initiative

Bird City Minnesota is a municipal recognition and engagement program that hatched from Audubon Minnesota’s Bird-Friendly Communities conservation program. It is modeled after two successful programs in other states, Bird City Wisconsin and Bird Town Pennsylvania, and also incorporates a number of positive actions from within the GreenStep Cities program. Audubon Minnesota is currently working with a number of communities throughout the state to help each work towards becoming a recognized Bird City in recognition of the actions they are taking to create safe and healthy living spaces for birds and for people.

In addition to spotlighting bird-friendly communities throughout the state, the Bird City program helps foster and strengthen relationships within communities of any size. When people come together around a shared interest of a healthier environment for all, great things can happen. Katie Burns, Audubon Minnesota’s Bird City Program Manager, says that they have a growing list of target communities that they plan to include in Bird City outreach, knowing that not all may choose to participate. The goal is to have 40 Minnesota communities enrolled in Bird City Minnesota by fall 2020. The current priority list for potential Bird City candidates includes La Crescent, Duluth, Austin, Stillwater, Wabasha, West St. Paul, Rosemount, Alexandria, Silver Bay, Brainerd, Breezy Point, Minneapolis, Minnetonka, Rochester, Fargo/Moorhead, Northfield, and Red Wing. Katie is looking for interested community members in these locations to work with as they organize Bird City advisory groups; but just because a community isn’t yet listed on the target list doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be included. She welcomes any community that is interested in participating.

Audubon Minnesota currently has four recognized Bird City Minnesota communities (Bemidji, Crosslake, Hastings, and St Paul) and is currently working on outreach to more than 30 others to engage them in the program (Austin, Wabasha, La Crescent, Stillwater, Duluth, and Roches-

ter, to name a few). Some communities are already working on their applications, while others are in the process of cultivating community volunteers who will serve on a Bird City advisory team for their city. The community advisory team is a key element in gathering information that reflects all the great things communities are doing for birds in the areas of 1) educating citizens about birds and bird-friendly actions, 2) creating and improving habitat for birds, and 3) reducing threats to birds.

Katie welcomes inquiries from other communities about joining this program. To learn more about the program and how you can support your own community in becoming an official Minnesota Bird City, contact Katie Burns at kburns@audubon.org or 651-739-9332, ext 120.

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Settlement

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently working on the final settlement details for the first three years for allocation of remediation funds related to the loss of common loons in the oil spill in 2010. The settlement will involve allocation of funds to the DNR and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency totaling over \$7 million. The first allocation will possibly be announced in July or August for the MPCA to initiate a “Get the Lead Out” effort focused on reducing the use of small lead fishing jigs and sinkers. When jigs and sinkers are lost while fishing, they lie on the bottom and can subsequently be swallowed by loons. Loons need small pebbles to help grind up the minnows that they eat. It only takes one lead split shot to kill a loon. Further information about the problem with lead in fishing tackle can be found on the MPCA website by entering “Get the Lead Out” on their search engine. If you have anglers in your family, encourage them to restock their tackle boxes with non-lead jigs and sinkers. Many sporting goods stores do a very poor job of displaying nontoxic fishing jigs and sinkers. Let them know that this is a priority for all Minnesotans who care about loons, including anglers.



Swainson's Thrush, by Allan Meadows

My Favorite Home Patch: Mud Lake, Duluth

by John Richardson

You're heading up to Duluth for birding, so you've got your list of stops: Canal Park, Park Point, Hawk Ridge, the North Shore toward Two Harbors. Maybe you'll head over to Hartley Nature Center. Or up to Sax-Zim Bog.

Here's another suggestion: Mud Lake. Huh?, you ask. Which of 200 Mud Lakes in Minnesota would that be? This Mud Lake is on the west side of Duluth. It's part of the St. Louis River system and is near the Oliver Bridge. One reason I like this place is that it's off the beaten path. It's a place where you can bird alone, away from the hustle and bustle of the city (and all the dog walkers on the Lake Superior shore). I like it especially during spring, which is my favorite time to bird here—or, for that matter, anywhere.

This isn't a park. You bird along some old railroad tracks that begin at E McCuen St. and continue east towards U.S. Steel-owned land. The tracks are no longer in use, so birding here is safe. Walking along the tracks can be a bit difficult, though, so you do have to be cautious and watch



Marsh Wren, by John Richardson



Virginia Rail, by John Richardson

your step. In fact, there really is nowhere to walk here except along the tracks, which run right through the middle of the lake. The birding can be wonderful, both for migrants and resident birds. On one side is a shallow muddy area surrounded by marsh grasses and cattails that is host to many aquatic, marsh, and land birds.

Frequenting these marshes are hard-to-find—at least for St. Louis County—Marsh Wrens, recently discovered Least Bitterns, and a bucket load of Soras and Virginia Rails. Of course, water-loving sparrows are plentiful here as well, with Swamp and Song Sparrows being the most numerous.

During spring the lake hosts many types of waterfowl, and the viewing is excellent, since the river is narrow here, and when you walk along the tracks you are walking right through the middle of the lake. You will see lots of birds feeding within a few feet of you—which is what you want in the spring after spending hours staring up into the canopy and developing the “warbler neck”! Sparrows will be foraging among the marsh grasses. Swallows will zip past, gleaning insects off the surface and putting their water-skimming skills to use.



Tree Swallow, by John Richardson

Near the end of the path where you can walk on the tracks, a stand of trees takes over. Here you can focus more on woodland birds. A great variety of warblers, flycatchers, sparrows, and other passerines will be passing through in the spring. Some will stay to nest here as well. The area is sheltered and quiet, so you can hear the birds singing and chipping as you scan among the trees.

Hawk migration will be taking place overhead. Mud Lake lies below the ridge that runs from Barton's Peak to Duluth and beyond. Although you will not be elevated for hawk-watching, as you would be on the ridge, birds can be

seen heading that way. Watch the skies, and you will see hawks, accipiters, eagles, and more passing through.

I recommend Mud Lake in the fall too, when the birds are heading back south. Large flocks of passerines move through in the early mornings. I have been there when the mayflies are emerging, and birds stop in to feast on them to fuel up for their journey south. The views are often close up, since there are few spots for the birds to land except along the tracks.

We all enjoy the places where rare birds show up, but I think most birders also like to have a quiet place just to enjoy nature alone once in awhile, a place removed from the busyness of life. Mud Lake is such a place. It may not possess the aesthetic appeal of many other birding locations, but a short walk and diligent observation will yield many species and offer a fulfilling experience. You can bird here, observe wildlife, and reflect on nature in solitude. Here it's less about the number of species you see than the simple joy of birding and being out in nature. And the birds you do see will be right in front of you. They look at you, and you look at them, with a sense of shared intimacy. The isolation allows you to feel like you have all of nature to yourself.

Directions: To get to Mud Lake, head south in Duluth on Grand Ave (Hwy 23), then turn east onto E McCuen Street. Just after you cross the tracks, you will see an area under the railroad bridge where you can park. The old tracks are just ahead about 100 feet.

John Richardson is a birder residing in Duluth, having been in Minnesota for 21 years now after emigrating from E. Yorkshire, UK. John is currently the Fall Count Director at Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory and has been a bird guide in the northland for the last four years.

MOU Certificates of Appreciation

Throughout the year the MOU presents Certificates of Appreciation to people who host birders on or near their property to view rare birds. This past spring the following people received Certificates of Appreciation, along with a one-year complimentary membership to the MOU:

Pam Solie, Coon Rapids, MN – *Western Tanager*
Dave and Lucy Barta, New Prague, MN – *Lazuli Bunting*
Brian Smith, Sleepy Eye, MN – *Bullock's Oriole*
Jim and Jill Gordon, Dassel, MN – *Lazuli Bunting*
Randy Frederickson, Willmar, MN – *Bullock's Oriole*

CONGRATULATIONS and Thank-you to Pam, Dave and Lucy, Brian, Jim and Jill, and Randy!

Please contact Susan Barnes Elliott, Chair of the Awards Committee, to make nominations for Certificates of Appreciation. Susan can be reached at honeywarbler@gmail.com.



Western Tanager, by Bob Dunlap

Subspecies: Interesting, or a Waste of Time?

by Ann Kessen

We love to give names to the birds we see. After long practice we master the species we're most likely to see, and then we look for the next challenge. For many that next challenge is learning to identify subspecies. Identifying these groups within species can be trickier than identifying species and it adds another level of interest to our birding. But among ornithologists the subject of subspecies is controversial. In particular, they disagree about how useful a subspecies designation might be, and even whether it has any use at all.

We'll begin by defining what a subspecies is. The traditional explanation goes back to what's called the "75% rule" (Amadon, J. 1949. *The Condor* 51:250-258.). According to this rule, if 75% of the individuals in a population of a species can be told apart from other members of that same species, then that population should be called a subspecies. The 75% rule seems straightforward, but it presupposes a few things. Let's look at those presuppositions and come up with a more useable definition.

First of all, when we see a segment of a species that looks different from the rest, if we're going to call that segment a subspecies the difference must be heritable; that is, it must be genetically determined and passed on from one generation to the next. So, for instance, we might see several Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) in an area that have orange terminal bands on their tails rather than yellow. This condition results from differences in diet. We wouldn't call these Cedar Waxwings with orange tail bands a subspecies, because the color of the bands will not be passed on to their offspring. The difference is environmental, not genetic.

Second, the difference must be diagnosable. We have to be able to detect this difference between the group we're looking at and the rest of the species. For our purposes, that means there is some difference that we can see or hear in the field.

Finally, the birds that are different from other members of their species must occur in a discrete, non-overlapping area. If there are different-appearing individuals scattered throughout the species' range, we're just looking at a highly variable species, but if the difference that's seen occurs in most (75% or more) of the individuals in one particular area, then researchers may give that population a subspecies name.

In sum, a good workable definition of subspecies is this:

A subspecies is a discrete geographic population within a species that is diagnosable, based on heritable traits. Or, to put it another way, a subspecies is a group of individuals of a species that breed in the same area and have observable differences from other members of the species, and these observable differences are inherited from parents and passed on to offspring.

So a subspecies is different from other members of its species, but it's not so different that it rises to the level of being a separate species. Members of a subspecies may look or sound different, but they are still fully capable of successfully breeding with other members of their species. This seems pretty straightforward. Why then is the topic of subspecies so contentious among ornithologists? Why do some think that the subspecies designation is virtually meaningless? To understand the answer to that question we need to understand a little bit about how some of today's ornithologists do their work.

A hundred years ago people who studied birds based all their conclusions on appearance, sound, and behavior—stuff we can readily see. Today, however, a lot of ornithological research involves something we can't readily see—DNA. Much research involves neutral genetic markers. These are stretches of DNA that have proven useful in understanding relationships among species. The DNA is sequenced, and the sequences are examined to discover similarities and differences among the groups being examined. In general, more similarities among neutral genetic markers indicate the groups have inherited their DNA from a more recent ancestor and are thus more closely related. We're all familiar with this concept from our own families. I am more closely related to my siblings than I am to my first cousins, because my siblings and I have the same parents; but my first cousins and I don't share parents, we only share grandparents. The more recently I share ancestry with someone, the more closely related we are. Neutral genetic markers are very good at determining whether or not two groups are the same species or different species based on how recently they shared an ancestor.

What does this have to do with subspecies? Well, it turns out that when neutral genetic markers are used to look at subspecies, these markers don't show any, or very little, difference between the subspecies and other members of the species. As a result, some ornithologists would argue that subspecies designations are useless, because they don't

indicate any real differences.

Others would argue that the neutral genetic markers that are good for investigating species are not appropriate for looking at subspecies. Subspecies, by definition, are part of a species, so it shouldn't be surprising that they don't show big differences from other members of their species in certain regions of their DNA. But again, by definition, subspecies do show differences that are genetic. So some would argue that we just haven't yet figured out the best way to look at subspecies on a molecular level.

Here's the question: Is naming a population a subspecies useful? From my perspective, this is a question that cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." It depends on what criteria were used to decide subspecies status.

Calling a group a subspecies is not useful when the subspecies limits are arbitrarily determined. So for instance, let's say for the sake of simplicity that we have Species A. Species A is variable in the darkness of its plumage. Birds at the northern end of its range tend to be darker, and birds at the southern end of its range tend to be lighter. Birds in between the two extremes are very gradually darker as you go from south to north. If we wanted to say that this species is comprised of two subspecies, a light one and a dark one, where would we draw the line between the two? What shade of coloration is too dark to be called the light subspecies? At what point is a bird too light to be called a member of the dark subspecies? Where we decide to draw the line is largely arbitrary. When we can't tell if a bird is dark enough to be the dark subspecies, that bird is not diagnosable to subspecies. You'll recall that diagnosability is part of the definition of subspecies.

Historically, there was great enthusiasm for naming subspecies, and many subspecies were named during the first half of the twentieth century. In many cases, these designations were not well supported, because the differences were not diagnosable. In the case of a number of different species ornithologists today largely ignore individual subspecies but instead put similar poorly differentiated subspecies into groups. For instance, as of 1957 there were 18 subspecies of Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca*). We may not have heard of any of them. However, we probably have heard of the four groups of Fox Sparrows: Red, Sooty, Slate-colored, and Thick-billed. The Red group includes two subspecies, the Sooty group includes six, the Slate-colored includes five, and the Thick-billed includes five. While many of the individual subspecies are probably invalid, the various subspecies can be put together into four diagnosable groups.

Should we conclude then that all subspecies should be ignored? I think not. Certainly some subspecies designations are invalid, for the reasons outlined above. But valid subspecies, those that meet all the criteria in our definition, are interesting and useful for a variety of reasons. I'll highlight three of those reasons here:

First, valid subspecies are interesting because they may be populations that are on their way to becoming separate species. These are starting to develop differences from other members of their species. When they have accumulated enough differences, including an inability to successfully interbreed with others of their original species, they will become a separate species. Seeing evolution "in action" can be informative and interesting.

Second, in some cases subspecies designations are useful in telling us something about the origin of vagrants that may show up in Minnesota. For instance, the Brant (*Branta bernicla*) has an Atlantic subspecies and a Pacific subspecies. On the rare occasion when a Brant shows up in Minnesota, by identifying it to subspecies we can understand which breeding area this individual may have come from.

And third, an important value of subspecies designations is that they may be useful for purposes of bird conservation. The Endangered Species Act (1973) extends protections to species, of course, but also to "distinct population segments." A subspecies qualifies as a distinct population segment. So even though a species as a whole may not be threatened, protection may be extended to a subspecies that is. The value here is that a population that may be evolving into a new species is preserved, as well as its habitat and, indirectly, other organisms that utilize that habitat.

Ornithologists will doubtless continue to argue about the usefulness of subspecies designations. For us as birders these arguments may be puzzling and/or fascinating, but subspecies themselves still deserve our attention. For those subspecies that meet all the criteria in our definition, there's a lot that's useful and interesting to be learned.

If you're curious about digging deeper into the subject of subspecies, an excellent resource for the current status of various subspecies is Birds of North America Online (www.birdsna.org). The Birds of North America (BNA) project was initiated in 1992, when individual accounts on all facets of the lives of the breeding birds of North America, written by experts on each species, began to be published. Now the BNA is available online, which allows for timely updates as more is learned about North America's avifauna. Access is free to members of the American Ornithological Society (formerly the American Ornithologists' Union); for others there is a reasonable subscription fee.

Ann Kessen has a Ph.D with emphasis on avian systematics. She currently serves as MOU Treasurer.

New MOU Members

Ray and Sandra Bissonnette, *Mahtomedi, MN*

Elise Kingman, *Plymouth, MN*

Micheal (not Michael!) Preston, *Brooklyn Park, MN*

Ise Varghese, *Minneapolis, MN*

Savaloja Grant Report: Belwin Outdoor Science

by Katie Bloome, Executive Director, Belwin Conservancy

Every year Belwin Outdoor Science, a partnership between Belwin Conservancy and Saint Paul Public Schools, brings over 10,000 students to the prairies and woodlands of Belwin to learn about science and nature. Whether or not birds are part of the lesson for the day, these charismatic critters play the role of ambassador for many of these third and fifth graders. When they first notice a bird, students become quiet, curious, and still. After a few moments of observation, they erupt in questions, excited to learn about what they have just seen.

With the help of the Savaloja Grant program of the MOU, Belwin is enhancing the bird sanctuary near their education center this year with the goal of increasing bird abundance, frequency, and diversity.

A cold and wet spring has delayed much of the planting, but Belwin staff have started work on the area with site prep and transplanting cedar trees. Follow-up planting this summer will include other shrubs and many bird-friendly wildflowers.

The cedar trees will play an important role in attracting birds by providing the forest edge and shrub habitat needed for shelter and perching areas. Many birds, like cedar waxwings, eat the blue “berries” of the cedar. These plants also provide safe nighttime roosts for species like Juncos and blue winged warblers like to nest underneath them. The prickly needles provide some safety from predators. Many thanks to MOU for funding this high-impact project!



Belwin students participating in bird banding lessons



Belwin staff plant cedar trees, by Justin Sykora

Birding by the Numbers 3: Operaton Extreme Redundancy

by Ben Douglas

Few things can prepare you for birding in 75 counties in three weeks. I'm not even sure how I came to the conclusion that birding for 12 to 14 hours a day for that amount of time would be possible. As the first few days of May came and went, though, my vacation was a mounting storm on the horizon. The tension was palpable as I started to get that feeling from my younger days, like I was about to highjump in an important track meet. That intoxicating mix of anticipation, excitement, and nerves had me fidgeting like a horse in the starting gates, ready to break loose from the 40-hour per week shackles of work in favor of the 80-plus hours per week of fun birding.

Now, how do I distill three weeks of intense birding in 75 counties? What message or lesson could I convey to readers who may love birding but can't imagine birding for nearly 300 hours and driving (or riding) for over 5,000 miles? What can I share beyond the exhausting challenge of picking through swallows for the seventieth time or making sure to note a Canada Goose on the roadside because they count again now that I've crossed into yet another county?

I guess I would start by simply stating that it's okay if you don't get it. Birding should be what you want it to be about. I personally need birding to replace sports and healthy competition, I need it to be an adventure with hours of trail time, and I need it to test my limits of physical endurance and mental aptitude. I need to know that I can attempt to break records or set marks of achievement, even if they exist only for me to measure my own performance and skill set. If birding for you is something simply to stay in touch with nature and occasionally find some solitude in a hectic world, then pursue it that way and don't apologize for what you can give and what you need from the hobby. Birding doesn't have to be the chase and accumulation of high species counts. You aren't measured on anything other than what you desire birding to be for you personally. Some of us have a competitive edge, but that doesn't make us better or worse birders than anyone else. It just means that we're all different and that we enjoy the hobby in our own ways.

Once May hit I birded nearly every waking moment for the remainder of the month. In rain, wind, cold, and heat I ground out hour after hour of effort looking to canvas as much ground as possible before the migrant waves passed to the north. I had to get comfortable time and again with the concept of failure, as the migrant waves seemed to adeptly



Scarlet Tanager, by Ben Douglas

avoid my presence or lag so far behind my efforts that I'd be four or five days ahead of their prime densities. I'd learn each day that east to west and north to south the state of Minnesota is a complex tapestry of prime migrant flyways mixed with dead zones harboring many fewer species. I'd learn that in an area otherwise devoid of great habitat a single creek flowing under a roadway in the middle of nowhere can suddenly turn into the best hot spot in the entire county.

This happened while at the end of a 23-hour day of grinding out birds in the west central counties like Big Stone, Stevens, and Traverse. Alex Sundvall and I were looking to finish in Grant County at the now legendary North Ottawa Impoundment. In transit we crossed into and out of Swift County in just a few miles. As we crested a hill with a storm approaching we stopped to see if any birds were moving about in a creek below the road. The next 15 minutes were pure chaos as 32 species of birds presented themselves in a feeding frenzy near the drain point under the road. Just 100 yards up the road a Western Kingbird, along with an Eastern, flew out over the road snagging bugs. An Orchard Oriole dropped into the ditch, while nine species of warbler flitted about catching smaller prey. The best wave of birds for the day was at this unknown creek running along a small wooded corridor and agriculture fields.

Success ultimately depends on some combination of knowledge, skill, and effort. For my own part, I knew at the start of this year I was short on county knowledge and would supplement that by spending time birding with others and ramping up the number of hours I was willing to bird.

What was lost on me at the time I started this year is that every one of the 87 counties would get just a few hours of time on most visits in favor of visiting multiple counties each day. Short of devoting an entire day on a single county, I'm not sure 100 or more ticks was even a reasonable goal to begin with for multiple counties in a single day.

It is also not possible to give enough credit and appreciation to all the wonderful birders who joined me and helped me, like Liz Harper, Clinton Nienhaus (twice), Garrett Wee, Alex Sundvall, Dana Sterner, Sandy Aubol, Alex Burchard, Andy Nyhus, Dedrick Benz, Pete Nichols, and Josh Wallestad. Not to mention the full day of birding for the Grey Cloud Dunes Big Watch run by Sharon Stitler, where I helped provide guide support showing groups of new and veteran birders excellent sparrows and migrants from before sunrise to after sunset.

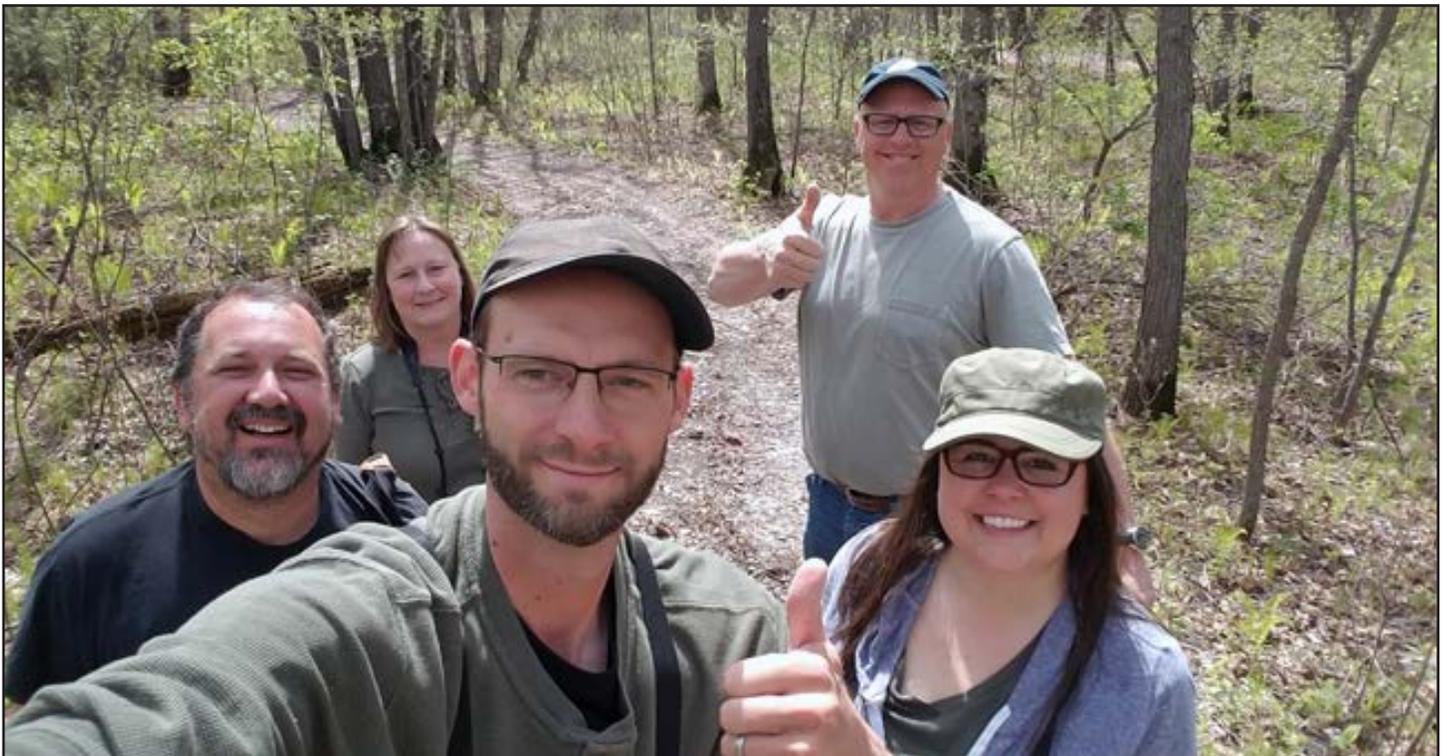
In spite of this, I still found myself covering many counties alone. On one such day, I found the second county record of Summer Tanager in Nobles County. And on a day "off" in that stretch, when I birded for only about six hours, I found a Whimbrel at Lake Byllesby in Dakota County.

I do have the tendency to be so focused on my goals that nearly everything else ceases to exist. When not only the third, but also the fourth, state record Bullock's Orioles made appearances in the state, it barely even entered my mind to make the chase. I stuck to my plan and focused on

my efforts, and still I'm at a higher statewide species count (270) than I've ever personally had at this point. That being said, now that May is done and we are into June, what I consider phase 3 is ready to begin. That phase will be marked by breeding birds and targeting small groups of counties in hopes of closing them out with one more day of effort or at least getting them ready for the fall migrant crush coming in August and September.

This makes me start to think that perhaps a few chases are not going to hurt and, in fact, may help me add some signature birds in counties that otherwise haven't gotten a lot of attention. As Houston recently began to string together some really great birds (White-eyed Vireo and Prairie Warbler being two of the best), that became one of my weekend targets in post-migration birding. On a recent Saturday morning I met Gerry Hoekstra in Cannon Falls at 5 a.m., and we headed south. Matthew and Michael Thompson (15 years old), who have been crisscrossing the state all year adding a lifetime of experiences finding birds, wildflowers, and all manner of other enjoyable natural things, followed in their car behind us. At the time of writing, my count stands at 7,680 county ticks. I'm looking forward to another few months of finding fun birds, hanging out with fellow bird lovers, and seeking something deep within myself that I didn't know I was looking for.

Ben Douglas is a member of the MOU's Social Media Committee, volunteer guide, and presenter on technology for birding. His 2019 birding goal is 10,000 Minnesota state ticks. This is the third installment in a series that will keep us up to date on his efforts.



July / August

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	JULY 1	2	3	4	5	6 MN Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr Red-headed Woodpeckers, Cedar Creek Reserve Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
7 Bluebird Walk & Talk, Wm O'Brien SP, DNR "Birding Language," MVNWR	8	9	10	11 Central MN Birding Days, MRVAC, July 11-12 Banding Osprey Babies, Lowry Nat. Ctr, 3RPD	12	13 WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr
14 Bluebird Walk & Talk, Wm O'Brien SP, DNR	15 Sparrow ID Presentation, Cedar Creek Reserve Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC	16	17 Bird walk, Roberts Bird Sanctuary	18	19	20 Birds and Trees, St. Paul Audubon Society Bird Banding, Lowry Nat. Ctr, 3RPD
21	22 "So. America to So. Africa," MN Global Birders	23	24 Bird walk, Roberts Bird Sanctuary	25	26 Bird Banding, Carpenter Nat. Ctr	27 Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC
28	29	30	31	AUGUST 1	2	3 MN Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr Red-headed Woodpeckers, Cedar Creek Reserve ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
4	5	6	7	8	9	10 WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr
11	12 MN Global Birders, speaker TBD	13	14	15	16	17 Bird Banding, Eastman Nat. Ctr, 3RPD Bird Banding, Lowry Nat. Ctr, 3RPD
18	19	20	21 Bird walk, Roberts Bird Sanctuary	22	23 Bird Banding, Carpenter Nat. Ctr	24 Warbler Walk at Wolsfeld SNA, DNR Chimney Swift Sit, ZVAS
25	26	27	28	29	30	31 Chimney Swift Sit, ZVAS



MOU Calendar

July / August 2019



CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Minnesota Campus:

12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN

Wisconsin Campus: 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

July 6: MN Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. Join bird expert Kevin Smith on a morning hike around the nature center. Learn to identify birds by sight and sound. Field guides and binoculars available to use or bring your own. Program fee: \$6 or free for “Friends of CNC,” Hastings Environmental Protectors, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. RSVP at 651-437-4359 and let us know you are coming.

July 13: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 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 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.

July 26: 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.

Aug 3: MN Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. See description above.

Aug 10: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. See description above.

Aug 23: 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.

CEDAR CREEK ECOSYSTEM SCIENCE RESERVE

July 6 and August 3 (2 dates):

1st Saturday Red-headed Woodpecker

Details: 8 am. Join volunteers from the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project to go birding in off-limits areas of our oak savannas! Meet your guide at the Fish Lake Nature Trail parking lot, located at the end of Durant St. on the southeast side of Cedar Creek. Wear closed-toed shoes and layers, and bring your own binoculars and camera if you desire. Free, though donations to the project are recommended and always gladly accepted. Location: Fish Lake Nature Trail, Durant St, East Bethel.

July 15: A Sparrow is Not Just a Sparrow: Sparrow Identification in Minnesota

Details: 1–2 pm. Presented by Keith Olstad. Have you ever passed off a little brown bird (LBB) as just another sparrow? Or wondered which sparrow was chirping in your binoculars? Keith Olstad will offer tips on identifying the twenty-some sparrow species that regularly occur in Minnesota. Using photos, recordings and field notes, Keith will offer cues for distinguishing sparrows from similar species and will close the program with a quick exam to test your sparrow ID skills. Location: Cedar Creek Ecosystems Science Reserve, 2660 Fawn Lake Dr. NE, East Bethel

DNR (See www.dnr.state.mn.us for directions)

July 7 and July 14: Bluebird Walk & Talk

Details: 10–11 am. Have you ever wondered what’s happening inside a bluebird house? Join the naturalist for a glimpse into the life of these much-adored birds. We’ll peek inside some bird houses to see if baby bluebirds, swallows, wrens or chickadees are in the nests. This program is great for adults and kids, but be prepared to walk a half mile. For more information call 651-433-0500 x277. Location: William O’Brien State Park

Aug 24: Warbler Walk

Details: 8 am. Led by Bill and Esther Marengo and the Friends of Wolsfeld Woods. Help ID warblers as they pass through Minnesota on their way south. Bring binoculars and bird books. Location: Wolsfeld Woods SNA, Hennepin County. See the [Wolsfeld Woods SNA](#) web page for a map and description of the site.

MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

This informal group meets monthly to discuss birding in other countries.

Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55408

July 22: Olaf Danielson

South America to the Southern Tip of Africa

Details: 6–8 pm. Olaf Danielson, one of the top US “Big Year” birders, will give a presentation on his epic voyage from the southern tip of South America to the southern tip of Africa. High among his goals was to check off his “bucket list” a visit to the most remote inhabited island on earth, Tristan da Cunha. He will discuss and show photos of the ocean voyage and birding on the two continents. For details and to register, go to tinyurl.com/globalbirding20.

August 12: [Speaker to be determined]

Details: 6–8 pm. Details will be forthcoming at tinyurl.com/globalbirding21.

MN RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

MRVAC Bird Watching Treks

Join us for a bird walk on one of the Refuge’s many units. Learn which species of birds use the Refuge as a migratory stop and those that call the Refuge home for the summer nesting season. Birders of all skill levels are welcome. Bring binoculars, your favorite field guide and dress appropriately for the weather. Craig Mandel, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist, 952-240-7647.

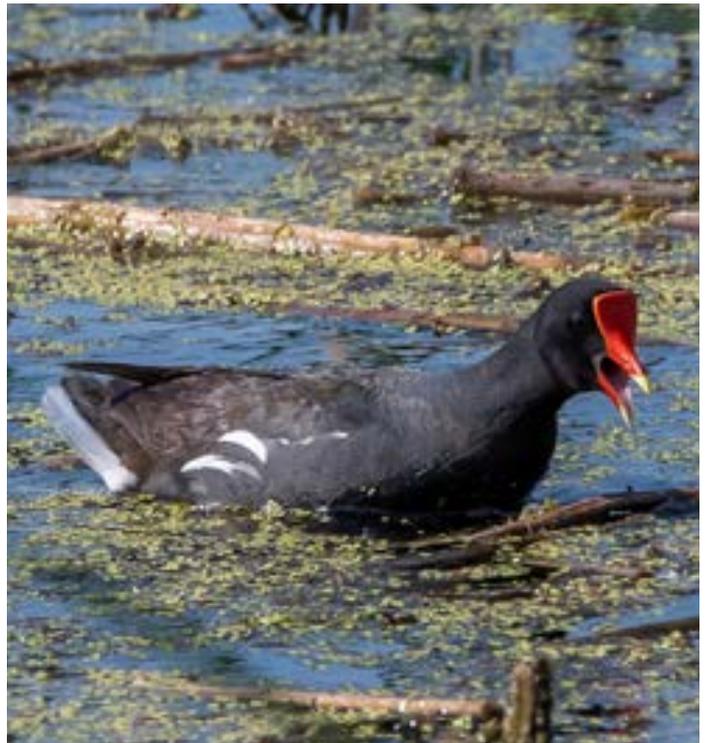
- Saturday, July 6, 8:00-10:30 am, Bass Ponds
- Monday, July 15, 8:00-10:30 am, Bass Ponds
- Saturday, July 27, 8:00-10:30 am, Bass Ponds
- Saturday, August 24, 8:00-10:30 am, Bass Ponds

Location: Bass Ponds Trailhead:
2501 86th St. E., Bloomington

MRVAC Field Trips

July 11-12: Central Minnesota Birding Days—Litchfield

Details: 6 am start. On this Litchfield-based trip, we will be birding in Kandiyohi and Meeker counties. Some of the locations may include the Litchfield Nature Center, Lake Ripley and Lake Washington, Sibley State Park and Dassel and Darwin city parks. We’ll be searching for birds that nested in the area and some early fall migrants. \$35 for



Common Gallinule, by Gerald Hoekstra

non-MRVAC members; \$25 for MRVAC members. Please contact Craig Mandel for more information and to register at 952-240-7647.

MN VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

July 7: Bird Language

Details: 9 am–1 pm. Join us as we gather on the slopes of the Minnesota River Valley to explore what the birds are telling us about our surroundings. We will split the time between the classroom and outdoors. Bring a notebook, pencils, and something to sit on outdoors. Led by Jonathon Poppele and Donnie Phyllaier, Volunteer Refuge Naturalists. Location: MVNWR Visitor Center (Classroom A), 3815 American Blvd. E, Bloomington. To register, visit www.mntracking.org/.

ROBERTS BIRD SANCTUARY

July 17 and August 21: Wednesday on the Wing

Details: 8 am. Join an Interpretive Naturalist from the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary on a walk through Roberts Bird Sanctuary to look for and learn about the birds found in this beautiful park. Bring binoculars and a field guide or borrow ours. Plan to meet in all weather situations. Location: 4124 Roseway Road, Minneapolis. The walks start at the wooden visitors shelter adjacent to the Peace Garden parking lot off Roseway Road, across the street from the Rose Garden.



Cedar Waxwing, by Jean Brislanice

Aug 17: Bird Banding at Eastman Nature Center

Details: 9 am–12 pm. See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied, and tagged with numbered rings as part of international avian research. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Eastman Nature Center, 13341 Elm Creek Rd, Osseo

Aug 17: Bird Banding at Lowry Nature Center

Details: 9 am–12 pm. See description above. Location: Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr., Victoria

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON

July 6: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10 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, 701 Silver Creek Rd NE, Rochester

August 3: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10 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, 701 Silver Creek Rd NE, Rochester

August 24 and August 31: Chimney Swift Sit

Details: 7:30–9 pm. Led by Sandy Hokanson. Each year citizen scientists count migrating Chimney Swifts who gather in large numbers to roost for the night at sites all over the United States. Last year at this sight we watched thousands of birds enter John Marshall High School’s big chimney. Bring a lawn chair, bug spray and binoculars. Location: John Marshall High School, 1510 14th St NW, Rochester. Meet behind the school near the football field.



Common Loon, by Richard Gotz

SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

July 20: Birds and Trees

Details: 7:30–9 am. Led by Kathy Robbins and Cathy Croghan. Join us for a stroll at Langton Lake Park to observe and identify birds and trees, and consider their interactions. Bring binoculars, bird guide, tree guide and magnifier if you have them. Location: Langton Lake Park, 1894 County Road C2 W, Roseville. Meet at the parking lot on County Road C2 at the west side of the lake.

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

July 11: Banding Osprey Babies

Details: 6–7:30 pm. Learn about the osprey restoration and research project that began over 30 years ago. Drive to an active osprey nest and watch as the babies are banded. Everyone attending this program must pay \$5 and register. Location: Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr., Victoria

July 20: Bird Banding at Lowry Nature Center

Details: 9 am–12 pm. See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and tagged with numbered rings as part of international avian research. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr., Victoria

Birder Bio: Marsha Shuff

Tell us about yourself.

I was born and raised in International Falls. I know . . . we are also known as the “Icebox of the Nation”! However, our summers more than make up for our cold winters, and living in an area where we have beautiful Rainy Lake and a wonderful wilderness all around is not too bad. My husband and I are self employed and own Sportsmen’s Service. We cater to fishermen—rods, reels, etc.—and also sell fresh Walleye. We have two sons and a daughter.

When did you start birding?

I started birding about ten years ago and I regret that it was not sooner. There is so much to learn, I could have used a few more years! Actually, I got into birding accidentally through photography. That was my first love. I got my first good camera one fall. I set up bird feeders outside my window and practiced with my camera on birds: took photos, put them in the computer to process, and learned what the birds were. In the beginning I probably did not know what a chickadee was. Little by little the birds, though, were becoming important too. People would say, “So, you are a birder?” I would always answer with, “No, I’m a photographer.” Now if I say that, it’s always with a grin.

How did your interest expand after that first experience?

A good friend, Al Meadows, was very instructive in teaching me about birds. Not only is he a very good birder but an excellent photographer of birds as well. Without him passing his knowledge on to me, I would not know very much today. He likes to tell me that he taught me all he knows and that I still don’t know very much. I hope he was kidding. Year after year he kept at me to learn about our feathered friends.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

I love a good challenge. I think I wanted to see a LeConte’s Sparrow for about three years before I finally did. That felt like Christmas to me! Each year I pick a new bird to go out and find. You certainly get to know a bird that way. Each spring now is all about the migration and the birds coming back. I get emotional in the fall when they leave, especially when the last hummingbird leaves.



Photo by Allan Meadows

How did you originally become acquainted with MOU?

Through my friend Al Meadows. He said that I should join and he was right. All birders should.

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

I have loved birding in Florida and South Padre Island. One of my favorite places is Whitewater Lake in Southwestern Manitoba. The bogs of Minnesota are a favorite also. Besides the different kinds of birds there, they’re magical places, and we are very lucky to have them.

Favorite birding style (i.e., by yourself, with others, etc.)?

Well, it’s always nice to have two sets of eyes and someone with good hearing. But I also find it relaxing to just get in the car and go on a bird-finding adventure alone. So either way is good for me.

Favorite bird or bird family?

How can you pick if you love birds? A favorite, though, is the Belted Kingfisher. Not only beautiful but very entertaining! I also love the grebes, especially Horned and Eared Grebes.



Golden-winged Warbler, by Marsha Shuff

Any advice on how to be a better birder?

Well, take a class, listen to their sounds, get out in the field, and bring a bird book. Just be interested. I always find it interesting that so many people don't even know what we have in Minnesota. If you post a photo on Facebook, for example, of a Golden-winged Warbler or a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, most people have never even seen one and want to know what country you were in to get photos like that.

Ever had an unusual experience while birding?

I have only a single pair (at least as far as I know) of hummingbirds every summer. In the fall after the male has gone and the female is ready to go, she has hovered at my window with me standing there, and the next day she is gone. It's like she was saying goodbye. That has happened for the last two years. And all I can think of is how far away the middle of May is. It's very sad. I also had a Varied Thrush for a couple of months two years ago. That was a wonderful wintertime thrill.

Any other interests or hobbies when you're not birding?

Yes, of course, that would be photography. For me, birding and photography go well together. I have become a photographer and a birder.

What new bird would you most like to see most?

There are so many beautiful birds that get posted in Facebook from all around the world. I just think, "Wow, I would love to see that!" The birds-of-paradise would be at the top of my list.



Swamp Sparrow, by Marsha Shuff

MOU Bird Puzzle

Minnesota Ducks

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American Black Duck
 American Wigeon
 Barrow's Goldeneye
 Black Scoter
 Blue-winged Teal
 Bufflehead
 Canvasback
 Cinnamon Teal
 Common Eider

Common Goldeneye
 Common Merganser
 Eurasian Wigeon
 Gadwall
 Garganey
 Greater Scaup
 Green-winged Teal
 Harlequin Duck
 Hooded Merganser

King Eider
 Lesser Scaup
 Long-tailed Duck
 Mallard
 Mottled Duck
 Northern Pintail
 Northern Shoveler
 Red-breasted Merganser
 Redhead

Ring-necked Duck
 Ruddy Duck
 Smew
 Surf Scoter
 Tufted Duck
 White-winged Scoter
 Wood Duck



Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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

Minnesota Ornithologists' Union
Carpenter Nature Center
12805 Saint Croix Trail South
Hastings, MN 55033
Email: mou@moumn.org
Web: <http://moumn.org>

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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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Birding Hotline

Northwest: 800-433-1888

MOU Contacts

Minnesota Birding Editor: newsletter@moumn.org
President: president@moumn.org
Vice President: vicepresident@moumn.org
Membership Secretary: membership@moumn.org
Treasurer: treasurer@moumn.org
Recording Secretary: secretary@moumn.org
The Loon Editor: editor@moumn.org
CBC Compiler: cbc@moumn.org
MOU Records Committee: mourc@moumn.org
Conservation Chair: conservation@moumn.org
Grants: grants@moumn.org
Youth Mentorship: mentorship@moumn.org
Field Trips: fieldtrips@moumn.org
All other MOU functions: mou@moumn.org
MOU web site: <http://moumn.org>
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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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