



Minnesota BIRDING

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Conservation Column: Minnesota's Waterfowl and their Habitats

by *Andy Forbes*

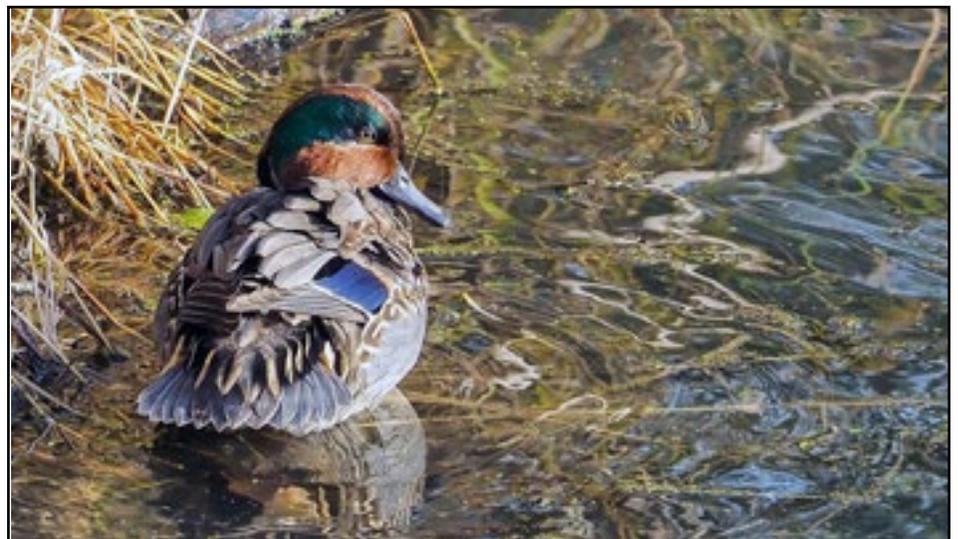
As you read this article, the annual spectacle that is Minnesota's spring waterfowl migration is likely well underway. We live in a great state for ducks, geese, and swans: 35 species are regular here in most years. Of those, about half stop here as they pass through, while the other half breed in Minnesota. The western half of Minnesota is located within the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR), which is the center of duck breeding on the continent. The rest of the state also contributes significantly to annual waterfowl production for several species. Overall, an average of over 600,000 ducks and 150,000 Canada Geese breed in

Minnesota each year, along with a growing population of over 20,000 Trumpeter Swans. Here's an overview of the waterfowl picture in the state.

The "Duck Factory"

The PPR is a massive, approximately 300,000-square-mile region, of which about a third is located in the U.S., from northern Montana through the Dakotas to western Minnesota and north-central Iowa. While much of the region has been converted to cropland due to its rich, fertile soil, the millions of mostly small, "pothole" wetlands and sur-

Green-winged Teal, by Tom Gilde



rounding grasslands are extremely important to breeding waterfowl as well as to many other wetland- and grassland-dependent birds and other wildlife and plants. Grasslands are every bit as important to most breeding ducks as are the wetlands: without grass cover, there is nowhere for them to hide their nests and hatch their young. Nest predators abound, and extensive, healthy grassland/wetland complexes have much greater potential for producing ducklings than wetlands with minimal surrounding vegetative cover. They also play a critical role in maintaining water quality and preventing soil erosion, as well as providing habitat for several other imperiled species. Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, Gadwall, and Trumpeter Swan are among the more common breeding waterfowl species here, along with several others that occur in smaller numbers, or with more limited ranges.

Big Rivers

Several large river systems cut through the state as they wind downhill towards the Gulf of Mexico. Woodlands often border these waterways, and they offer habitat for cavity nesting ducks, like Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser. Many of the river floodplains also contain extensive marshlands, which can provide nesting habitat for Trumpeter Swans, Canada Geese, and other species. It is along these river floodplains that one can witness huge numbers of birds on the move during migration. In late fall in southeastern Minnesota along the Mississippi River, thousands of Tundra Swans can be viewed as they rest and feed in marshes within the floodplain. A large portion of the continent's Canvasbacks also migrate along this stretch of river.

Northern Lakes

While they are generally less nutrient rich and productive than wetlands in other parts of the state, the forested lakes of Northern Minnesota nonetheless support large numbers of waterfowl, if generally at lower densities. Wild rice is an important food source for migrating waterfowl in this part of the state and is thus the focus of conservation attention. Common Goldeneyes, Ring-necked Ducks, Common Mergansers, and some American Black Ducks breed in wetlands here. Larger lakes and wetlands in the region can host massive numbers of migrating waterfowl. Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Aitkin County is one location where spectacular numbers of waterfowl often occur in fall migration, which generally peaks around mid-October. In 2019, nearly 900,000 waterfowl were detected on fall waterfowl surveys, most of which were Ring-necked Ducks. Huge rafts of diving ducks can also be seen on Mille Lacs Lake as well during this time frame.

“Sea” Ducks

While they are rare in Minnesota, several species of sea ducks occur in Minnesota. White-winged, Surf, and Black Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks are all regularly seen



Trumpeter Swans in a Kandiyohi Wetland, by Gerald Hoekstra

in small numbers during migration (mostly during the fall). The best places to see these species are large lakes—especially the largest lake of them all, Lake Superior I really enjoy birding Lake Superior during this time of year. The crowds have thinned considerably, the weather has cooled, but temperatures usually aren't bone-chilling yet, and other migrants and wintering species have begun to arrive in some years. Obviously, any body of water that is relatively deep can host sea ducks, so vigilance at your local bodies of water from October thru November can sometimes turn up one of these species. They also occur during spring migration, although less frequently. Of course, your local sewage lagoon is always worth a check during spring migration as well for these species and maybe other surprises—you never know!

Ducks in the City

Along with Canada Geese, large numbers of Mallards can also be found in city parks, backyard ponds, and other heavily altered habitats. As long as there is some open water and food, many of these Mallards overwinter and can be seen flying around neighborhoods as the flakes fly in the heart of winter, when you wouldn't necessarily expect to see them. These flocks likely mix with migrant ducks, resulting in some level of interchange between “city” and “country” ducks.

Mallards also frequently nest in areas next to houses and in other places that might make you scratch your head as to what they were thinking when they chose that location. It is important to keep in mind that many of these birds are likely generations removed from living in more “natural” settings, are used to human activity, and know how to survive in urban environments. Other than keeping pets and children away from nests, you don't usually need to do anything to help them. Even if the nest isn't next to water,

the hen will lead her young to whatever water bodies are in the area after they hatch, just as a hen nesting in a native grassland would.

Waterfowl Populations

Overall, populations of most species of waterfowl are doing pretty well, with stable populations. There are a few exceptions to this, such as Lesser Scaup and Northern Pintail, which are showing signs of population decline. For the most part, though, waterfowl conservation is one of the great success stories in North America. Several decades ago, many populations of ducks were in trouble, due to drought and loss of habitat. The conservation community saw this and has worked together over the last 30+ years to restore millions of acres of wetland and grassland habitat, which resulted in an incredible recovery of most waterfowl populations.

Threats do remain, however. Loss of wetland and grassland habitat is a continual challenge in our part of the world, especially in the “Duck Factory” of the Prairie Pothole Region, which is so important for breeding populations of many species. The wetlands that do remain are also often degraded. Nutrient runoff from neighboring agriculture and urban areas can cause harmful algal blooms, which can turn a wetland toxic. Wetlands that lack habitat buffers are particularly susceptible. Altered conditions and hydrology can also favor invasive species and allow them to dominate

the vegetative community, choking out native species and making the wetland unsuitable for waterfowl and many other species. Narrow-leaved cattail and reed canary grass are two of the most common invasives in Minnesota wetlands.

The good news is that there is a simple way for anybody that cares about waterfowl, wetlands, and wildlife to support keeping wetlands on the landscape: purchase a Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (the “Duck Stamp”). Whether you hunt waterfowl or not, or even if you don’t like hunting, we can all agree that having healthy wetlands on the landscape is a good thing. Virtually all of the funds (98%) raised through the purchase of this stamp go directly to habitat conservation. Since the stamp was introduced in 1934, more than five million acres of habitat have been protected through funds raised via stamp purchases, including portions of 252 National Wildlife Refuges. In Minnesota, three important National Wildlife Refuges—Sherburne, Hamden Slough, and Tamarac—might not exist at all were there no Duck Stamp, as their lands were purchased almost entirely (99%+) with funds raised through stamp purchases. You can learn more about the stamp, and how to purchase them, at <https://www.fws.gov/birds/get-involved/duck-stamp.php>.

Andy Forbes is the Deputy Chief for the Great Lakes Migratory Bird Program with the USFWS and is a member of the MOU Records Committee.

Tundra Swans and other waterfowl on the Mississippi River at Brownsville, by Gerald Hoekstra



Message from the President

ANTICIPATION, a key word at this time of the year. The days are getting longer, the sun seems brighter, and most importantly for us, the birds are singing and telling us that we have nearly made it again. We are ready to get out alone or in groups to find the common, uncommon, and unusual birds. Birders are generally happy and friendly people who anticipate being able to identify a bird and to share this information with others. If you are looking for an unusual sighting, you only need to look for people with binoculars or a spotting scope to know that someone will help you in your search.

OUTSIDE, another key word for birders. Birds fascinate people throughout the world. In our own urban areas we often must go out to see them, while they often surround those who live in warmer, less urban areas. We walk through fields and forests, along beaches and lakes, through marshes and swamps so that we can see and hear the birds. Then we analyze the size, color, song, and flight of a single bird or a group of birds, outside. To go birding means to go outside, this is critical to what we do and how we act.

UPBEAT, the third key word for birders. One of the wonderful generalizations about birders is that they are upbeat, positive in outlook, and enthusiastic to share what they find. These are characteristics of happy people who exhibit well-being. The beauty and flight of birds are astounding, and the fact that we are usually outside when we are watching adds to the joy. It is my belief that the 'being outside' is a significant part of why birders are a happy lot, but this is not unique to me. The Minnesota DNR is on board with the 'No Child Left Inside' program to help connect youth to the outdoors. In the view of the DNR, getting more people into

Boreal Owl, by Becca Engdahl



the outdoors will be the important to the future stewardship of Minnesota's natural resources, which is good. Encouraging people to get outside may have additional benefits beyond natural resources.

There are early studies that suggest that spending time outside is good for our health, but none are definitive. The term *Shinrin-yoku*, or 'forest bath,' broadly refers to this approach. Dr. Brent Bauer, director of the Mayo Clinic Complementary and Integrative Medicine Program, talked about this at the 2020 Minnesota DNR Roundtable and he was highlighted in the StarTribune (August 20, 2019). He suggests that physicians may soon prescribe time outside as therapy for our physical and mental health. The sense of well-being may be the important part of this outdoor approach. This fits well with the DNR's mission of increasing the quality of life by ensuring safe and equitable outdoor experiences. And this certainly fits with the MOU mission to create and increase public interest in birds, and promote the preservation of bird life and its natural habitat.

Birds are mysterious and beautiful, and they are free to observe. We feel good when we watch a single bird or a flock of birds, when we identify a new bird or are comforted with the common winter birds at our feeders, and when we can share these experiences with others. Feeling good can only benefit our health and make us happy. This is why I feel that birders are generally happy, kind, and positive. There are few downsides to watching birds. We get outside and improve of lives just by watching, and birds are amazing to watch. It can't get better than this. Have a wonderful spring outside.

– Richard King

New MOU Members

Thomas Beer, *Minneapolis, MN*
Suzanne Blue, *Red Wing, MN*
Robert Freeman, *Long Prairie, MN*
Jessica Gutierrez, *Chicago, IL*
Alyson Gullette, *Andover, MN*
Mary Kelly, *Fountain, MN*
Adele Krusz, *Canyon, MN*
Howard Markus, *St. Paul, MN*
Kevin O'Connor, *Plymouth, MN*
Gordon Plorin, *Woodbury, MN*
Barbara Thoman, *St. Paul, MN*

Seventeen Years of a Life “For the Birds”: Volunteering at the Raptor Center

by Linda Whyte

Many birders can name their so-called “portal species”—the one that hooked them on birding, and its many ramifications. Sometimes those ramifications morph into a way of life. In my case it was a Red-tailed Hawk, whose charisma led to life as a volunteer at The Raptor Center.

When Rob and I moved to Minnesota, we were already wildlife enthusiasts, though not necessarily birders. Audubon Chapter involvement helped to change that, and I found myself especially captivated by raptors. Eventually, retiring from teaching presented an opportunity to “give back” to the birds that made so many of our outdoor experiences memorable. That’s how I came to volunteer at The Raptor Center, not far from home.

The Raptor Center offers several prospective volunteer venues—Carpentry, Special Events, Education, Transport/Rescue, Clinic, and Flight Exercise among them. As part of the interview process, we were asked to name three such areas of interest in order of preference. My first two choices were Clinic and Transport/Rescue. Asked why I chose those over education, I explained that I was ready for something entirely new and wished to make amends for the grief that human activity sometimes causes raptors. After a few two-to-three-hour training sessions, I was assigned to a morning clinic crew. The remainder of training was on the job, shadowing and observing experienced crew members, and assisting when I could.

Crews vary in size; ours has expanded to nine members, as the patient load has grown. The make-up of the crew has changed over 17 years, as schedules changed, students graduated, or life made other demands. Of the original group, only two of us remain, but most members have stayed several years. That longevity has created much camaraderie, as well as efficient teamwork.

There are separate clinic crews for morning and afternoon each day. The jobs for the two shifts vary, but task categories are the same: laundry, floor and mat-cleaning, perch and cage-cleaning, food preparation, feeding, medication, and bird-handling. The work ranges from simple to complex, from mundane to challenging. Based on personal skills and interests, we may gravitate toward our preferences, but crew leaders make sure everyone learns the procedures for each task so we can rotate positions as the need arises.

Most volunteers would agree that the pinnacle of interest and satisfaction—and the area requiring the most training and practice—is bird-handling. Prior experience



A Broad-winged Hawk being brought from its flight room to the treatment room for assessment

is not necessary; training is thorough, and as extensive as needed for birds and volunteers to interact safely. Even experienced handlers will request not to handle birds on a given day if they’re not feeling “up to par.” Newcomers take as long as needed to learn all the steps of handling, and others sometimes get re-training on particular procedures, especially if staff institutes something new. Handling is challenging, but it ensures there’s never a dull moment. It’s also a chance to see a variety of raptors closer than you may ever see them elsewhere.

When staff requests a specific bird, it means a handler must safely extract the patient from its individual cage or its flight room. Another crew member cleans the cage, replacing its used perch and pad-cover, if any. The handler carries the bird to the treatment room, where he or she weighs it and prepares to hold it on one of the tables, in whatever position is required for the treatment procedures at hand. Treatment could include administration of subcutaneous fluids, radiographing, blood-draws, wound-dressing, disinfection, bone-setting, physical therapy, and much more. The gloved handler guards the veterinarian against beak and talons. If a procedure is done under an-

esthesia, the handler also monitors the bird's respiration throughout, so the vet can make necessary modifications to dosage.

Morning shifts do early feedings, and usually also morning medication. The patient charts indicate what meat (rodent, fowl, or fish), and in what amount and state, to feed each bird. The patient sheets also list which medications are required for a particular bird and the dosage for each. Birds that are not eating well may need to be hand-fed with forceps, at least the portion of food with medication. During winter months, morning crews also feed birds that have been upgraded to the outdoor communal flight pens. The most exciting part of that is probably bringing food to the group of free-lofted Bald Eagles—"presentation is everything"—but most outdoor raptors greet the cuisine with gusto!

If you choose to try Transport/Rescue, as I did also, you may get to experience an individual bird's entire journey, from injury or illness, to rehabilitation and release. T/R volunteers are the "medevac" crew who answer the emergency call to bring in a raptor that's in trouble or to release a bird that's rehabilitated. Again, these crews go through thorough training. Sometimes the job simply entails fetching a bird that's already contained. Other times it means capturing the bird and confining it in a pet carrier. Occasionally, when birds from far away are acquired too long after closing, the T/R member is asked to keep it overnight. While some of the calls are errands of mercy that end with a death en route, or in euthanasia, other efforts have amazingly positive outcomes.

Some of my most memorable and rewarding experiences were transport/rescue incidents. Many were an adrenaline rush; some were sobering, others amusing or heartening, but all of them were worthwhile. Quite often other citizens who initiate or help with a rescue are equally moved by it. On a recent hike at Crosby Farm Park, a woman walking her dog stopped to ask me what I was seeking and listening to so intently; when I explained I was hoping to see or hear a Barred Owl, she launched into a story of having helped some woman rescue a baby Barred Owl there some years ago. It didn't take much detail to affirm that this was a rescue she and I had done together, a memory she avowed she would always treasure. I suspect the same would be true of the friendly bike riders who helped me corral a fledgling Peregrine Falcon at risk of falling into the Mississippi under the Smith Avenue High Bridge. Sometimes T/R work just helps to boost one's faith in the compassionate side of human nature.

Starting with that portal species, the ubiquitous Red-tailed Hawk, one thing led to another. Many Raptor Center contacts became good friends, who brought me into bird counts and surveys, bird-banding, leading bird-walks, and other related volunteering. Now there's weekly raptor care

and weekly passerine banding at Carpenter Nature Center in Hastings. In Carver Park there's monthly passerine banding and, in fall, several weeks of nightly Saw-whet Owl banding. During summers there are weekly overnights for banding at Sugar Loaf Cove Nature Center in Schroeder. In between the regular gigs are the Christmas Bird Counts and various surveys. Obviously, time for personal birding has become scarce, but I have no real regrets. Although I'll need to retire from volunteering sooner or later, it has definitely been engaging and fulfilling to live life for the birds.

If you want to know more about volunteering at The Raptor Center, just go to the website www.raptor.umn.edu. to find the sub-heading "Volunteer"—and see if you discover a new passion for service around raptors.

Linda Whyte is a retired teacher, living in St. Paul, who birds mostly in the metro area, and in outstate Minnesota when possible.



Morning clinic volunteers prepare food and medications for each patient, as prescribed on the patient charts.

My Favorite Home Patch: Lake Osakis

by Ben Fritchman

Note from the editor: Do you have a favorite local spot for birding? I'd like to hear about it, and I'm sure other birders would too. Please send me a note at newsletter@moumn.org if you would like to write about your favorite local patch for this column. GH

My obsession with Lake Osakis began years ago when I was sitting at my grandparent's dining room table. I was maybe 14 or 15 years old. Across from me sat Bob Jansen, and he had this massive three-ring binder with all of his county lists. It was opened to Todd County, and there, next to Surf Scoter, was an "X." I couldn't believe it. At that time, I thought scoters could only be found on Lake Superior in Minnesota. When I found out he had seen a 'sea duck' in my home patch, Lake Osakis became a literal sea of possibilities for me, with the sky being the limit on what I could find there.

Lake Osakis is a large lake—6,270 acres, and primarily surrounded by open land. It is one of the largest lakes in the prairie pothole region of Minnesota. Only Ottertail Lake and Lake Minnewaska are larger in this part of the state. Luckily, Osakis seems to be a huge attraction for waterfowl during migration, and it can be an exciting place to bird. Lake Osakis actually covers two counties, Todd and Douglas. Most of the lake is in Todd, but the southwest corner is in Douglas.

After getting my driver's license I found myself visiting the lake as often as possible. One summer day, I found a handsome Clark's Grebe near the southeast shore. It was a life bird, and that only added to fuel my love of Lake Osakis. I was able to share the bird with my grandparents, which made it all the more sweet.

In 2004, when I was 18, the birding started to heat up at the lake. On April 22, Earth Day, I visited the lake after track and field practice, and after looking at all the Western Grebes and Red-necked Grebes on the lake, I was slowly driving along the western side of the lake when I noticed a white bird on a lawn near the lake. I slammed on my brakes and realized I was looking at a Cattle Egret! Three days later, nearby, a White-faced Ibis was found on the western side of the lake. It put on a gorgeous show and was still present the next day. At this spot I also found a group of Willets, Dunlins, and Wilson's Phalaropes.

Spring migration on the lake is a wonderful time, with hordes of waterfowl, gulls, terns, warblers, and shorebirds. This is the best place in Todd County to find migrating geese like Snow and White-fronted and it's hand down the



Red-necked Grebe, by Larry Sirvio

best place to find Red-breasted Mergansers in the county. Forster's Terns can be found in the spring and a handful stay all summer. Franklin's Gulls used to nest at Osakis but in recent years have been tough to find during the summer. A few birds have been seen in recent summers, though they may represent non-breeding summering birds.

The largest misfortune about Todd County is that it doesn't have much public birding land. No state parks, no national wildlife refuges, and only one county park. Luckily, that one county park is located on Lake Osakis: Battle Point County Park is located off 210th Street on the northeast side of the lake. The park is best during spring and fall migration for warblers, flycatchers, vireos. It is a peninsula of land that juts out into the lake, and it can be a great migrant trap. Unfortunately, it doesn't have a lot of habitat and is by no means a Point Pelee; if you hit it right, though, you can have 15 species of warblers there in the spring during the right conditions.

Summer can be a fun time to bird the lake also. Western and Red-necked grebes nest on the lake. If you haven't seen Western Grebes' mating ritual in person, a trip to see it is



Black Scoter, by Gerald Hoekstra

needed. Their courtship dance is one of the most elaborate of any North American bird. And look closely at those Western Grebes, because Lake Osakis is one of the best places to find Clark's Grebe in Minnesota. Be careful, though: hybrids are possibly just as common on the lake as pure birds. Many of the pure Clark's have nested with Westerns, creating offspring with features that are intermediate between the two species. Pied-billed Grebes also nest on the lake. While I've tried to find nesting Eared Grebes on the lake, I haven't been successful. I have found Eared Grebes nesting in Osakis, though, just south of town on Clifford Lake. So, it is entirely possible to find five nesting species of grebes in Osakis in one day!

Fall is my favorite time to bird the lake. The lake's size, along with its openness to the surrounding landscape, makes it a huge attraction to waterfowl. In 2007, I had yet to find a scoter on Osakis. It was October 14, and I told my mom, "I'm going to go find some scoters." I think she rolled her eyes, because it was probably not the first time I had made that prediction. I pulled up to my first stop along the eastern shore of Osakis, and directly in front of me were swimming two Black Scoters! I whooped and hollered and jumped up and down, excited because it was a new county bird for me. Then, at my next stop along the lake shore, I found five Surf Scoters huddled together not too far out. I couldn't believe it. Seven scoters in five minutes. And I was finally able to put an "X" next to Surf Scoter, just like Bob had done years before. I've now seen all three scoters on Osakis.

You literally never know what you're going to find on this lake in the fall. In November 1976, a hunter shot a King Eider on the lake, and in November 2009 Milt Blomberg found a Pacific Loon. I went to search for the bird but unfortunately was not able to find it. While looking for the loon, though, I managed to find two Harlequin Ducks. My mom was lucky enough to be with me and got great looks at the first county record Harlequins with me. The lake is full

of diving ducks mid-October until mid-November, mainly Redheads, Buffleheads, scaup, and goldeneyes, but even Long-tailed Ducks have been found during the fall season. In 2017 I still needed White-winged Scoter for my Todd County list, and when Herb Dingmann reported one from the lake, I jumped in my car and was there soon after. I couldn't find the White-winged Scoter, but quickly found some Black Scoters. I called Herb, who was a few miles away, and he was able to get back to see the Black Scoters, which he still needed for Todd County. Surf Scoters had also been reported that day on Osakis. So all three scoters were present on Lake Osakis at the same time!

I had to wait until November 3, 2018, to get my White-winged Scoter in Todd. I was co-leading an MOU field trip with Aaron Ludwig, visiting lakes in the area to look for scoters and other sea ducks. I don't know why but I was very confident that we'd find a scoter on Osakis, as I had many times before. At the exact spot where I saw my first Black Scoters back in 2007, our whole group pulled over, and there in front of us were two lovely White-winged Scoters. The whole group had awesome views of the birds through scopes, and it completed my personal scoter slam for the lake.

I'll never stop birding Osakis. It seems to offer a new bird or new experience every time I visit. Whether it is April, July, or November, a stop at the lake is often memorable. Hopefully, next time I visit, another rare bird will be waiting.

Ben Fritchman is a pharmacist living in Long Prairie, where he grew up. His birdwatching takes him to all corners of the state, county listing in every county along the way. In 2005, Ben was the first recipient of the MOU Young Birder Award.

White-winged Scoter, by Gerald Hoekstra



New Erpelding Generations WPA in Stearns County

by Myrna Meadows

“Habitat preservation is our best chance to guarantee that there will be birds in Minnesota’s future.” (Bob Janssen, Preface to Birds in Minnesota (2020).

What was a central Minnesota family farm for 115 years is now permanently conserved habitat open to the public due to the stewardship of MOU member Ron Erpelding, his family, and many partners.

The Erpelding Generations Waterfowl Production Area (WPA) includes 277 acres of a major portion of Island Lake, surrounding pastures, woods, restored wetlands, and former croplands in Stearns County. It has been enjoyed by five generations of the family since Ron’s grandfather “rode a bicycle from Iowa” to view and purchase the land in June of 1900.

“As birders know,” Ron said, “habitat is the key to wildlife. The Erpelding Generations WPA is a small step in the right direction and it has been significantly enhanced with the conversion of the 128 acres of cropland into additional habitat as a major pollinator site with 38 species of prairie wildflowers and ten prairie grasses.”

Ron might be known to MOU members as the person willing to travel anywhere, any time to spot a rare bird. On this property, however, 187 species have been documented, the most recent, a Sedge Wren seen and heard on a wet spot in the no-longer grazed cow pasture.

Early on he developed an interest in recording wildlife on the farm. “As a consequence, I have 25 pages of handwritten notes,” Ron says, including his first year list from 1961 with 64 bird species. It may have been predictable that he would become a “county lister” with to date 211 species in each of Minnesota’s 87 counties. Nationally he counts 710 species, with the Black and Brown-capped Rosy Finches recently seen in New Mexico and a Rose-throated Becard in Arizona.

Ron and his wife DeLayne have been owners and stewards of the farm since 1972. “For the last 20 years we have looked for a way to conserve the property so that quality habitat is maintained or improved and future generations of curious kids, and adults could experience the same enjoyment as our family has for many years.”

While serving on the board of the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center in Spicer, Ron met Scott Glup,

a project leader for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) who was knowledgeable about land acquisition. Ron thought the property met Waterfowl Production Area criteria. The USFWS, however, had no land nearby, making the Erpelding parcel, if acquired, a more expensive proposition to manage. He did agree to contact Minnesota Pheasants Forever (PF) Coordinator Eran Sandquist because of the many successes PF had in applying for Outdoor Heritage funds (sometimes known as Lessard-Sams).

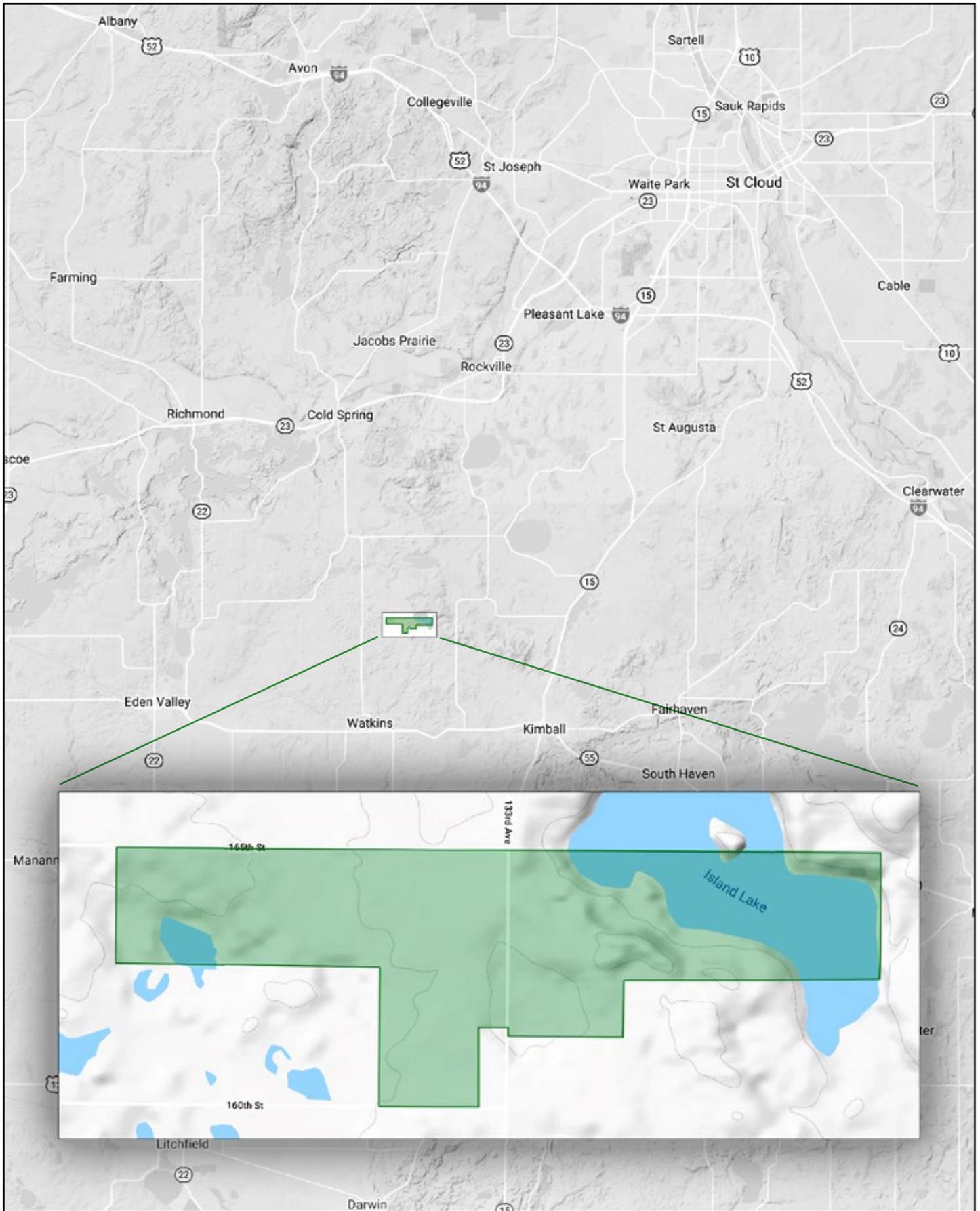
Sandquist saw the possibilities and began pulling together potential partners who showed interest in the project and might be able to commit some matching funds required in the grant application. Ron noted, “The skills of the PF staff are remarkable. They consulted townships and county officials, worked with stakeholders and understood the issues involved in moving taxed property to public ownership.”

The funding package included the family selling the property at less than market value; a cash donation from Stearns County PF; Outdoor Heritage Funds, and the North American Wetland Conservation Act. The completed project was donated to the USFWS and formal dedication was held on August 28, 2019.

A lifetime interest in conservation and environmental education has been a hallmark of Ron’s career. From a farm childhood where he was active in 4-H and FFA to many years as an educator and member of boards, Ron exudes enthusiasm for nature and love for its variety. He is excited to see digital photography and other technology bringing young people into birding. “GPS equipment can now identify exact locations where birds have been spotted. Apps mimic calls and songs help with identification. Documentation through Cornell’s eBird and other checklist programs are an extension of the original Christmas Bird Counts that have occurred for 120 years. Old and new ways of cross-referencing sightings and comparing with historical data are improving citizen science.”

The Erpelding Generations WPA is located 4.5 miles north-east of Watkins, MN on the west side of Island Lake (GPS coordinates 45.359011, -94.383269). Access is via both sides of 133rd Avenue.

Myrna Meadows lives in Koochiching County and is a lifetime member of MOU.



Map showing the general location (small green polygon) of the new Erpelding Generations Waterfowl Production Area. Inset in the lower portion of the map details the the WPA's shape and specific location.

Savaloja Grant Report

Kindergarten Winter Birds Program at Westwood Hills Nature Center

by Greg Feinberg, Interpretive Naturalist, City of St. Louis Park

Last March Westwood Hills Nature Center was a recipient of a MOU Savaloja Grant. We were awarded just over \$3000 to help fund program costs and transportation for all of the kindergarten students in the St. Louis Park school district to attend our Winter Birds Program. This includes approximately 400 students from four different schools: Aquila, Park Spanish Immersion, Peter Hobart, and Susan Lindgren. For many of these students, this field trip may be the first time they get to visit a natural space like Westwood Hills Nature Center.

The goal of the Winter Birds Program is to provide education about bird migration, adaptations, and species diversity; to teach basic bird identification and observation skills; and to help students develop an appreciation for the birds commonly found in their neighborhood and throughout Minnesota during the winter. We work toward these goals with the following activities:

- Students are introduced to many of Minnesota's winter birds through a guessing game incorporating pictures and bird songs. We discuss the reason why some birds migrate while others remain throughout the winter.
- Students watch a puppet show that deals with the ad-

aptations (beaks) that our winter birds have for finding and eating food. Westwood uses puppetry extensively in our programming with preschool and lower elementary students. It's a very effective tool for teaching kids about abstract concepts (in this case adaptation) and making that concept come alive.

- Outdoors, students hike with a naturalist looking for birds, old nests, and food sources, and listening for bird songs. Though we do often identify the birds found with the students on the hike, we really emphasize the act of observing and the excitement of finding birds.

- We end the program by doing a short presentation with one of the raptors Westwood cares for. This gives students the chance to experience a real winter bird up close.

The program runs for one-and-a-half hours. It's a lot of content to fit into a short period of time, and we realize that not everything we teach will be retained by the students. Ultimately, though, what we hope to achieve with the Winter Birds Program is that each student has a positive experience interacting with birds and the natural world. We hope this positive experience will be one of the pieces that leads them to becoming individuals who care about the protection and conservation of the natural world.



March / April

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
MARCH 1 "Masters of the Sky," CNC	2	3	4	5	6 WI Campus Owl Prowl, CNC Intl. Festival of Owls, Intl Owl Ctr	7 Intl. Festival of Owls, Intl Owl Ctr Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC Bird Banding, Eastman Ntr Ctr, 3RPD Bird Walk, ZVAS
8 Intl. Festival of Owls, Intl Owl Ctr	9 Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC	10	11	12	13	14 WI Campus Bird Hike, CNC "Belize, Panama, Aruba," MN Global Birders
15	16	17	18	19	20	21 Bird Banding, Lowry Ntr Ctr, 3RPD
22 Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC	23	24 "Crows!" ZVAS	25	26 Western MN Birding Days, MRVAC (Mar. 26-27)	27 Bird Banding, CNC	28
29	30 Rapids Lake Bird Walk, MRVAC	31	APRIL 1	2	3	4 MN Campus Bird Hike, CNC Bird Walk, ZVAS
5	6 Rapids Lake Bird Walk, MRVAC	7	8	8	10	11 Rapids Lake Bird Walk, MRVAC Youth Birding Competition Prep. Course, CNC WI Campus Bird Hike, CNC
12 Program TBD, MN Global Birders	13	14 Woodcocks, Eastman Ntr Ctr, 3RPD	15	16 Central MN Birding Days, MRVAC (Apr. 16-17) Woodcock Walk, ZVAS	17	18 Hastings Area Birding Festival Bird Banding, Lowry Ntr Ctr, 3RPD Rochester Res. Field Trip, ZVAS
18	20	21	22	23 "Waterbird Use of No. Ottawa Impoundment," MRVAC	24 Bird Banding, CNC WI campus Woodcock Walk, CNC Spring Migration Celebration, HRBO	25 Salt Lake Birding Weekend Spring Migration Celebration, HRBO Springflowers & Bird Migration, MN Landscape Arboretum
26 Spring Migration Celebration, HRBO Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC Root River Co Pk Walk, ZVAS	27	28 Monthly program, ZVAS	29	30		



— MOU Calendar —

March / April 2020

CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Minnesota Campus:
12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN
Wisconsin Campus:
300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

March 1: Masters of the Sky

Details: 11 am–4 pm. The World Bird Sanctuary staff from St. Louis, MO, will be coming to CNC to present a captivating program about birds of prey. Visitors will learn about raptors from around the world. Experience live hawks, eagles, owls, falcons, and other birds up close and in free flight. The presenters will introduce methods to help protect raptors and their habitats. Event Fee: \$10.00 or \$7.00 for “Friends of CNC.” RSVP and non-refundable payment required. Minnesota Campus

March 6: WI Campus Owl Prowl

Details: 6–8 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.

March 14: 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: \$6.00 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.

March 27: 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 3½ 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. Minnesota Campus

April 4: 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: \$6.00 or free for “Friends of CNC,” Hastings Environmental Protectors and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359 and let us know you are coming.

April 11: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. See March 14 description above.

April 11: Youth Birding Competition Preparation Course

Details: 9 am–11 pm. Learn everything you need to be successful in our birding competition by first attending this instructional course! No prior experience needed. Attendance fee is included with registration for the 50 for 50 Youth Birding Competition. For more information or to reserve your spot, please call 651-437-4359.

April 18: Hastings Area Birding Festival

Details: 8 am–4 pm. Celebrate birds and conservation at the Hastings area Earth Day Birding Festival. This is the sixth year the Hastings Environmental Protectors has teamed up with CNC for the Birding Festival. Participate in the Youth Birding Competition. Attend classes and demonstrations that introduce you to raptors, birding, and bird banding. Go on guided bird trips in the Hastings area. To learn more about the day’s events, visit the festival website. Event fee is \$5 or \$15 with a box lunch. RSVPs are required; call 651-437-4359 to reserve your spot.



Sharp-tailed Grouse, by Allan Meadows



Snowy Owl, by Doug Kieser

April 24: Bird Banding

Details: 8:00 am–12 pm. See March 27 description.

April 24: Woodcock Walk (WI campus)

Details: 8:00 am–12 pm. Visit CNC's WI Campus to learn about the world of the American Woodcock. CNC Executive Director, Jennifer Vieth, along with St. Croix Valley Bird Club Vice President, Cathy Olyphant, will share fascinating details about the lifestyle and conservation outlook of these bizarre long-beaked birds. The program will begin with an indoor presentation, which will be followed by a walk through the darkening prairie trails to observe the acrobatic mating displays of male Woodcock. Registration is required, so call 651-437-4359.

HASTINGS AREA BIRDING FESTIVAL

April 18: Hastings Area Birding Festival

Details: 8 am–4 pm. Celebrate the many birds of Minnesota at the Hastings Area Earth Day Birding Festival. This year, Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day by recruiting 50 youth birding teams to participate. Cost: \$5 per person or \$15 per person including a box lunch. Reservations required by calling 651-437-4359 or at www.CarpenterNatureCenter.org.

HAWK RIDGE BIRD OBSERVATORY

April 24–26: Spring Migration Celebration

Details: Join us for a weekend to celebrate the amazing spring bird migration in Duluth. Public education programs at the West Skyline Spring Count, Spring Migration Workshop, Saturday evening presentation, and birding

field trips offered. General information including pricing and the official schedule of events can be found online at www.HawkRidge.org. Location: Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory 3980 E. Skyline Pkwy, Duluth

INTERNATIONAL OWL CENTER

March 6–8: International Festival of Owls

Details: Immerse yourself in the only annual, full-weekend, all-owl festival in North America. Highlights include live owl programs by the World Bird Sanctuary and Scottish Owl Centre. Each year the International Owl Center presents World Owl Hall of Fame awards to people who are making the world a better place for owls. Learn from owl experts from around the globe at the 18th Annual Festival in Houston, Minnesota sponsored by the International Owl Center. The Illinois Raptor Center will present live owl programs (including a live Snowy Owl). There will be owl prowl buses as well as a daytime bus trip, over 1,000 pieces of owl art from children all over the world, speakers, vendors, face painting, nest box building, pellet dissection and much more. The banquet and bus trips require pre-registration. Information on how to register for a bus trip, speaker bios, and general pricing can be found online at www.FestivalofOwls.com.

Location: International Owl Center 126 E. Cedar St., Houston, MN

MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

This informal group meets monthly at the Walker Library in Minneapolis. Anyone interested is welcome. We prefer to monitor the number of attendees, so please RSVP via email to Gregg Severson at Gregg.Severson@gmail.com. Cost: Free

Saturday, March 14. Belize, Panama, and Aruba

Details: 1–3 pm. Gregg Severson will give a presentation on birding during a family trip that encompassed three countries: Belize and Panama in Central America and Aruba off the coast of South America. The birds include both characteristic Neotropical families and wintering North American migrants. For details and to register (so we can monitor attendance for our 50 seats), go to tinyurl.com/globalbirding28.

Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Avenue S (at Lagoon), Minneapolis

Monday, April 12

Details: 6–8 pm. Presenter and topic TBD. For details and to register, go to tinyurl.com/globalbirding29.

Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Avenue S (at Lagoon), Minneapolis

MINNESOTA LANDSCAPE ARBORETUM

April 25: Walks with Matt: Early Spring Wildflowers and Bird Migration

Details: 9–11 am. Matt Schuth, naturalist, author, and Minnesota Landscape Arboretum expert for more than 30 years. Discover the awakening natural world around you through Matt's wealth of wisdom, trivia, and wit. This walk will be a celebration of wildflowers, such as hepatica, bloodroot, Dutchman's breeches and trillium. Catch sight of the first wave of migrating birds! Register on the Arboretum website: \$19 member/\$35 non-member, includes Arboretum admission. Limit 25.

Location: Meet at the Ordway Picnic Shelter

MN RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

See additional field trips and updates at MRVAC.org.

Field Trips

March 26–27: Western Minnesota Birding Days

We will be exploring some of the following birding locations in Stevens and Pope Counties. Glacial Lakes State Park, Barsness & Pomme De Terre Parks, the Morris Wetland Management District, and any open water or flooded fields we may find. We will be searching for migrant waterfowl, early sparrows and other early spring migrants. Cost: \$25/MRVAC members; \$35/non-MRVAC members. Craig Mandel (952) 240-7647. Please call to register.

Location: Meeting in Glenwood, MN

April 16–April 17: Central Minnesota Birding Days

Some of the locations we will likely bird on this tour include Mille Lacs Kathio State Park, a number of waste water treatment plants, Benton Beach County Park, and a few WMAs and SNAs. With luck we will see some late waterfowl and the start of shorebird and songbird migration. Cost: \$25/MRVAC members; \$35/non-MRVAC members. Craig Mandel (952) 240-7647. Please call to register.

Location: Meeting in Princeton, MN

Salt Lake Birding Weekend

April 25: 45th Annual Salt Lake Birding Weekend

Details: 7 am. If you're dreaming about spring and finding migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, why not join the 45th annual Salt Lake Birding Weekend? On Saturday, April 25 volunteers will guide birders around Salt Lake, Big Stone Refuge, the lakes, wetlands and native prairies in Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, and Big Stone counties. We will see the end of waterfowl migration and the start of shorebird migration. Every year interesting birds can show up, such as Say's Phoebe, White-faced Ibis, Prairie Falcon, or Snowy Egret. Friday and Sunday birding is on your own.

This event is free and open to all who are interested. No pre-registration is necessary except for Saturday's dinner. Reservation and a pre-payment of \$11 per dinner should be mailed to Camey Maland at 2570 280th Street, Madison, MN 56256. Payment at the door will be \$12 per dinner and last minute reservations can be sent to oelmal@farmerstel.net.

Additional information and details including a general map can be found online at www.MOUMN.org/saltlake/. This website also provides information about lodging or camping, or contact Ken Larson at prairieMarchshfarm@comcast.net or 612-210-8486.

Location: Meet at the Marchietta American Legion to join guided car caravans for tours of the best birding areas.

April 23: "Waterbird Use of the North Ottawa Impoundment"

Details: 7 pm. Christine Herwig, Regional Nongame Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Nongame Wildlife Program, will discuss waterbird use at the North Ottawa Impoundment located in Grant County. This impoundment was created to reduce flooding along the Red River but has a secondary benefit of providing habitat to birds. Christine will talk about the monitoring efforts and some of the rare and unusual species that have been observed.

Location: MRVAC Bloomington Visitor Center, 3815 American Blvd. E, Bloomington. Call 952-854-5900 for more information.

MN Valley National Wildlife Refuge Bird Walks

Join us for a bird walk on one of the many Refuge 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. Led by Craig Mandel, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist. Reservations are not required for Refuge Bird Walking Treks. Walks typically go from 8 a.m.–10:30 a.m.

Bass Ponds Trailhead – Craig Mandel, 952-240-7647

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

Saturday, March 7 – 8 am
Monday, March 9 – 8 am
Sunday, March 22 – 8 am
Sunday, April 26 – 8 am

Rapids Lake Unit – Craig Mandel, 952-240-7647

Location: Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center, 15865 Rapids Lake Rd, Carver

Monday, March 30 – 8 am
Monday, April 6 – 8 am
Saturday, April 11-8 am

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

March 7: 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

March 21: Bird Banding

Details: 9 am–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. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free.

Location: Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria, MN

April 14: Woodcocks: Dusk Sky Dancers

Details: 6:45–9 pm. Learn the natural history of American Woodcocks. Rush for position at dusk as the male swoops and twitters in a high aerial dance, then hope he lands nearby. Rain dates: April 21 and May 8. Reservations required by 7 days prior. Everyone attending must register and pay \$5.

Location: Eastman Nature Center, 13341 Elm Creek Rd, Osseo, MN

April 18: Bird Banding

Details: 9 am–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. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free.

Location: Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria, MN

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

March 7: 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, Rochester

March 24: ZVAS Monthly Program – Crows!

Details: 7–8 pm. Presented by Dr. Michael Osterholm.

Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester

April 4: 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, Rochester



Sharp-shinned Hawk, by Thomas Burns

April 16: Woodcock Walk

Details: 7:30 pm. Led by Jim Peterson. Every spring the American Woodcock perform one of the strangest and most interesting mating rituals. We will observe it up close, beginning at dusk.

Location: Chester Woods County Park. Meet in the horse corral parking lot. (Note: a County Parks sticker is required to enter the park.)

April 18: Rochester Reservoir Field Trip

Details: 8 am–12 pm. Led by Lance Vrieze. The flood control reservoirs around Rochester have created some of the best bird habitat in Olmsted County and are more often than not where local rarities are found. We will visit several to see what we can turn up during migration. There will only be a few short walks totaling less than a mile. Bring a scope and binoculars if you have them, otherwise some will be available to share.

Location: Heintz Center, 1936 Collegeview Road East, Rochester MN. Meet in the east parking lot.

April 26: Root River County Park Walk

Details: 8:30 am–12 pm. Led by Sandy Hokanson. We will visit Root River County Park south of Rochester near Simpson to look for migrants and spring wildflowers. The park has good walking trails and diverse habitat.

Location: Heintz Center, 1926 Collegeview Road East, Rochester. Meet in the parking lot to carpool at 8:30 am or meet at Root River County Park at 8:50 am.

April 28: ZVAS Monthly Program – John Stravers

Details: 7–8 pm. Details to come.

Summary of the MOU Board Meeting Minutes, December 6, 2019

by Kathrynne Baumtrog, Recording Secretary

The December 6, 2019, Board Meeting was held at the Roseville Library. Present: Richard King, President; Bob Dunlap, Past President; Michelle Terrell, Vice President; Ann Kessen, Treasurer; Bob Janssen, Cindy Smith, Dave Cahlander, Kate Kelnberger, Mark Lystig, Steve Wilson, Susan Barnes Elliott, Kathrynne Baumtrog.

This was a busy meeting, as many board positions changed. Dick King took over as president from outgoing president Bob Dunlap. Names of all current officers and committee chairpersons can be found on the MOU Administration link on the MOU website. Please Note that the Young Birders Committee Chair position is currently vacant. Thank you to all that have volunteered their time to manage so many of the projects, publications, and organizing of MOU!

Reports:

Treasurer's Report: Ann Kessen presented the report, noting that the MOU budget was in the black for the first time in years due to measures taken to reduce spending. Thanks to all involved in balancing the budget and managing funds.

Membership Report: Cindy Smith reported that MOU gained 57 new members since the last report. Any and all ideas for recruiting new members are welcome. Members are asked to check their personal information and verify email addresses, as many publications are strictly digital.

Finance Committee: Dick King presented his plan for safeguarding MOU funds in the Ameriprise Account. The Finance Committee will oversee the funds, and the number of authorized members who need to access the account was determined. A redacted copy will be available in the spring; personal security information needed for such accounts will be removed. The budget for birding field trips led by a MOU member was set at \$150.00 per trip for instate trips, and if a trip leaves Minnesota the leader will collect a fee to pay for expenses.

Savaloja Grant Committee: Steve Wilson discussed the Savaloja Fund and the need for a budget adjustment. Anne Kessen stated that we need to rethink how we determine the

total amount that will be available for grants each year. An ad hoc committee will come up with some options to present to the Board, and these will be considered at the March Board meeting.

Announcements:

Spring Primer: The date of Saturday, March 28, 2020, was set for the annual Spring Primer at Carpenter Nature Center, and planning is underway.

Partnership with the Bell Museum: The Bell Museum's partner to the MOU is Holly Menninger. This year the Bell is featuring "Audubon Animated" January 25–May 31, 2020. The guided bird walks at the Bell Museum that MOU has led have been successful and will continue in 2020. Volunteers to lead a walk are encouraged to apply. Please note that specific training from the Bell is required.

Cedar Waxwing, by Jean Brisance



Birder Bio: Tod Eggenberger



Tell us about yourself.

I am a lifelong Minnesotan, other than going to law school at Columbia University in NYC. I worked at a large Minneapolis law firm out of law school as a commercial litigator and am currently the managing editor for the state build of the Commercial Transactions Service at Practical Law, a division of Thomson Reuters that specializes in providing expert, legal know-how for attorneys. My wife and I reside in the south metro with our daughter, who is a sophomore in high school, and our lovable cockapoo, Rosie. We love to travel as a family, which, apart from birding, is one of my great passions. I also enjoy playing tennis with my daughter, who is on the high school tennis team.

When did you start birding?

I really did not get started birding until 2010. I had always enjoyed hiking, but more and more I got curious about the birds I was seeing and hearing out on the trails. I don't remember exactly how, but I came across an advertisement of a bird walk with MOU that was meeting near my house. I decided to give it a try and, sure enough, I got hooked. I think it might have been the Black-billed Cuckoo we saw. I remember saying to myself, if this cool bird exists in Minnesota, just think about how many other cool birds there must be out there. From there I started to go on some Minnesota River Valley Audubon outings led by Craig Mandel. Craig was an amazing teacher. I've learned so much from him over the years. I also started exploring the state on MBW trips led by Kim Eckert. I think I owe my knowledge of the best places to bird in Minnesota to Kim. Before birding, my world in Minnesota was pretty much limited to the Twin Cities. Thanks to Kim, I got to know the rest of the state.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

I don't think there is necessarily one main attraction for me. I will say, however, that I am a big proponent of Zen birding. Maybe a better way to put that is mindful birding. When I'm outdoors I really focus on seeing and listening to the birds. This allows me to put aside any worries or stresses and simply relax into nature. I was actually reading the book *Zen Birding* the week before I unexpectedly found out I had cancer back in 2011. My whole world was turned upside down. Birding, however, helped center me as I fought cancer and underwent chemotherapy. When I got home from the hospital, my wife set up a chair beside our bedroom window, and I watched spring warblers arrive in our backyard. Pretty soon I gathered my strength (and a walking stick) and started to go birding while I recovered. Birding allowed me to focus on the here and now, rather than worries about the future. I remember having chemo in the morning, and then going over to Carver Park Reserve with my wife later that day to bird and breathe in the outdoors. No doubt Zen birding and mindfulness carried me through that and continues to influence the way I bird today.

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

My favorite places to bird in Minnesota are, in no particular order, Sax-Zim Bog, Oberg Mountain, and North Ottawa Impoundment. I have so many great memories from



Red-shouldered Hawk, by Thomas Burns

all three. This year I have already seen a Barn Owl, Great Gray Owl, Northern Hawk Owl, Barred Owl, Snowy Owl, and Boreal Owl in the bog! Last summer I went to Oberg Mountain with Clinton and Kristina Dexter-Nienhaus and it was simply magical. It was like one of the Black-throated Blue Warblers knew we were coming and rehearsed a song to sing especially for us. Rather than the bird leaving first, we were the ones who finally had to move on along the path. We could still hear the bird singing as we hiked further along the trails. I also remember a past trip where Clinton and I saw Evening Grosbeaks hawking insects from cars in the parking lot. Oberg is also where I get to see my favor Minnesota wildflower, corydalis.

My favorite memory of North Ottawa is with Susan Barnes Elliott, Kevin Manley, and Liz Harper. We saw a Cattle Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Glossy Ibis, and Hudsonian Godwit, among other birds, at North Ottawa before seeing a Western Wood-Pewee at Buffalo State Park the same day.

My favorite spots to bird outside of Minnesota both involve water. The first is LaVerna Preserve in Maine, which is a lot like Oberg Mountain, only the end of the trail opens to the Atlantic Ocean, rather than Lake Superior. Similarly, you get to hear Black-throated Blue Warblers, which are my favorite warbler species. My other favorite is Riserva naturale regionale Foce dell'Isonzo—Isola della Cona in northeast Italy between Venice and Trieste. The reserve has blinds that surround a wetland on the Isonzo River. I was introduced to the reserve by a good friend and fellow birding adventurer in Trieste, and it is a birding must every time we visit him. I think the bulk of my European birding list comes from that one location. My wife and I are going back this summer, and I'm sure to add yet more birds to my list.

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

I love birding both by myself and with friends. I have a large group of friends who are birders, so we have had many fun adventures across the state. In January, Liz Harper, Kevin Manley, and I birded along the North Shore to Grand Marais, including the Gunflint Trail, and then high-tailed it over to Sax-Zim Bog in time to see the Boreal Owl on Admiral Road. It has also become an annual tradition for Craig Mandel, Susan Elliott Barnes, and I to go birding on January 1st. I've also done birdathons with Clinton and Kristina Dexter-Nienhaus and John Richardson. I could mention many others, like Doug Kieser and others who I enjoy birding with or simply enjoying bumping into out in the field (I'm thinking of you, Schumachers and Martins). No matter whom I bird with, the emphasis is always on having fun and camaraderie. I also enjoy birding by myself, especially during spring migration, when I like to focus on bird song and long contemplative hikes in the woods.

Favorite bird or bird family?

This is an easy question for me. My favorite bird is the Atlantic Puffin. I've liked them for so long that I don't even remember how my obsession with puffins started. I even had a pet rabbit named Puffin! I've been to every island off the coast of Maine to see puffins. My family and I have been going to Maine for over 25 years. We stay is near Eastern Egg Rock, which is where Dr. Stephen Kress reintroduced puffins to the U.S. Puffins had last nested there in 1885. Through his efforts, the first pairs of nesting puffins showed up in 1981, and now there is a thriving community of puffins nesting there. We take a boat out to see them every summer, often with Dr. Kress. I'm big supporter of National Audubon's Project Puffin, which not only supports puffins but other Maine seabirds as well.

What new bird would you most like to see most?

My life list for North America is two birds shy of 600. Other than a rarity for Minnesota, the only regular Minnesota bird left for me is the Little Gull. Fingers crossed that this May I see one in Duluth (hint, hint, Clinton), plus a rarity.

Smith's Longspur, by Kevin Manley





Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

Carpenter Nature Center
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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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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: \$ _____