



Minnesota BIRDING

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My 2019 Minnesota Green Big Year

by Gregg Severson

In 2014 Dorian Anderson completed a biking Big Year spanning the 48 contiguous U.S. states. He recorded 618 species of birds while biking over 17,000 miles (that's nearly 50 miles a day), and while not using *any* motorized transport! Importantly, he also raised almost \$50,000 for conservation. I followed his adventures in real time via his blog (bikingforbirds.blogspot.com). He had the mental fortitude and discipline to blog every single day during his trip. I was truly inspired by his project, and while there was no way I was able to undertake a similar effort, I was intrigued by the idea of a biking Big Year on a smaller scale.

I had long been drawn to doing a Big Year, but I didn't want all of the driving that comes with a conventional one. My partner Kellie and I have taken a number of actions to build sustainability into our lives. One of the most significant was selling our car. This committed us to a lot more biking and the use of public transit, since hopping in a car was no longer an option.

The benefits of bike-birding are many. The primary reason that most bike-birders give for this transportation choice is that it dramatically low-

ers one's carbon footprint. But there are other benefits, too. It's good exercise, powering yourself to all the different birds. The constant motivation to see more birds is powerful, which means you visit lots of different habitats, as well as chase rare birds that are reported by other birders. As you bike, you are more connected to the landscape. Since you're moving slower than a car, you see more and are better able to stop. You also are essentially outside the entire time, which means you're better able to hear what's around you.

In late 2018 I decided to embark on a green Big Half Year, starting January 1, 2019. I would spend six months trying to find as many bird species as I could, using only my own power for transportation. I wanted to use the occasion of doing this Big Half Year to raise funds for important causes, so I chose two fundraising beneficiaries: Friends of Sax-Zim Bog and the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Sax-Zim Bog is a wonderful area, and the Friends are doing great work in preserving habitat and increasing accessibility. And the MS Society because in 2017 Kellie's sister was diagnosed with MS, and since then Kellie and I have been participating in BikeMS



Kellie and Gregg heading out on BikeMS

events to raise awareness and money for a cure. In effect, this biking Big Year would be a BikeMS event of my own design.

I decided on a half year rather than a full year primarily to reduce the effort. I was mindful of the time and energy a Big Year could take away from other aspects of my life. The six months also coincided well with past fundraisers for Sax-Zim Bog that were specifically Big Half Years. And the timing fit well with BikeMS fundraising, since we were enrolled in a five-day BikeMS fundraising ride scheduled in July. All of my biking for birds before then would get me in good shape for that ride!

The rules I laid out for my Big Year were that the only species that would count were the ones I saw on completely self-powered loop trips to and from home. So, I had to bike or walk for the whole trip to and from home—no biking to see a bird and then taking the bus back. Or, if I had taken the bus to work, no biking to see a bird after work and then counting it.

In January I started by focusing on winter specialty birds and, as with any season, chasing reported rarities. My first big dip for the year came right away on January 4: I chased an Evening Grosbeak in northeast Minneapolis. I spent three hours searching for it, but to no avail. That same

day I did pick up a Mute Swan that was spending the winter at Fort Snelling. Later in the month I biked to St. Paul to see a Carolina Wren, and I biked to the MSP airport for a Snowy Owl. (Yes, it is legal to bike on Cargo Road.)

Starting in late January the weather turned unusually harsh: we had ten separate storm systems between January 27 and March 12. That was ten rounds of snow, with plenty of cold weather in between. In case you were wondering, this weather did make bike-birding more difficult! I took almost no long bike rides in February. However, I was lucky in that there were a couple of really good birds not far from home. The first was a Varied Thrush that was visiting feeders in South Minneapolis, and the second was a Hoary Redpoll mixed in with a flock of Common Redpolls in downtown Minneapolis and visiting all of the birch trees at Cancer Survivors' Park.

We had a cold spring last year too, and migration started late. The best find of March was definitely a Long-eared Owl that appeared in Jason Caddy's yard—just two miles from my home. Jason discovered the owl because some crows were mobbing it, and he kindly alerted me. I rushed out the door and was at his house a few minutes later, admiring a beautiful and hard-to-find bird. Earlier that same day I had seen a Eastern Screech-Owl, so my owl list for the year was doing quite well. By the end of March, I was at 54 species for the year.

Migration really started to get underway in April, so my list expanded rapidly. In late April I was invited to give a talk about my bike-birding at the Hastings Earth Day Birding Festival. I rearranged my schedule so that I was free that entire weekend, and I decided to travel to the festival in the greenest way possible—by biking. I was also excited to tick some birds in rural habitats. However, Hastings is a long way from my house in Minneapolis, especially with questionable April weather. Since the forecast looked OK, I decided to make it a three-day biking adventure.

On this trip I made visits to many well-known hotspots: Holman Field (the downtown St. Paul airport) for a Hudsonian Godwit; Grey Cloud Dunes for some early season sparrows; and Pete Nichols' house/nature preserve, where I got Eastern Towhee, Pine Warbler, Purple Finch, and American Woodcock. Pete graciously hosted me for the night, in addition to sharing the quality birding on his property. That was great hospitality!

The next day I biked to Carpenter Nature Center for the festival and delivered my presentation. During the talk I outlined my birding strategy for the next few months, including my plan to locate a Red-Headed Woodpecker. Well, good thing I mentioned it, because that prompted Kevin & Cindy Smith to mention that they had a Red-headed Woodpecker visiting their nearby house all winter. Since the bird was there consistently, I made plans to bike to their house that evening. When I arrived, Kevin offered me a beer (an optimal post-ride hydration!), while we chatted



This map includes only my Strava data from bike rides, so it doesn't include walking routes. The map is a heatmap. The brighter colors mean that I rode that route more frequently. The brightest is yellow and means I rode that route very frequently (you can clearly see my route to work in yellow/orange on the map) and a pale purple means I only rode it once.

and waited for the Red-headed Woodpecker, who did not let us down. That was definitely some pleasant birding.

The final day of the trip, I headed home via some Dakota County hotspots; at the 180th Street Marsh there were the expected Yellow-headed Blackbirds, as well as a surprise LeConte's Sparrow. All in all, on this one three-day adventure I biked 118 miles and got 29 year-birds.

May was, of course, a very intense month, with tons of new species. Wood Lake Nature Center in Richfield was particularly good that spring, and I kept making repeated visits to get different birds. Two highlights from Wood Lake in May were a Prothonotary Warbler and a self-found and photographed Connecticut Warbler. Other highlights from May were a White-winged Dove visiting the yard of Jim Hovey & Pamela Stevenson in South Minneapolis; a 45-mile round-trip bike ride for Summer Tanager that was visiting a homeowner's feeder setup in Shorewood; and self-finding three Common Terns at the Bass Ponds in the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

In June I transitioned from migrants to uncommon nesting birds. I made a three-day camping trip to the eastern metro, with significant birding and logistical support from Kellie. Afton State Park was great, with many quality species, such as Yellow-breasted Chat, Common Raven, Henslow's Sparrow, and Eastern Whip-poor-will. A trip to northern Washington County was specifically to visit Crystal Spring SNA on a tip from Ezra Hosch; there we found Louisiana Waterthrush and Acadian Flycatcher (although I did dip on the Cerulean Warbler and Yellow-throated Warbler that others had located there).

June also included trips to 140th Street Marsh in Dakota County for Common Gallinule and Blue Grosbeak; a trip to Steve Weston's house in Eagan for Tufted Titmouse; a trip to Hyland Lake in Bloomington for Bell's Vireo; and

one to Powderhorn Park in Minneapolis for a surprising late Greater White-fronted Goose. Matthew Thompson regularly eBirded a Purple Martin colony in Rosemount; thanks to that info I added a side trip there as well.

At the end of June my Big Half Year concluded, and I had 211 species with 1,480 miles biked. I was happy with that species number, since my original estimate, based on my previous Hennepin County counts, was 190-200 species.

As I was completing the Big Half Year, I considered continuing and doing a full year. One number that caught my attention was 222 species. That is the number Diana Doyle lists on her MOU profile for "Green Birding." I knew she had done a Green Big Year prior to 2010, and I didn't know of any other Minnesota birder doing a Green Big Year, so I considered her 222 species to be the record. Since my count stood at 211 species before July 1, it seemed like a good bet that I could surpass 222 if I continued until the end of the year.

As mentioned previously, I was planning to do the five-day BikeMS Ride Across Minnesota in July. That route changes yearly but is always around 300 miles; this year it was a loop ride from Willmar, through Montevideo to Ortonville, into South Dakota, then back through Benson, finishing back at Willmar. This route sounded like a great way to add new territory and species to my Green Big Year. However, according to my rules, in order for species to be countable, I had to bike only all the way from my home and back. So I would need to bike to Willmar at the start, and then bike back home from Willmar at the end, and that would be without the logistical support the MS Society provides during their ride. With help from friends and family who were already participating via driving, Kellie and I biked the whole way from home, all the way into South Dakota and back: 500 miles over nine days. July isn't an

ideal time for adding new birds to the year list, but I added four species over the course of the trip: Western Kingbird, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, and American Bittern. (Thanks to Jason Frank for his local intel about the Ortonville area!) An interesting side note here is that I saw two Swainson's Hawks on our one-day loop in South Dakota: that would have been a great species to add to my bike birding list, but they couldn't count for my Minnesota big year, since I saw them in South Dakota. We also made a bonus side trip and had a delightful bike ride on the auto tour loop at the Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge.

July and August also brought a few rarities closer to home: a Loggerhead Shrike in Dakota County, a Least Bittern at Wood Lake Nature Center, and a Neotropic Cormorant found by Bruce Fall at Richfield Lake Park.

As we entered fall, I picked up a few species I had expected to get in the spring but had missed, such as Northern Harrier and American Wigeon. Then, a Least Sandpiper at Old Cedar Avenue Bridge (spotted by eagle-eye Kellie after I had packed up the scope) gave me 222 species on the year. I had tied Diana Doyle's record!

As you can probably guess, I was motivated to get another species in order to officially break the record: like many birders, I was really hoping that the numerically significant record-breaking bird would also be a particularly cool species. When I saw an eBird alert in late September that Doug Kieser had found a Black-throated Blue Warbler in Rice Creek Trail in Anoka County, I knew that I had to try for that bird. After biking 13 miles to arrive at the exact spot, then spending 40 minutes identifying every bird in the mixed flock, I located the Black-throated Blue Warbler very close to where Doug had first spotted it. A tremendous sense of accomplishment came over me. I spent the whole ride home just basking in the feeling of reaching a goal that had seemed quite distant only a few months ago.

As the fall continued, I added species here and there. Some were relatively common, like White-crowned Sparrow and Northern Pintail; others were uncommon birds that I finally managed to track down, like Harris's Sparrow and American Black Duck. The city lakes in Minneapolis were very productive, with uncommon gulls and sea ducks making appearances. I spent four cold and windy October hours over two days searching for and eventually finding a very elusive Red-throated Loon on Lake Harriet that was first found by Cole Bauer.

My final new species for the year came when I tracked down a Northern Shrike at Wood Lake Nature Center on the sixth of December. It felt like a fitting bird to end on—a very cool species in a location just five miles from my home, and a bird that was once my Hennepin County nemesis!

In total, I biked 3,351.6 miles and tallied 238 species of birds in Minnesota (239 species overall if I count those South Dakota Swainson's Hawks). Thanks to many supporters, I raised \$626 for the Friends of Sax-Zim Bog and



Jason Caddy's Long-eared Owl, by Gregg Severson

\$1200 for the National MS Society. The birding community in Minnesota was tremendously supportive of my effort—from people who helped out with rare and uncommon bird reports, to people who suggested biking routes, to people who welcomed me into their homes, to the many who donated to my two causes. A big shout out to Liz Harper, who stood out for being a generous donor of money and source of birding information as well as the finder of a Baird's Sandpiper when we were birding together at Holman Field. The most supportive person of all was my partner Kellie. She is a tremendous birder (I always see more species birding with her than I do when alone), but she also did a lot to indulge my quest, from agreeing to turn a five-day 300-mile charity ride into a nine-day 500-mile tour, to letting me spend long days biking to far corners of the metro area, to generally letting this endeavor be a prime consideration in all our travel and vacation and free time plans for the year. Doing a Big Year takes a lot of solo effort, but there is no way it can come together without the support of family and friends, as well as the broader birding community. I am touched and thankful for the support, and so grateful I decided to make the Big Year plunge. To follow my current adventures and to stay in touch, I invite you to connect with me at birdingwithgregg.com. I didn't blog daily like Dorian, but there are many more details from my biking Big Year on the blog there. Happy birding!

Gregg Severson, Minneapolis, leads private birding excursions as well as group birding trips for the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, and the Sax-Zim Bog Festival.

Message from the President

The following are the personal thoughts of the MOU President at this important time.

As birders, we know that the world is constantly changing. The seasons change, places we like to bird disappear to development or new ones open up, our favorite birds arrive earlier or later, but we adapt. Now the world is changing in ways that are complex and hard to comprehend, though, challenging our ability to adapt.

The first big change came with the arrival of the pandemic early this year, which led to the cancellation of the MOU Spring Primer and required most of us to stay home and away from others just as the spring migration was starting. COVID-19 infections led to many deaths, particularly among those who are older and socioeconomically disadvantaged, but society started to adjust to this new way of life with masks and social distancing. The birds, though, carried on without notice, and for us birders their seasonal migration provided some sense of balance during this anxious time.

The next wave of change was the economic repercussion of the public health measures necessary to control the spread of the virus. The economy came to a halt, unemployment soared, and it was difficult to predict what was going to happen next. Against the backdrop of uncertainty, birds continued their pairing, nest building, and fledging of another generation, even as our stress levels were high and the future cloudy.

Then George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, and it seemed that everything came apart. Unemployment among blacks and Hispanic workers and anger of long-standing racism and racial inequities in our society became the focus of demonstrations and conversations that continue as of this writing. As a physician, I was overwhelmed with the realization that racism itself played a major role in the development and spread of diseases, including COVID-19, in minority populations. Birding became less important as we looked at ourselves, our attitudes, and our biases and realized that the world is different. Early in the pandemic, I saw a small yard sign on my daily walk suggesting that if you can be anything in life, be kind. I thought that this was a good motto for life with the stresses of virus risk and isolation. Now I feel that this is insufficient and that we need to do more.

After Christian Cooper's experience birding in New York's Central Park, I cannot avoid the realization that my birding life has greatly benefitted by my being white, educated, and economically comfortable, and it always has. My wife and I have birded around the country and the world and have never been asked to justify why we are where we are

or what we are doing. I had never put this in the context of "white privilege" until the recent riots and demonstrations, and now this makes me uncomfortable and questioning past behaviors and actions. I think I am kind to others, but kindness itself, although important, will not produce the necessary and overdue change.

Minority and Indigenous individuals experience racism in employment, housing, and daily encounters that are not part of my life. As individuals and as a society, we have known this for a long time, but it can no longer be ignored. All people are all driven by the same basic needs to be valued, to be respected, to feel loved, to be happy and fulfilled. Black Lives Matter is about more than protesting police killings or the demonstrations of professional athletics.

So, what can we do? The MOU should be against racism and discrimination. However, we need to do more than invite black birders to our meetings and electronic communication lists. We need to engage in conversations with people from minority groups, listen to others, and examine our own behaviors and biases so that we can bring about change. This is truly the BIG YEAR and we should listen, learn, and change. Is the MOU open to diversity? Is the MOU welcoming to all people? Together with Vice-President Michelle Terrell, I urge all MOU members to reflect on how we might effect change in our own lives, as well as offer insights, ideas, and suggestions on how to make the MOU a truly diverse and welcoming organization.

– *Richard King*



Canada Warbler by David Keyes

Conservation Column

A Shorebird, Minus the Shore: Upland Sandpiper

by *Andy Forbes*

The Upland Sandpiper is a regular species in Minnesota; however, its life history is anything but regular. While classified as a shorebird, the Upland Sandpiper's habitat preferences are more like a Grasshopper Sparrow's, as they rarely associate with water. While a grassland habitat obligate that can be somewhat selective at times, they are occasionally found in places that do not by any means resemble a thriving grassland ecosystem, such as soybean fields and airports. Their appearance could be described as odd by some, but they are nonetheless a fascinating bird, and listening to the eerie call of an "Uppie" may transport you back to an ancient time where prairies seemed endless and massive herds of bison roamed the landscape.

Upland Sandpipers are medium-sized shorebirds about the size of Greater Yellowlegs. They are unique in appearance with relatively long tails, thin necks, and small heads, which have a large eye and short bills. Despite appearances, they are most closely related to curlews. They feed primarily on insects and other invertebrates (especially grasshoppers and crickets) on the ground where they generally walk slowly through sparse grass. They will often perch on fence posts, raising their wings above their bodies briefly after landing. This is thought to be some kind of territorial display, although the species nests in loose colonies and overall is not very territorial with others of their kind.



Upland Sandpiper, by Larry Sirvio

From North to South

Upland Sandpiper breeding distribution ranges from Alaska through western Canada, through the Great Plains, and into the eastern United States to New England, where they are much less common. In Minnesota, they are found primarily in western counties within the Prairie Pothole Region, although in migration they can theoretically show up anywhere in the state. Their stay on the breeding grounds is relatively brief—most birds arrive in late April/early May—and are gone by the time the calendar flips to August.

Their wintering range is a world away, primarily in southern Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, and northern Argentina, where they inhabit the "pampas," the vast, fertile, lowland plains where they spend about four to five months of the year. Migration occurs mostly at night in the spring and fall, primarily through a relatively narrow band over the Great Plains in North America. Groups of birds will call to each other while flying overhead, and if you find yourself in a western MN prairie at night at the right time, you might be able to hear them flying overhead, giving a distinctive short chattering call. As during the breeding and wintering seasons, they aren't typically seen near water or in the company of other shorebird species. Interestingly, they are capable of amazing non-stop flights, especially during spring. In a recent study, one bird traveled approximately 7,600 kilometers (4,720 miles) non-stop over seven days while migrating northbound through South and Central America.

Aerial Acrobatics

The species is perhaps most well known for its courtship call and flight display, which includes a combination of displaying on the ground and in flight, where the birds fly in a sweeping, circular pattern, sometimes well over 30 meters in the air, becoming nothing but a speck in the sky. While in flight, birds give a long, drawn out whistle that rises and falls over several seconds, with a few chattering calls often mixed in. This sound is very distinctive and can't be confused with anything else. Both sexes participate in display flights early in the season. The intensity and frequency of the displays wane as the season progresses. Through incubation and brooding, both sexes care for offspring, typically staying with and protecting them until

(and sometimes after) they are able to fly. There is some evidence that males tend to incubate eggs more and stay with offspring longer than females.

Market Hunting and Populations

Upland Sandpipers and Eskimo Curlews were shipped by the trainload to satisfy the epicurean tastes of diners, primarily in eastern cities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Demand peaked for them as the Passenger Pigeon declined. The species crashed as a result, and they became quite scarce in Minnesota, limited to pockets of birds in the west-central and northwestern part of the state. Thankfully, Upland Sandpipers avoided the fate of the Passenger Pigeon and Eskimo Curlew. With the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918 and the elimination of market hunting in the United States, the species gradually recovered, although they will likely never regain the level of abundance that they once had.

In recent years, populations have been mostly stable, although the species is declining in many areas, especially in the eastern United States. While birds are still hunted by people in the southern part of their range (i.e., outside of North America) the main threat to species is without question the loss and degradation of suitable grassland habitat. As noted above, the species will sometimes use habitats other than grasslands to a degree. However, research does strongly suggest that Upland Sandpipers prefer larger tracts



Upland Sandpiper, by Gerald Hoekstra

New MOU Members

David Adams, *Plymouth, MN*
Mary Dresser, *Sandstone, MN*
Robert Ellenbecker, *St. Joseph, MN*
Judy Golden, *St. Paul, MN*
Ed Hicks, *Minneapolis, MN*
Jean Johnson, *Minneapolis, MN*
Stephen Kolbe, *Duluth, MN*
Yvonne Peterson, *Woodbury, MN*
Sushma Reddy, *Roseville, MN*
Kieran Schwartz, *St. Paul, MN*
Brick Fevold, *Bemidji, MN*
Arlon Lande, *Cologne, MN*
Carissa Scanlan, *St. Paul, MN*
Mark Spencer, *Shoreview, MN*
Sandra Swanson, *Inver Grove Heights, MN*

of intact grasslands over smaller, isolated islands of habitat.

Management of grasslands is also very important. Shrub cover is avoided: thus, a regime of prescribed fire and/or woody vegetation removal is necessary for populations to persist in areas. Upland Sandpipers need a combination of shorter grass for feeding and taller grass to hide nests and young; in other words, they need grassland habitat that has some heterogeneity. When applied correctly, grazing can be an effective tool for providing this mix of cover types the birds like. However, care must be taken not to overgraze areas, as too much short vegetation is not desirable, and nests can be vulnerable to trampling.

Continued grassland habitat restoration and management holds promise for maintaining and hopefully increasing Upland Sandpiper populations. When the right habitat is provided, the species does seem more adaptable than many other grassland birds, which bodes well for the future. Let's hope so. Prairies without the whistles of Upland Sandpipers would be like lakes without the wailing of Common Loons.

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.

July / August 2020

Note: Due to frequent cancellations of events because of COVID-19, readers are advised to check the websites of the respective organizations to confirm before going.

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
			July 1	2	3	4 ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 MN Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter NC WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter NC
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 Bird Banding, Carpenter NC	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	August 1 MN Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter NC ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter NC
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	30
31						



MOU Calendar

July / August 2020

Note: Readers are advised to check the web sites of the respective organizations before going.

CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Minnesota Campus:

12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN

Wisconsin Campus:

300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

July 11: 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. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359. Location: Minnesota Campus

July 11: 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. Location: Wisconsin Campus

July 24: Bird Banding

Details: 8 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 but visitors may come and go at any time. Donations of bird seed or suet will be greatly appreciated in lieu of a program fee. Location: Minnesota Campus

Aug 1: 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. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359. Location: Minnesota Campus

Aug 8: 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. Location: Wisconsin Campus

MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

From Craig Mandel: Due to the current social distancing guidelines in place, the July and August MRVAC Bird-watching Treks have been cancelled.

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

July 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. Covid-19 restrictions: All attendees should wear face masks. We will keep groups to less than 10 people. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester. Meet at the west entrance to Quarry Hill Park at the end of 9th St. NE. The nature center is closed so no borrowing of binoculars or use of bathrooms.

Aug 1: 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. Covid-19 restrictions: All attendees should wear face masks. We will keep groups to less than 10 people. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester. The nature center is closed, so no borrowing of binoculars or use of bathrooms.

Requiem for a Marsh

by *Linda Whyte*

In a fate as common as it is harsh,
Human demands are claiming a marsh;
As a landfill expands, to our consternation,
We fondly remember a piece of creation

Who will be here to sing in memoriam?
Maybe Song Sparrows, resilient, abundant,
But will there be Dickcissels singing nearby?
Surely no Loggerhead Shrike, so few,
Finding scant nest-sites wherever they fly

Who will remain to join in the chorus?
Perhaps the Brown Thrashers, will be there for us;
But doubtful Bell's Vireos will be around,
Nor will the Mockingbird, master of voices,
Whose habitat needs grant limited choices

Yellow-headed Blackbirds may join, singing near,
Yet not the Blue Grosbeaks we all hope to hear;
Of waders and shorebirds, will there be more birds
Paying respects? Killdeer may keen where Sora now trill,
But the voices of Bittern and Rail will be still

Way-faring Ibis and Cattle Egret
May be met with a song of silent regret---
Food source reduces where "progress" holds sway;
The bugs that feed Phoebes, including the Say's,
Will languish in number in coming days

Construction will stifle the drone of the dragonfly,
Render a by-gone, the Monarch wing's sigh,
Where milkweed will no longer bountifully grow;
Who of all these will gather here now,
Only the uncertain future will show

Human expansion can be nature's scourge,
A marsh's chorale becoming a dirge;
With limited prospects of compensation,
We're mourning a place of Nature's creation;
RIP, 140th St. Marsh, Dakota County, 2020

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



Common Gallinule at 140th St. Marsh, June 2014, by Gerald Hoekstra

Savaloja Grant Report

Urban Bird Collective — Creating Space: Race and Identity in the Outdoors

by Loreen Ann Lee, Urban Bird Collective

In January, the Urban Bird Collective organized an outing to the North Shore and Sax-Zim Bog with funding support from a Savaloja Grant. I'm so grateful for the generosity of spirit that I experienced with my fellow UBC members as we broke bread together early each morning, then piled into two cars to brave the snowy roads and go looking for the Great Gray Owl. If you've ever been to the Bog area, then you may know it's racially very white. Some of the locals like bird watchers and some do not. A trip to these unique habitats presents the opportunity to search for target boreal bird species, but it also comes with the challenge of entering a space that may not feel very welcoming depending on the color of your skin. I'm glad that as a group of BIPOC and LGBTQ folks rolling together, we had each other to depend upon for physical and emotional safety. At the time, we didn't know that being 'together' would change drastically in the months to come.

As the pandemic and COVID-19 health crisis quickly evolved, UBC's plans for the spring had to adapt. We had been scheduled to host our first Gathering in mid May—a weekend of guided walks, educational classes, and a keynote address with Dudley Edmondson—all based at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Bloomington. For health and safety reasons, we shifted away from in-person events and decided to focus our efforts on leading virtual walks through our YouTube channel. Mr. Edmondson graciously agreed to keep his date with us, and we were able to host an intimate talk with him, our members, and people from the larger community via Zoom on May 16. Mr. Edmondson, who lives in Duluth and is the author of *Black and Brown Faces in America's Wild Places*, spoke candidly with us about race, allyship, and what it means to him to be Black in the outdoors. I was inspired by what he shared with us: "Wherever I go, I belong" and "I have a right to be here."

As I meditated on life under quarantine and Mr. Edmondson's words about taking up space, things were quickly falling apart in the Twin Cities. On Memorial Day, video emerged of the murder of Mr. George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by Minneapolis police officers Derek Chauvin, J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas Lane, and Tou Thao. This event set off weeks of civil unrest against police brutality and in solidarity with Black Lives Matter throughout the Twin Cities, across the nation, and around the globe. Many members of our collective were directly affected by the civil unrest. On the same day, video of Mr. Christian

Cooper, a prominent Black birder, and Ms. Amy Cooper, a white woman who called 911 on him, falsely claiming that an African American man was threatening her life in New York City's Central Park Ramble, went viral. Suddenly, the topic of Birding While Black and lifting up #BlackBirdersWeek became front and center in our UBC social media page.

It is easy to believe that racism and bird watching have nothing to do with each other. It is easy to close our eyes or to look the other way. Now is the time to listen, to lean in and to bear the weight of Mr. Floyd and Mr. Cooper's stories. Let them catapult us into new ways of belonging in the outdoors. One where the broader birding community, both individual people and organizations, truly reconcile with a society that has always been entrenched in systemic racism. It is these injustices of the day, revealed in a harsh and unforgiving light, that tell us there is so much work ahead. Like the Baltimore Oriole who carefully weaves the fine fibers of their nest to cradle their young, let us intentionally weave new spaces where we hold each other with care, empathy and understanding.



Members of UBC at Tettegouche, Jan.

Birder Bio: Ise Varghese



Ise Varghese, by Margarita Mac

Tell us about yourself.

I've lived most of my life in Minneapolis, where I was partially homeschooled and partially self-taught, before attending and graduating from the University of Minnesota. I volunteer at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, both on the trails and at the main office. I'm keeping myself open to a range of career paths at present, but my work might involve environmental policy or biology in some way.

When did you start birding and what first sparked your interest?

I think I've always loved birds, but I started really birding after getting a first flimsy pair of binoculars at about nine years old, and in the years after that traveling with my family to India and Australia and seeing the wildlife there.

How did your interest expand after that first experience?

I got to know local species better by spending literally all of every morning birding for a few springs and summers,

and while camping with my family, from Sawbill Lake to Whitewater State Park, I took off on my own to find as many breeding birds as I could. In university, I studied evolutionary biology and took field classes at Itasca Biological Station. Since I joined eBird (a little late, in 2017) and started contributing to and looking through MOU seasonal reports I've discovered the appeal of county and month listing, as a challenge and a rubric for ensuring I see birds in a range of places and seasons.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

Appreciating life from the point of view of another organism. Figuring out how birds solve their problems and how they occupy an ecological niche.

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

The Minnesota River valley has a lot of my favorite places, from the huge marshes, hills, and lakes around Big Stone Lake and Lac Qui Parle, to the national wildlife refuge closer to home, for having such a diverse mix of floodplain habitats in close proximity to each other. Also, Sax-Zim Bog and similar areas on the southern fringe of the boreal forest, and forest areas such as Itasca and Tettegouche state parks for the breeding passerines: these two types of places make the region around Minnesota stand out for birding on a continental or even global scale.

I've really enjoyed birding around the Alps in Europe, since mountain faunas are all special and the Alps offer species like White-throated Dipper, Alpine Accentor, and Black Grouse, plus it's so easy to get around by transit, hiking, and biking, and there's plenty to fill slow afternoons with. I haven't been to much of the tropics, but out of the regions I have been, the Indian state of Kerala has a lot to offer: vast wetlands like the Kole region and Lake Vembanad backwaters, huge flocks of Siberian migrants at the end of their travels south, wet tropical forests, and if you look even in the big cities you can find species like Indian Pitta, Crested Serpent-Eagle, and Vernal Hanging-Parrot.

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

Some more elusive birds may be easier to sneak up on alone, but overall I've seen far more species thanks to birding collaboratively with others, whether that's birders far more expert than I am or complete novices. Even though big groups get unwieldy and noisy, it seems to me like the more observant eyes and ears the better.

Favorite bird or bird family?

Waterfowl have had a special attraction for me for as long as I can remember, and I'd love to spend much more time watching shorebirds and getting to know them better. I'll admit to having a real soft spot for Old World sparrows, especially the species we don't get in North America though.

Any advice on how to be a better birder?

Get to know some other birders well, and help each other learn and grow with respect to identifying and finding birds. I benefited immensely from doing this and wish I had known much earlier how much it could help. Be ready to make identification mistakes and be challenged. Accept

that sometimes you will never know what you actually saw. I'm going to echo Ben Douglas and say, Sometimes the best approach is to stand still and let birds come to you, but sometimes you can see a lot by hiking far and not stopping anywhere too long.

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

I've contributed dozens of articles to Wikipedia, about birds, history, and more. I'm an enthusiastic fan of musical genres such as hip-hop and dubstep, and dabble in making music.

What new bird would you most like to see most?

Buff-breasted Sandpiper.



Ise Varghese, by Margarita Mac

Shorebird Puzzle

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|-----|------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|------------------------|
| 1. | Black-necked Stilt | 16. | Ruddy Turnstone | 31. | Western Sandpiper |
| 2. | American Avocet | 17. | Red Knot | 32. | Short-billed Dowitcher |
| 3. | Black-bellied Plover | 18. | Ruff | 33. | Long-billed Dowitcher |
| 4. | American Golden-Plover | 19. | Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | 34. | American Woodcock |
| 5. | Snowy Plover | 20. | Stilt Sandpiper | 35. | Wilson's Snipe |
| 6. | Wilson's Plover | 21. | Curlew Sandpiper | 36. | Spotted Sandpiper |
| 7. | Semipalmated Plover | 22. | Sanderling | 37. | Solitary Sandpiper |
| 8. | Piping Plover | 23. | Dunlin | 38. | Lesser Yellowlegs |
| 9. | Killdeer | 24. | Purple Sandpiper | 39. | Willet |
| 10. | Upland Sandpiper | 25. | Baird's Sandpiper | 40. | Greater Yellowlegs |
| 11. | Whimbrel | 26. | Least Sandpiper | 41. | Wilson's Phalarope |
| 12. | Eskimo Curlew | 27. | White-rumped Sandpiper | 42. | Red-necked Phalarope |
| 13. | Long-billed Curlew | 28. | Buff-breasted Sandpiper | 43. | Red Phalarope |
| 14. | Hudsonian Godwit | 29. | Pectoral Sandpiper | | |
| 15. | Marbled Godwit | 30. | Semipalmated Sandpiper | | |



Sanderling, by Lon Baumgardt

Shorebird Puzzle

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