



Minnesota BIRDING

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Results of the 2019 MOU Members Survey

by Bob Dunlap

At the end of last year the MOU distributed a survey to its members, as well as to non-members in the greater Minnesota birding community. It was intended that the results of this survey would help the MOU Board of Directors identify opportunities for change and growth within the organization in this new decade and beyond.

We received 338 responses, comprising 82.5% current or former MOU members, with the remaining respondents being non-members. I had planned to convey a summary of the results early on this year, but as Covid-19 hit, all our responsibilities and priorities changed a bit (to put it lightly), so I have to acknowledge that this summary is coming several months late. However, the results were provided to the Board earlier this year, so I am happy to announce that at least some things highlighted in the survey have already begun to be addressed.

Perhaps most notably, the MOU website needs a facelift. Our website is the most visible aspect of our organization in an increasingly digital world, yet according to the survey 60.7% of respondents indicated that they visit the website only a few times a month or less. The major uses of the website include accessing and entering bird

data, as well as documenting rare birds and keeping track of people's personal lists. What seems to be missing here, according to respondents, is a way to connect people with the organization and its purpose and also a way to draw in new members. Currently, the website seems to be working well for the people who frequently use it, which, as the above statistic suggests, is a minority of MOU members. It is clear that the website needs to refocus on attracting new and different audiences. To that effect, the Board has been actively soliciting feedback from various parties on how to approach changes to the website, and in working with the current website manager has identified an individual who is interested in taking on the challenge.

The MOU's two publications, *The Loon* and *Minnesota Birding*, were identified as two additional opportunities for improvement. The good news is that only 9.5% of respondents indicated that they don't read *The Loon*, and almost 74.5% of respondents identified the journal as having high importance to the MOU's mission. Yet respondents wondered whether it was necessary to continue to publish seasonal report information in the journal, given that the same informa-



Ruby-crowned Kinglet, by Britt Dalbec

tion is readily available online, and noted a general lack in quality in terms of the research presented. The percentage of respondents who indicated that they don't read the *Minnesota Birding* newsletter was a little higher at 15.5%, but the most frequent comments regarding the publication were that members don't know how to access it (since it is now only available online) or that they don't have the desire to read articles in digital form. On the question of offering the publications in print or online, the three options listed received about equal weight: digital copies of both *The Loon* and *Minnesota Birding* (35.3%), printed copies of both *The Loon* and *Minnesota Birding* (28.2%), and a printed copy of *The Loon* and a digital copy of *Minnesota Birding* (29.8%; this is what is currently offered). Navigating the right combination of what to print and what to offer digitally will likely continue to be challenging, but it is clear that whatever is offered digitally needs to be advertised more explicitly so that members know how to access it.

The MOU's Savaloja Grants are often identified as one of the best things the MOU does. A full 95.3% of respondents understood that this program exists, yet only 40.5% of respondents had ever donated or considered donating to the program. Currently, the MOU dedicates roughly 30% of its annual expenditures to funding Savaloja grants, and 78.6% of respondents agreed that this is an adequate amount. The Board recently moved to ensure that at least 30% of the organization's expenditures are available for funding Savaloja grants annually, with room to increase the amount available with additional fundraising.

Demographically, as you might have guessed, the majority of respondents were over the age of 65 (50.7%) and male (55%). In addition, most MOU members who responded (59.8%) have been members for more than 10 years. What these statistics say is that, like the birding community at large (at least in North America), the MOU com-

prises mostly older men and is challenged with attracting younger, more diverse members. This was also a frequently identified issue by many respondents, and it's one that has been apparent to many in the birding world for a long time. Dick King, the current MOU president, is coordinating a diversity team to address this need for greater engagement with different audiences, which seems like a necessary first step in the right direction.

Several other general issues were frequently mentioned by respondents: There is a need for greater advertising and outreach in the organization; MOU-sponsored field trips are enjoyable, and more should be offered throughout the state; the MOU focuses too much on listing; the MOU is perceived by some as elitist. All of these are legitimate issues that the Board is taking seriously and has either already begun to address or is planning to address in the near future. Obviously, we always desire more advertising and outreach, and many organizations struggle to achieve this. Updating the MOU website will help, as will increasing our partnership with eBird (the MOU is getting an eBird portal in 2021!). Once it's safe and healthy to do so again, I'm sure most of us will jump at the chance to lead or attend field trips when that time comes. A little under a majority of respondents (45%) identified themselves as county or year listers. Keeping birding lists is as much a part of birding as the birds are themselves, and it is clear that lists are important to MOU members. Acknowledging this, and the contribution of those who call themselves listers, while maintaining a level of academic and scientific rigor that provides scientific value, is important, since the MOU continues to comprise people with varying interests and educational backgrounds. And regarding the charge of elitism: Perceptions are difficult to change, especially when they've been reinforced by bad behavior of a few individuals. Know that the MOU is no longer tolerating individuals within its membership who either knowingly or unknowingly create barriers to others' enjoyment of Minnesota's birds and birding.

Many, many thanks to those who took the time to respond to this survey. This summary should be considered very high-level: the concerns mentioned above, as well as additional ones not listed here, can and will be discussed in greater detail in the MOU's committees as the organization works toward progress. Some of these changes are relatively easy and can be implemented in the near term, whereas others will likely prove more difficult and involve longer processes. And, as always, we'll be asking the help of MOU members throughout this transitional period. As the MOU solely comprises volunteers, including its officers, board, and committee chairs and members, we continue to acknowledge that any work done on behalf of the organization is volunteer work, and thus the many contributions made by MOU members in any capacity remain greatly appreciated.

Bob Dunlap is Past President of MOU.

Message from the President

It has been an amazing fall. September was a special gift of wonderful color and pleasant weather as we watched the birds on the move. We are very fortunate to have the Minnesota State Parks, various county parks and nature centers, and the national park and refuges that allow us to be in safe areas of nature. Because of our interest in birds, we are often out in nature on a regular basis. This has helped us get through the stress of an early fall snow, the increasing risks associated with the manifestations and spread of Covid-19, and the impending election.

The scientific literature on the value of nature experiences for mental health and well-being is expanding. Richard Louv (2016) has published a curious book, *Vitamin N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life*, that defines ‘nature-deficit disorder’ and is good at describing approaches for engaging children and adults in many aspects of nature. A more recent review on nature and mental health was published (G.N. Bratman, et al., “Nature and Mental Health: An Ecosystem Service Perspective,” *Sciences Advances*, 2019) that is an attempt to put science into practice for improving psychological well-being. I wrote in a previous message about *shinrin-yoku*, or the concept of a nature or forest bath, for improving our sense of well-being. More recently, the benefits of a walk in nature, particularly in new areas where a person could notice small things that produce a sense of awe (an “awe walk”), have been associated with a sense of well-being and increased happiness (V.E. Sturm, et al., “Big Smile, Small Self: Awe Walks Promote Prosocial Positive Emotions in Older Adults,” *Emotion*, 2020). This literature offers evidence of the many benefits that come from our looking for and at birds, especially when we are outside. We are fortunate to have birding as our passion.



Canada Jay, by Dennis Randall

Now, to announce some changes for the MOU: With the public health requirements for staying safe in the Covid-19 pandemic, the annual Paper Session will be a virtual this year (see p. 16). The general theme for the meeting is the changing habitat, and an excellent group of speakers will present recent research in Minnesota. The Paper Session presentations will be available on the MOU YouTube channel for viewing between November 26 and December 4. On Saturday, Dec. 5, at 10:00 a.m., the speakers will be live on a panel to discuss their work and answer any questions. This will give everyone a chance to conveniently view the presentations before the Saturday panel discussion. We hope that this format will be successful and we look forward to having a strong virtual turnout for the panel discussion.

The other big change for the MOU deals with the MOU website. The MOU Board of Directors has established a new Information Technology Committee and has appointed Liz Stanley as committee chair. Liz is a software engineer, a long-time birder, and a Life Member of MOU. She will work with MOU members to identify the website priorities as she develops plans for updating and improving the programming behind the website. It is important to know that no historic data or record processes will be lost in this transition. David Cahlander and the members of the Electronic Communications Committee should be congratulated for providing a wonderful job of creating and maintaining our website for years, and the Board is delighted to have a plan for continuing and moving forward.

Stay healthy and safe through the late fall and early winter, and please plan to participate in the virtual Paper Session in December.

– Richard King



Golden-crowned Kinglet, by Allan Meadows

My Favorite Home Patch: Upper Sioux Agency State Park

by William Marengo

Editor's note: Bill's contribution to this series stretches the meaning of "favorite local patch" a bit perhaps, since he lives in Chaska. But there are fewer out-state birders in the MOU than metro-area birders, so it's good to have a piece about this spot in Yellow Medicine County (where we have zero members!). All of the bird photos in the article were taken in the park.

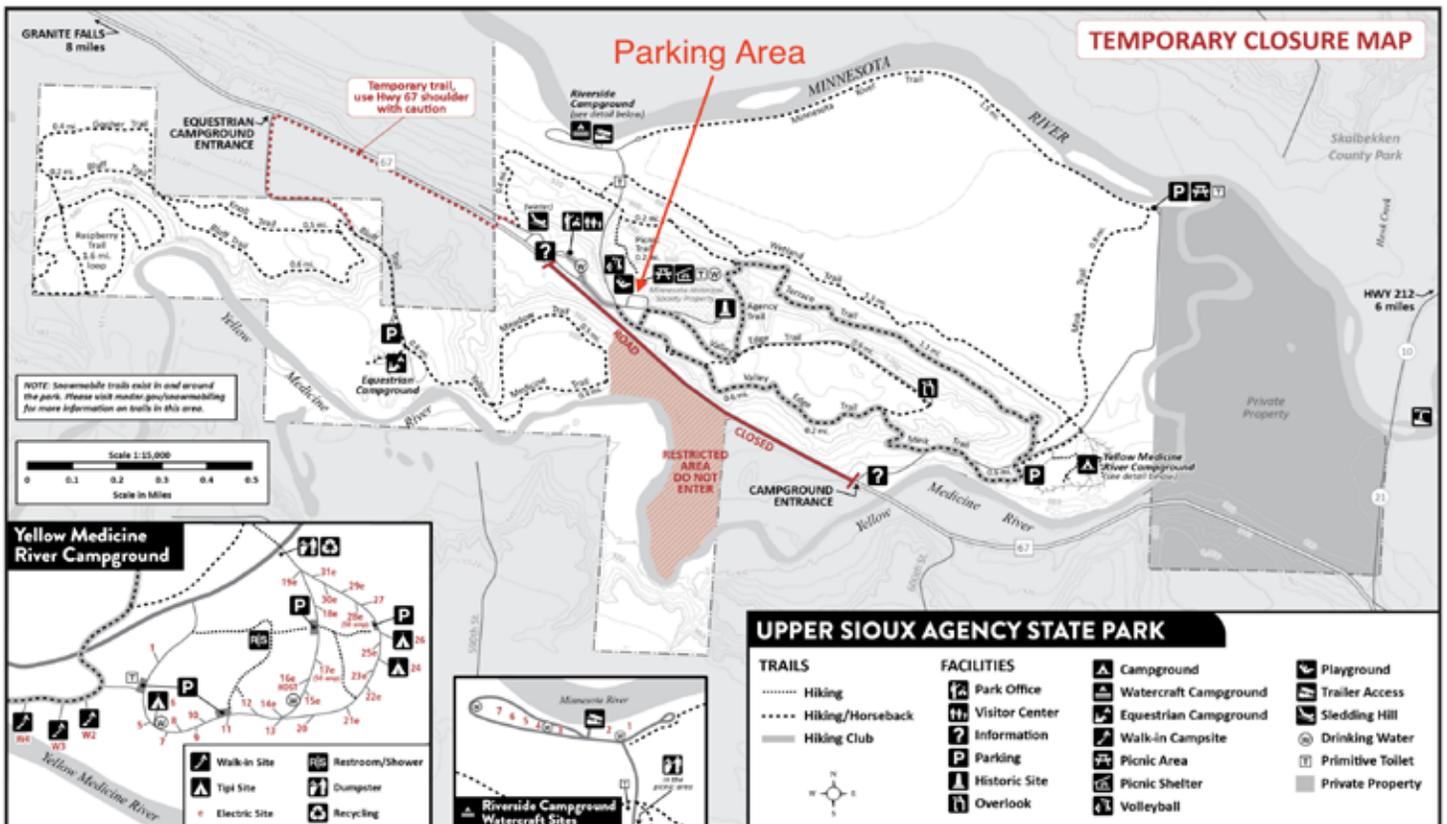
I have this thing for west-central Minnesota. Someday I'll look through all my 35 years of Minnesota checklists and figure out the percentage of trips I've taken in that region compared to other regions of the state away from the Twin Cities area. I think it would be well over half. In 1985 I had my first ever Minnesota birding experience outside of the Twin Cities to this area. I've been going back to this region, repeatedly, ever since.

I can't remember exactly when I first visited Upper Sioux Agency State Park. eBird says it was in 2004, but that doesn't seem right. So I'll happily pretend it was in the nineties, and no one will be the wiser. And if I were told, "You can only bird in one spot in this region forevermore," this is the place I would choose.

At just shy of 1,300 acres, Upper Sioux Agency State Park sits along the Minnesota River just downstream from Granite Falls. Geography places it in a natural migration corridor. The park has just about every kind of habitat: prai-



Orchard Oriole by William Marengo



rie grasslands, river valleys (Minnesota and Yellow Medicine), deciduous woods, wooded floodplain/bottomland, marsh/wetlands, periodic mudflats for shorebirds, and even some dry burr oak savannah. The only thing missing is one of those 10,000-plus lakes. Upper Sioux Agency just about “has it all.”

For those of you who do most of their birding via auto, take note: This park is best covered with your own two legs. With that in mind, I’ll cover the route and areas I usually visit, with an occasional detour down memory lane.

My preferred route begins at the at the top of the road that leads to the Riverside Campground (see park map). Park here, as the campground is currently closed to use and the park web site offers no information on when that may change. Walk down the road through wooded hillsides, where Barred Owls and Eastern Whip-poor-wills have occurred (about the only place in the county one can find these two species), to the campground proper.

The campground sits immediately next to the Minnesota River and is frequently subject to flooding. Regardless of the condition of the campground, the immediate area may be hiked and is a prime location for woodland floodplain species. As the road levels out you’ll be in the area where Prothonotary Warblers were documented nesting in 2016 and were seen as recently as of May 2020.

One memorable experience occurred when I pitched a tent at this campground in May of 2010. I was awakened well before sunrise by the incessant calling of a Whip-poor-will. Soon a Barred Owl joined in, followed by an American Bittern calling from the marsh just upstream from the campground. American Woodcocks began calling and winnowing from across the river. It was as if these birds all knew their time to sing was about to end and were all accelerating the pace and volume before the sun rose.

While this was going on, the diurnal birds started to wake up as the eastern sky was becoming lighter: chattering Tree Swallows, followed by Yellow-billed Cuckoo, then Yellow-throated Vireo, Pied-billed Grebes, Sora, Grea Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Towhee from up the hillside, and others I can’t remember. This whole chorus continued



Prothonotary Warbler by William Marengo

for about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, I lay inside the tent thinking how much better this experience was than seeing any staked-out rarity I’ve ever chased and how few birders, let alone non-birders, ever witness something quite like this.

Later that same morning I walked the next part of the route: the Wetland Trail. And the word “wet” should be emphasized here. At 1.3 miles in length, this trail can be quite soggy, depending upon water levels, and also due to the naturally occurring springs or “seeps” that come down from the hillside. But don’t be deterred: this trail is perfectly placed. It skirts the edges of the wetlands to the north and the thick wooded hillsides immediately to the south. This is a wonderful area for migrant songbirds. Carolina Wren, Wood Thrush, Red-shouldered Hawk, Scarlet Tanager, and Eastern Screech-Owl have been found from this trail. And on that day in May 2010, a first county record Acadian Flycatcher appeared on this trail just east of the road to the Riverside Campground.

After you hike about a mile, racking up woodland and wetland species, the habitat changes dramatically to open grassland and hillsides. In this area expect things like Orchard Orioles, Field and Clay-colored Sparrows, Eastern Kingbirds, Eastern Bluebirds, and Bobolinks, and look for Northern Harriers gliding over the grasslands between the trail and the river.

Continue through the grassland area and you will have a couple of options: (1) bear left (north) and follow the gravel road to the confluence of the Minnesota and Yellow Medicine Rivers, or (2) bear right (south) to the Yellow Medicine River Campground. The former will take you past more woods and that nice, low grassland area. I usually take the latter option and head for the campground, since the former requires more time and energy than I usually have.

The Yellow Medicine River Campground does quite well for migrant songbirds. Work especially the areas closest to the Yellow Medicine River and by the walk-in campsites. I was doing exactly this back in mid-May 2006 when I heard a song I did not recognize. After spending a few minutes tracking it down, out of the top of a tree appeared



Field Sparrow Nest by William Marengo

a first county record Cerulean Warbler. Its song was unlike anything I have ever heard.

After working the campground, walk the gravel road toward the campground entrance on Hwy 67. This is a burr-oak area consistent for Eastern Towhee, sparrows as well as migrants. About half-way to the highway take the trail, at this point called the Valley Edge Trail, right and proceed uphill hiking through more burr-oak habitat.

Upon reaching the top, you will be presented with a tall grass prairie area that is good for Field Sparrows, Dickcissels, Bobolinks, Lark Sparrows, etc. Bear right/east to the east end of the gravel road that started way back at the west end of the park and the visitor's entrance. At the end of the road and immediately on its north side there is a little knob. This is called the Mazomani Overlook. Hike up to the top of the knob and you will be rewarded with a spectacular view of the river valley. This is as fine a spot for raptor watching as exists anywhere on the river valley. From here one can scan down upon the wooded hillsides and wetlands. A scope is helpful, but since this is a long hike, you're probably not carrying one. In May 2018, Paul Egeland and I did a "big sit" from this spot and tallied exactly 100 species.

From here it's a wee 20-minute or so walk along the gravel road back to where you parked. All the way one walks between the tall grass prairie and the edge of the wooded hillside. Or, if you're with a group, make someone else hike back to the car and drive back to pick you up. Meanwhile, take your time and enjoy the birding and scenery from the Mazomani Overlook.

According to my eBird stats, this route covers just under five miles and anywhere from three to five hours hiking, depending on conditions and how extraordinary the birding is.

I have birded the part of the park south of Hwy 67 a few times, with the areas around the Equestrian Campground and the Meadow/Yellow Medicine Trail offering the best



Cerulean Warbler by David Cahlander

birding, with similar possibilities as above. The Bluff Trail I found too exposed to wind, and I have never birded the Raspberry Trail.

Some final logistical notes: (1) Hwy 67 was washed out in 2019 between the main campground entrance and the visitor's entrance. It's supposed to be rerouted in 2021. The drive between these two entrances requires a lengthy detour. (2) Pay attention to any updates on the park website. Trail conditions are posted there.

Good birding!

Bill has been birding in Minnesota since 1985. He is currently a Seasonal Reports (spring and fall) editor for The Loon and a member of the MOU Records Committee. Look for him out west.



Sunrise from the Mazomani Overlook at Upper Sioux Agency State Park, by William Marengo

Conservation Column:

Tracking Bird Movements: A Brief History and Exciting New Developments

by Andy Forbes

Migratory birds represent a unique challenge to those who work on their conservation for a variety of reasons, one of which is that they are, well, migratory. In order to provide habitat for a species that spends portions of its annual movements across multiple counties, states, and even countries, bird conservation professionals must work together across borders to ensure a species' long-term survival. If one critical component of a species' annual cycle is lost, the species cannot persist. Additionally, birds are difficult to study during migration and on their "winter" ranges, where they often move around a lot and aren't as detectable, since they don't often sing. Sadly, for many species we still don't have a very good idea of how they spend their time in migration or winter on a daily or weekly basis, how often they move, and why, and how populations are connected between their breeding range, migratory routes, and wintering grounds.

The practice of bird banding went a long way toward answering these questions for several species. The U.S. Geological Survey's Bird Banding Lab (which celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2020) supports the collection, management, and sharing of information related to birds in North America. Birds are captured using a variety of different methods, fitted with a uniquely numbered band/marker, and then released. The massive wealth of knowledge gained (especially for waterfowl) through band returns has revolutionized how they are managed, and we have a pretty good idea now of how waterfowl breeding ranges are connected with relatively distinct migratory "flyways."

However, banding alone is not as useful for many other species. The reason for this simple: band returns. Waterfowl are hunted—and harvested—across the continent, providing a great way to get locational information. However, most of the species we know the least about are not hunted, and band return rates are very low—usually less than 1%. Furthermore, we can't get any information on movements of individual birds from a metal band, other than its initial banding location and band recovery location, if we're lucky.

Over the last several decades, radio and satellite telemetry have helped fill in some of these pieces of the puzzle. Birds are captured and fitted with transmitters that transmit either via a pulse on a set frequency or by sending a signal directly to a satellite. To get a signal from a radio transmitter, the bird must be followed using an antenna, by which its general location can then be "triangulated" by moving around on foot or by vehicle. While useful for tracking birds when they are on breeding territories, etc., following a bird through the year using traditional methods just isn't pos-



Hermit Thrush, by David C. Keyes

sible for species that can cover hundreds of miles in days.

Satellite transmitters do not have the problem of requiring a person to collect data in the field, and they can provide real time, accurate locations for tagged birds. This technology has made some truly groundbreaking migratory ecology projects possible. One such study happened right here in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest with Common Loons. You can learn more about this study at: https://www.umesc.usgs.gov/terrestrial/migratory_birds/loons/main.html.

While both traditional radio and satellite telemetry are very useful, they have until recently had limited utility for studying smaller birds, as the weight of transmitters that can transmit over longer time frame has made their use unfeasible, since small birds cannot support their weight. Some other technologies have filled in this gap, including light-level geolocators, which estimate a bird's general location within a variable latitudinal/longitudinal gradient by estimating ambient light levels. While these have been very useful in studying movements and migratory connectivity for many species, including Golden-winged Warblers, there are challenges associated with them. The locational accuracy is somewhat variable and often is only able to point to a general region rather than a specific location, and perhaps more importantly, you must recapture a bird to get access to the data contained in the geocator. Return rates are low for some species, especially those that do not return to the same



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, by Dennis Randall

territories or have higher mortality during the nonbreeding season.

Recent advances in technology and collaboration have begun to overcome some of these obstacles, however. Perhaps the most notable of these are the development of miniaturized radio tags, called “nanotags,” and the establishment of a network of antenna receivers through the Motus Wildlife Tracking System (*motus* is Latin for “movement”). These newer nanotags are tiny, weighing as little as 0.2 grams, which is small enough for use on insects. While the smallest tags still have limited functionality, the technology has evolved to the point where tags small enough to be carried on warbler-sized birds can have surprising capabilities, including longevity, which allows us to track smaller birds over longer timeframes and distances (several months vs. several weeks, or days, as in the past).

Perhaps most exciting is the expansion of the Motus

network of automated receiving stations. These relatively inexpensive “towers” are semi-permanent to permanent antennas which can be placed along migratory flyways, at stopover sites, or most anywhere there is a desire to record bird locations. These towers have a receiving radius of approximately ten miles, and they are always “listening,” which eliminates the need for a person to be physically present. Through the Motus network, any tagged bird, bat, or insect that passes through the station’s radius is recorded and stored in a shared database, and the information is available to everyone in the network.

As the station network grows throughout the continent (and beyond), so too does the ability to get more and more information about migratory pathways, population connections, and stopover ecology. This is critical missing information that we need to conserve migratory birds, and the best part is that the bird never has to be viewed or captured after it is “tagged” to collect this invaluable data. In less than ten years of operation, several assumptions about how birds move and what pathways they follow have been shattered, and amazing insights have been gained through the Motus network. For example, a Gray-cheeked Thrush tagged in Colombia was tracked making an incredible 46-hour, 2,200-mile nonstop flight to Canada, a feat of endurance usually reserved for larger species.

Here in Minnesota and the Midwest, the Motus network continues to expand, and nanotags are being deployed on birds. The next several years will be a very exciting time for breakthroughs in our knowledge of bird movements!

You can learn more about the Motus Network at www.motus.org.

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.

American Pipit, by Kevin Manley



New MOU Members

Virginia Blood, *Burnsville, MN*
Alexis Grinde, *Duluth, MN*
Scott Kelly, *Northfield, MN*
Marsha Kurka, *Shoreview, MN*
Steven Lapprich, *Hastings, MN*
David Mather, *St. Paul, MN*

Savaloja Grant Report

Determining Subspecies Origins of Dark Morph Red-tailed Hawks Migrating through Minnesota

by Alexandra Pesano, University of Minnesota Duluth

Every fall Minnesota hosts thousands of Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) as they migrate south for the winter. Hawk Ridge, located in Duluth along the bluffs of Lake Superior, is a hotspot for Minnesota raptor migration and a hub for Red-tailed Hawk diversity, averaging 6,164 Red-tailed Hawk observations every fall season. Red-tailed Hawks, like other buteos, exhibit alternative plumages, referred to as “light morph” and “dark morph.” Most of the Red-tailed Hawks passing over Hawk Ridge are light morphs. However, rare dark morphs are also seen at Hawk Ridge; they make up 1-2% of the Red-tails observed every fall. Much debate exists concerning where these dark birds are coming from, both genetically and geographically. For my master’s thesis at the University of Minnesota–Duluth, in collaboration with Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, I am teaming up with some other researchers to answer long-standing questions regarding the subspecies origin of dark morph Red-tails migrating through Minnesota.

Red-tailed Hawks are one of North America’s most widespread raptors. There are 12 recognized subspecies, two of which are important to this project: *B.j. borealis* and *B.j. calurus*. The eastern subspecies (*B.j. borealis*) has only ever been observed with light morph plumage, and is currently known to occur in Minnesota during the breeding season, migration, and over winter. The neighboring western subspecies (*B.j. calurus*) exhibits both light and dark morphs, and can be easily distinguished from *borealis* based on other plumage traits. *Calurus* birds—of either color morph—have never been observed at Hawk Ridge.

To make things even more interesting, the dark morph birds seen at Hawk Ridge do not exhibit the typical *borealis* plumage traits. Instead, these dark individuals resemble northern Red-tails (*B.j. abieticola*), a phenotypically distinct, informal subspecies not recognized by the American Ornithological Society. According to Hawk Ridge Banding Director Frank Nicoletti, about 60% of the birds captured in Duluth are *abieticola* birds. Despite many discussions and observations, there is no scientific evidence proving that dark morphs occur in *abieticola*, nor are there any distinct plumage characteristics that can definitively distinguish dark *abieticola* from dark *calurus*. This is where we come in.

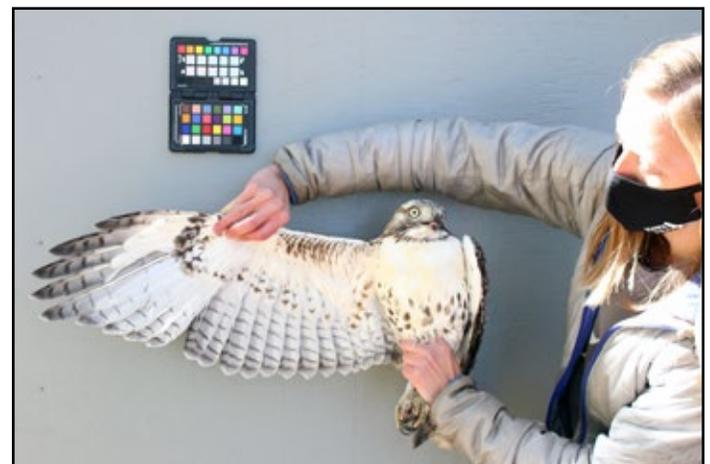
In order to assign the subspecies origin of dark morph Red-tails migrating through Minnesota, we have been collecting morphological measurements, photographs, and



Allie Pesano with dark morph, by Emily Pavlovic



Allie with light morph abieticola, by Emily Pavlovic



Emily Pavlovic with light morph borealis, by Allie Pesano

blood samples from all Red-tails caught at Hawk Ridge this fall. Collecting these types of data will allow us to investigate patterns between an individual's plumage characteristics and its genetic sequence. Ultimately, the genetic information from the sampled migrants will be compared to known *borealis* and *calurus* breeding subpopulations across North America, allowing us to determine whether the dark morph birds caught are genetically different from the *calurus* subspecies. In turn, we will also be able to determine whether these dark birds are genetically similar to the light morph *abieticola* birds, and how genetically related *abieticola* birds are to *borealis* birds.

This fall we also plan to deploy four satellite transmitters on adult Red-tailed Hawks: two on dark morph birds, and two on birds with classic *abieticola* phenotypes. These remote transmitters will be fitted onto the birds like a backpack in order to provide us the birds' geographic movement over the next year. This geographic data will supplement the genetic evidence we find regarding the subspecies of these dark morphs.

Since August we have sampled over 50 Red-tailed Hawks, two of which were dark morphs. We expect our sample size to continue to grow, especially now that Red-tails are migrating through Minnesota in large numbers. Thanks to funding support from MOU's Savaloja Grants program, we will be able to purchase a portion of the sup-

plies needed to process and analyze our genetic samples. Also, thanks to generous supporters, donors, and MOU member Anthony Hertzell, we were able to raise over \$5,000 towards the purchase of the four satellite transmitters. Furthermore, this project would not be possible without the support and efforts of Frank Nicoletti and the Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory Banding Crew. On behalf of the researchers at UMD, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, and myself, we are very excited to conduct and share this groundbreaking research on Minnesota's migratory Red-tailed Hawks.



Red-tailed Hawk, by Gerald Hoekstra

Savaloja Grant Applications and Donations Sought

by Steve Wilson, Chair, MOU Savaloja Grants Committee

MOU will award grants for bird-related projects to be funded from the Savaloja Memorial Fund in 2021. Grants can be awarded for projects that increase our understanding of birds, promote preservation of birds and their natural habitats, or increase public interest in birds. Proposals that include those currently underrepresented in Minnesota's birding community are welcome as a means of broadening public support for birds and their habitat.

Awards typically range from a few hundred dollars up to as much as \$4000. In 2020 eight grants, totaling \$14,575, were awarded for education, public appreciation, research and community outreach. Further details on these and past projects can be found at <https://moumn.org/grants.php>. For 2021, we anticipate that approximately \$12,000 will be available for grants. If your organization has an idea for a great project, please consider applying!

Application information also may be obtained at <https://moumn.org/grants.php>. The deadline for receipt of grant applications is **January 20, 2021**. Grant recipients will be notified by April 1, 2021.

Thanks to you MOU was able to support a diverse array of worthy projects last year. Unfortunately, only half of the projects we supported received full funding, while the others were only partially funded because there wasn't enough money to go around. You can help MOU make sure fewer worthy projects are left short next year by upgrading your membership when you next renew, or right now by donating to the Savaloja fund. Just go to the Donate link at <https://moumn.org/signup.html>. Follow the instructions, and be sure to enter "Savaloja Donation" after "Add special instructions to the seller." Or mail a donation with "Savaloja Fund" on your check's memo line. Minnesota's birds will appreciate it!

MOU Calendar

November / December 2020

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
NOVEMBER 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 WI campus Owl Prowl, CNC Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
8 Tundra Swan Field Trip, ZVAS	9	10	11	12 "Birds on Madagascar," St Paul Audubon	13	14 WI campus Bird Hike, CNC Tundra Swan Field Trip, DNR
15	16	17 "Birding Guatemala," MN Global Birders	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	DECEMBER 1	2	3	4	5 Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
6	7	8	9	10 "For Love of a River," St Paul Audubon	11	12
13	14	15 "Birding in Southeastern Peru," MN Global Birders	16	17	18	19 Christmas Bird Count, ZVAS
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	28	30	31 Owl Prowl, Intl. Owl Ctr.	JANUARY 1	2



MOU Calendar

November / December 2020

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

CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Nov 13: WI Campus Owl Prowl

Details: 6–8 pm. At this time of the year many of the Midwest’s 12 owl species are out and vocalizing. Explore CNC on a guided night hike to look and listen for these owls. Program fee: \$5.00 per person or \$4.00 for “Friends of CNC.” Please call 651-437-4359 to register. Location: Wisconsin Campus: 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

Dec 14: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 9–11 am. Join the St. Croix Valley Bird Club on a morning hike on our beautiful Wisconsin campus. Learn to identify birds by sight and sound. Program fee: \$6.00 or free for “Friends of CNC,” Hastings Environmental Protectors, Hastings High School students, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359 and let us know you are coming. Location: Wisconsin Campus: 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

DNR

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

Nov 14: Tundra Swan Field Trip

Details: 10 am–12 pm. Each November thousands of migrating Tundra Swans stop at the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge on their way to Chesapeake Bay. Join a naturalist for a short presentation at the Whitewater State Park Visitor Center, after which we will caravan through the Whitewater WMA to Weaver Bottoms on the Mississippi River to observe Tundra Swans. Binoculars, spotting scopes, and handouts will be available. Bring your own transportation. For more information call 507-312-2300. Location: Whitewater State Park

INTERNATIONAL OWL CENTER

Dec. 31 Expert-led Owl Prowl

Details: 4:00 pm. Come learn how to identify our local owls by size, shape, silhouette and sound with the Owl Center’s human and owl staff. Following the indoor portion of the program participants will drive their vehicles following staff to 3-4 known owl territories in and around Houston to call and listen for Eastern Screech-Owls, Barred Owls, and Great Horned Owls. Meet at the Interna-

tional Owl Center no later than the listed time (the Center will open 30 minutes prior to the program start time.)

Plan to spend the first 45 minutes indoors (chairs will be placed to keep households at least six feet apart) learning to identify owls by sound before going outdoors. Dress for the weather, and try to wear clothes that don’t make noise when you move. You will drive your vehicle following our staff to 3-4 different locations within ten miles of Houston. Calling will be done from the side of the road, so very little walking is required. Children are welcome, but must be able to stand quietly for at least ten minutes at a time. Expect to return to the Owl Center roughly 2.5–3 hours after program start time.

Program will be canceled in case of significant wind, rain, severe road conditions, or low enrollment, and refunds will be issued for these reasons. Cancellations will be announced at least 24 hours prior to the program time. If YOU need to cancel your reservation, please contact us at least 48 hours in advance. Cost: \$15 non-members; \$10 members **Pre-registration required.** Email karla@internationalowlcenter.org. Masks are required for the indoor and outdoor portions of the program. Location: International Owl Center, 126 E Cedar St., Houston, MN

Boreal Owl, by Dennis Randall



MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

Nov. 17: “Birding Guatemala”

Details: 7 pm. Online presentation via Zoom by Steven and Cynthia Broste. Guatemala in northern Central America is less visited by American travelers than neighboring Belize or Costa Rica, but has a lot to offer for birders. Over 750 species of birds are found in a range of habitats including volcanic mountains, Pacific and Caribbean coastal lowlands, dry scrub thorn forest, and the tropical lowlands surrounding the Mayan ruins in the north. Their two-week visit yielded more than 320 of those species, as well as other non-avian wildlife. A number of these birds are regional endemics, not found in the more visited countries of Panama and Costa Rica. The presentation will also include some discussion of the challenges of birding in Guatemala. Details will be available on the Minnesota Global Birding and Minnesota Birding Facebook pages and sent out over MOU-NET lists; or you can type “tinyurl.com/globalbirding36” into your browser.

Dec. 15: “Birding in Southeastern Peru”

Details: 7 pm. Online presentation via Zoom by Gerald Hoekstra of a trip to Peru, including birding at Lake Titicaca, Colca Canyon (Andean Condors), across the *altiplano*, and over the Malaga Pass. Details will be available on the Minnesota Global Birding and Minnesota Birding Facebook pages and sent out over MOU-NET lists; or you can type “tinyurl.com/globalbirding36” into your browser.

MN RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

Due to the current social distancing guidelines in place, there are no scheduled events for November or December.

Dark-eyed Junco, by Richard Gotz



ST PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Nov. 12: “The Dramatic Evolution of Birds on Madagascar”

Details: 7-8:30 pm. Virtual–Online. Dr. Sushma Reddy, the Breckenridge Chair of Ornithology at the Bell Museum of Natural History and the University of Minnesota. In her presentation, Dr. Reddy will outline her team’s work so far in uncovering the remarkable diversity of birds on Madagascar and investigating the biogeographic mysteries of how they got to this island. Free. See www.saintpaulaudubon.org/upcoming-events/

Dec. 10: “For Love of a River: The Minnesota”

Details: 7-8:30 pm. Virtual–Online. Darby and Geri Nelson, along with Editor John Hickman, will present “For Love of a River: The Minnesota,” which is also the title of a book by Darby Nelson, published in 2019. The three will tell the heartwarming story of how Darby finished the book as he suffered the beginning signs of dementia. His wife, Geri, and John Hickman, the book’s editor, played key roles in getting the book finished and published. Free. See www.saintpaulaudubon.org/upcoming-events/

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Nov 7: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10:30 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

Nov 8: Tundra Swan Field Trip

Details: 8 am. Led by Terry and Joyce Grier. Meet in the east parking lot at the Heintz Center at 8:00 am to car pool. We’ll travel through La Crescent and down the Mississippi to Brownsville to hopefully see THOUSANDS of Tundra Swans and other waterfowl. Trip will return early afternoon. Bring your own lunch or eat at a Subway sandwich shop before returning to Rochester.

Dec 5: 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

Dec 19: Annual Christmas Bird Count

Details: 7:30 am. Led by Clifford Hansen. Each year teams of interested birdwatchers search designated sections of the Rochester area to see what birds can be found. Due to Covid restrictions we may not be able to invite the public to ride with our teams as in previous years. Check www.zumbrovalleyaudubon.org/calendar for updates.

Birder Bio: Bob Williams



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

In 1994 Monica and I made a trip back east to visit family and friends. One beautiful day we had a picnic with my sister and her husband on a small pond near Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks. There were 8 Common Loons on that pond entertaining us. That's what got us started.

How did your interest expand after that first experience?

We then started to travel all over North America visiting places where we could see new birds. During at least one of those years I was able to record about 500 species.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

Aside from the obvious pleasures of being outside and enjoying nature it was a great way to take my mind away from work. I also appreciate the friendships that I have with other birders.

How did you originally become acquainted with the MOU?

In 2006 I started to keep records for the birds I saw in Minnesota. I found that the MOU website was a wonderful way to do that. I served as Field Trip Chair for a couple of years and worked with Tony Hertzell to replace the interpretive sign at Salt Lake.

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

We traveled to Costa Rica and Panama to see birds and thoroughly enjoyed those trips. When we were going to places around North America I liked the mental exercise of planning the trips to maximize the number of species we could see in a year. More recently I've only birded in Minnesota. I've tried county listing and big years but I'm no longer willing to drive long distances, stay in motels and eat restaurant food. This year I've done most of my birding within a 100 mile radius of home and I've taken up day birding. I can't really say that I have a favorite place to go. I plan the day based on what birds I'm hoping to see.

Your favorite bird?

Wood Thrush, which is a bird that I remember from family vacations in the Adirondacks. I also like Bobolinks for their unique song.

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

I've always enjoyed music. I took piano lessons for many years, played the trombone in high school and sang in three different groups in college. I probably should have majored in music but I chose to be a history major instead. I have a very large collection of books in my basement. I've read a lot of American history, but my current focus is on Renaissance art and history. We had plans to go back to Europe this year and visit some of the great art museums, but that will have to wait.

What new bird would you most like to see most?

Long-billed Curlew in Minnesota.



Wood Thrush by David Cahlander

Carpenter Nature Center's Annual Migratory Bird Count & Raptor Watch

by Ben Douglas

On September 27 Carpenter Nature Center and the Minnesota Ornithologist's Union hosted a now annual migratory bird watching program at the Washington County campus of the Nature Center. This year the event took place under muted advertising to ease attendance numbers while still allowing counters to interact safely.

One of the most prevalent species year-in and year-out at this event is the Blue Jay, and 2020 was no different, with 1582 birds counted over a nine-hour span. I myself have counted over 2,000 Blue Jays in a single day twice this year from the Carpenter property and I find great joy in seeing them streaming south every fall. They weren't the only stars of the day, though, as counters and guests were also treated to small groups of waterfowl throughout the day, including Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, both Teal species, and a relatively early group of Redheads.

Other highlights involved an early morning Common Raven beset by a murder of American Crows that numbered close to 100. Near midday the count team even spotted three Wilson's Snipe circling the property. Throughout the day 70 total species provided a great diversity of birds to identify as most made their way south for warmer wintering grounds. This day of sharing a single slice of migration along the St. Croix River was a welcome bright spot in a challenging year for birding programs. Many thanks to Executive Director Jennifer Vieth for working to hold this event and providing the precautions necessary to keep count staff and visitors safe.

Ben Douglas is a member of the MOU Social Media Committee, the MOU Awards Committee, a volunteer guide, and a presenter on technology for birding.



Ben, Liz Harper, and Bob Dunlap with the count board, by Jen Vieth

During a rare period of blue sky, we witnessed a stream of Franklin's Gulls fly over for roughly 45 minutes encompassing 116 individuals. This flight of gulls was interspersed with a few of the days 11 different species of raptors looking to pick up some thermals in the momentary sunshine.

Something of a fun challenge every year at this time is notching a full sweep of expected/potential woodpecker species for the southern half of the state. It was a great joy when a juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker visited the property, making it our seventh species of woodpecker on the day.



Purple Finch, by Jean Brisance

Annual MOU Paper Session

This year the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union Annual Paper Session is going virtual! This decision reflects the MOU's dedication to ensuring the health and well-being of its members and our community. Links to pre-recorded presentations will be available to access on November 28. While we look forward to being together in the future, we are excited about this new format, because it will allow you to watch presentations at your leisure. On December 5, from 10:00–11:50 a.m., there will be an online interactive discussion panel allowing those interested to ask questions about the presentations. From 11:50 a.m.–12 p.m. we will hold the annual MOU business meeting. Stay tuned for more information on this year's virtual MOU Paper Session and the interactive discussion panel taking place on December 5. Look for updates posted via the MOU-NET listserv, on our Facebook and Instagram pages, and in your mailbox.

MOU 2020 Paper Session Program

Alternative Futures: Climate Change and Biome Distribution in Minnesota

Lee Frelich, Director, University of Minnesota Center for Forest Ecology

Deep Time Origins for Minnesota's Songbirds

Tyler Imfeld, Assistant Professor, Biology, Regis University, Denver

Eagles as Ambassadors:

Raising Awareness on How Environmental Threats Impact Them and Less Charismatic Species

Scott Mehus, Education Director, National Eagle Center, Wabasha

Phylogenetic, Functional, and Biogeographical Analyses Reveal Global Patterns of Community Assembly in Diurnal Birds of Prey

Shanta Hejmadi, Graduate student, Ecology, Evolution & Behavior, University of Minnesota

Citizen Science and Research: American Kestrel Monitoring in the Sax-Zim Bog

Clinton Dexter-Nienhaus, Head Naturalist, Friends of Sax-Zim Bog

Wetland Loss in the Western Hemisphere: Impacts on Avian Diversity Known and Unknown

Keith Barker, Associate Professor, Ecology, Evolution & Behavior, Curator of Genetic Resources, Bell Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota

Identifying Habitat Conservation Opportunities

Using Region-wide Radar Interpolation in the Great Lakes Basin

Michael Wells, Fish & Wildlife Naturalist, Ecology Services, USFWS

Cloacal Swabbing as a Tool to Study Diet in Migrating Raptors Using DNA Metabarcoding

Lisa Brouellette, Graduate Student, University of Minnesota–Duluth

Common Tern Movement and Behavior in a Changing World

Annie Bracey, Doctoral Candidate, Conservation Sciences, University of Minnesota, Avian Ecologist, Natural Resource Research Institute, Duluth

Determining Subspecies Origin of Dark Morph Red-tailed Hawks Migrating through Minnesota

Alexandra Pesano, Graduate Student, University of Minnesota Duluth

The Secrets That Feathers Hold: Improving Our Knowledge of Migratory Connectivity for Raptors Banded at Hawk Ridge

Emily Pavlovic, Graduate Student, University of Minnesota Duluth



Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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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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