



Minnesota BIRDING

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Boreal Chickadee
by Lon Baumgartner

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Conservation Column Too Much of a Good Thing? The Snow Goose Dilemma

by Andy Forbes

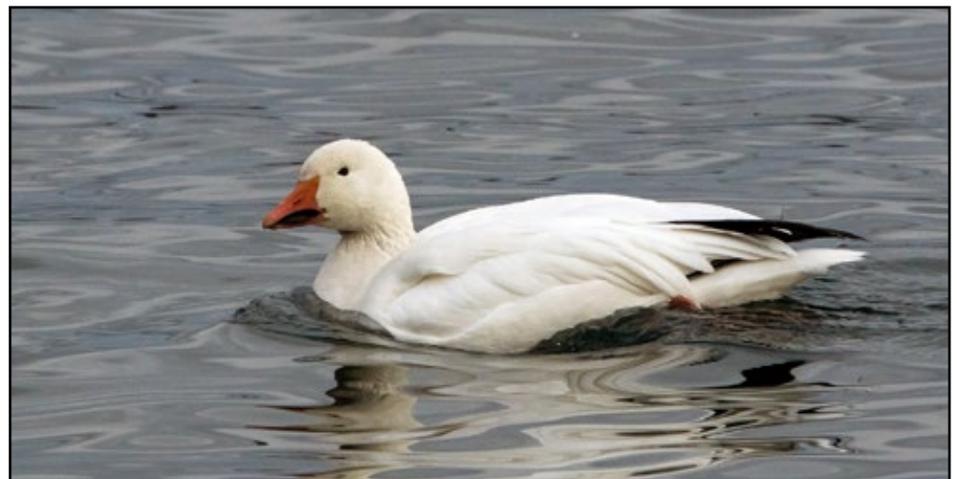
Ragged, V-shaped flocks of Snow Geese (*Anser caerulescens*) flying overhead are an early sign that spring is on the way in Minnesota. Typically, the first flocks of these arctic-breeding species start to move through the state in early March. By the end of April, all but a few stragglers are gone. Seeing (and hearing) a huge flock of Snow Geese take flight all at once is a magical experience of sound and movement. The noise that thousands upon thousands of birds make as they lift off is something that cannot be adequately appreciated unless you are there in person. The southwestern part of the state is the best place to view big flocks of these birds, although with a little luck you could see them just about anywhere in Minnesota during

their migration.

Populations of Snow Geese have increased dramatically over the last several decades, and continue to grow at such incredible rates (up to 9% per year in some populations) that estimating their overall population size is very difficult, as best estimates quickly become out of date. While having healthy populations of any native species is generally something to celebrate, this species has grown so rapidly and to such levels of abundance that it has raised some alarm bells in the conservation community.

Snow Geese breed in the flat, wet tundra and marshes mostly within a few miles of the coastline in arctic and

Snow Goose, by Gerald Hoekstra



subarctic Canada, as well as Alaska and even extreme north-eastern Russia. They feed almost entirely on plant material, and are quite ravenous—females spend up to 75% of the day actively eating. More so than other goose species, their foraging involves “grubbing,” where they rip vegetation out of the soil to feed on underground parts of plants. During the winter months and migration, they alternate between feeding in agricultural fields, and loafing and sleeping on wetlands.

The availability of this relatively new and ubiquitous and abundant food source (waste grain in agricultural fields) has helped drive the rapid growth of Snow Goose populations. Birds that are well fed and in better condition tend to have both higher survival through the nonbreeding season and higher productivity (i.e., more goslings) once they arrive on the breeding grounds. As waterfowl hunter numbers decrease, there is also less mortality of birds during the nonbreeding period, meaning that more and more birds are able to breed every year.

While the arctic is vast, the social nature of Snow Geese and their feeding habits are leading to problems. The sheer number of birds at breeding colonies, combined with the intensity of their feeding, is leading to some colonies literally eating themselves out of house and home. The “grubbing” that they do when feeding rips vegetation from the soil, leaving nothing but substrate (muck) behind. This sensitive vegetation takes decades to recover, due to short growing seasons and other factors, and increasing numbers of geese on established colonies stifles habitat recovery further; this can lead to total devastation of vast swaths of coastal tundra. That is not only a problem for geese, but also the many other species of tundra-breeding birds, such as shorebirds, that also depend upon these fragile ecosystems.

Faced with a unique dilemma, scientists and wildlife managers came together under the auspices of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Arctic Goose Joint Venture to try to figure out what to do. In the mid to late 1990s, they decided that the best way to manage increasing Snow Goose populations was through promoting increased harvest. Bag limits (number of birds allowed taken per day) were increased during regular waterfowl seasons, and the Light Goose Conservation Order was implemented. The Order established a special spring hunts for light geese with the hope of increasing harvest, thereby reducing population size. While these measures have resulted in increased harvest of birds, data suggest that to this point it has not had a major impact on slowing population growth, especially in the midcontinent population. Wildlife managers continue to experiment with new approaches to address this problem.

The news is not all bad, however. While increased populations of Snow Geese can cause local, and regional, habitat degradation in especially sensitive areas such as subarctic coastal marsh, the impact seems to be not quite as bad in many other freshwater habitats, where the birds feed more on above ground vegetation in a more dispersed fash-

Snow Goose, by Gerald Hoekstra



ion. Newer research does seem to indicate that most Snow Goose colonies are located in these kinds of areas that are less vulnerable to degradation.

Additionally, increasing Snow Goose populations are, of course, not all bad: they provide food for people as well as many species of wildlife. Bald Eagles rely heavily on wintering Snow Geese as a food source during the winter months in the southern United States, and there is some evidence that polar bears, faced with less available time on sea ice to feed on seals, may be exploiting Snow Goose colonies as an alternative food source in some areas. The economic impact generated through the sale of duck stamps, hunting licenses, hunting equipment, and hiring guides is massive, and it is important to the economies of many areas—not to mention that the sale of duck stamps and licenses has enabled the protection of millions of acres of wetland habitat.

Time will tell how this unique conservation dilemma unfolds. The dedicated professionals in the waterfowl management community have learned a lot about Snow Geese through their efforts to better understand the species and how best to manage it. One thing is clear: the answers will come from the same model of research, collaboration across organizations and geographies, and thoughtful regulations that have resulted in the recovery of many other species of waterfowl. It’s a reassuring thing to keep in mind as you listen to the annual cacophony of migrating geese flying overhead and dream of the coming spring that they foretell through their passage.

For more information about Snow Geese and their management, you can visit the Arctic Goose Joint Venture’s website at <https://www.agjv.ca/>.

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

Message from the President

The darkest and coldest days of the year are behind us, the vaccines are being distributed, the airwaves have become more peaceful, and the birds will soon return. It has been a tough year for everyone, and the anticipation of spring, migration, and being outside is high. We each develop our own approach to surviving, and I suspect that birds have played an important part of this.

My family is an excellent example. Our daughter is a grade 7-8 special ed teacher in Sacramento. With our encouragement, she recently put several bird feeders on her patio, where she can watch them while teaching by Zoom. She has moved from just “having birds” to exchanging phone photos for identification to discussions with our Sibley Western Guides about questions such as the differences between the American and the Lesser Goldfinch. Her enthusiasm has grown each day, and birds have become a major distraction during the pandemic—just one example of birds and birding improving our life and our families as we get through this pandemic.

Plans are underway for the 2021 MOU Paper Session. The MOU has traditionally had one annual meeting of the membership, the Paper Session, which always takes place on the first Saturday in December. The 2020 meeting was virtual because of the pandemic, and was successful and smaller. The 2021 Paper Session will be live at the University of Minnesota St Paul Student Center on Friday, De-

ember 4. Kara Snow chairs the Paper Session committee. The meeting format will be similar to previous years, with morning and afternoon sessions presenting recent and current research, and the MOU membership business meeting taking place after lunch. The presentations will offer an opportunity to learn about the exciting research being carried out though the state. Mark your calendar.

Another opportunity will be the Spring Birding Primer, which will be held virtually on March 27. To register, contact Susan Barnes Elliott (honeywarbler@gmail.com) or Jennifer Vieth (Jennifer@CarpenterNatureCenter.org). Other changes are coming to the MOU as we move through and beyond the pandemic. Lisabeth (Liz) Stanley, a software engineer and long-time MOU member, is working on database and website designs that will improve our public presentation and the ease of moving to the future. Ann Kessen, MOU Treasurer, chairs an ad hoc committee that is updating the MOU By-Laws. Our goal is to provide new opportunities for MOU members to participate in the organization and in birding in Minnesota.

These are wonderful times for the MOU. We look forward to an exciting spring migration and to hearing from more of the membership as we keep the MOU vital and moving forward.

– *Richard King*

Don't Miss This Year's Spring Primer!

by *Susan Elliott*

Put March 27 on your calendars—it's the date of the 2021 MOU Zoom Spring Primer! Just in time for Spring migration, the MOU will present a stellar panel of speakers to help you brush up on your bird ID skills.



Starting at 8:30 a.m. and emceed by Tom Lewanski, Natural Resources Manager for Dakota County Parks, the Primer will begin with an introduction by MOU President Dick King. The program will feature presentations

by this year's T.S. Roberts Award Winner and nationally known author and speaker Laura Erickson on warbler identification; grassland songbird expert Alyssa DeRubeis on sparrow identification; Victor Emanuel Nature Tours Guide Erik Bruhnke on raptor identification; avian species' relationships expert Ann Kessen on hybridized birds; field biologist/graduate student extraordinaire Kara Snow on birding for science; Minnesota eBird reviewer and this year's winner of both the Voelker and Young Birder awards Ezra Hosch on eBird best practices; and Big Ben “Beast Mode Birder” Douglas on what you can learn when birding in your own backyard.

It's easy to sign up: simply send an email to Susan Elliott (honeywarbler@gmail.com) or Jen Vieth (jennifer@carpenternaturecenter.org) or call Carpenter Nature Center (651-437-4359), and a Zoom link will be emailed to you.

We look forward to “seeing” you on March 27!

My Favorite Home Patch

Two Spots in Brown County

by Michael Oetken

Note from the editor: Do you have a favorite local spot for birding? If so, I'd like to hear about it, and I'm sure others would too. Send me a note if you would like to write a piece for this series. GRH

It is a brutally cold February day as I write this column. My daily drives to escape the pandemic seem dangerous. My wife calls me King of the Flat Tire, so I try not to venture too far in these conditions. I remind myself the beginnings of spring migration are only about a month away. It is hard to imagine those hot summer days when you remind yourself to bring along an extra bottle of water, or those early May days when you wear a light winter jacket at day-break and short sleeves by afternoon.

I have loved watching birds ever since my trips as a young lad to Grandma's house out in the country in north-west Iowa. It seemed there was a Red-headed Woodpecker on every telephone pole. I had my handy *Golden Nature Guide* (129 birds in full color) and would note with pride whenever I saw a new bird. I bought my first Peterson's *A Field Guide to Birds* (found east of the Rockies) in my teens. One of my first notes reads: "We came around a bend in the river and there stood 4 Avocets – April 25, 1965." That was the day I was hooked.

The next 40 or so years I was a casual birder, as family, work, and golf became a focus for my time. I kept a life list, but several events changed my birding habits.

My first MOU database entry was Green-tailed Towhee (Mountain Lake: 4-5-07). This bird began my quest for documenting Minnesota birds. My entries from that day until 2012 were of unusual birds or birds that were new to me. In 2012, I met a Sleepy Eye birder Brian Smith. Brian introduced me to county listing and big days. Through the subsequent years we have birded together frequently, and he has shown me birding areas that have become favorite haunts. We have branched out lately in our quest to see 200+ birds in neighboring counties. This expansion has taken us into several areas previously reported in this newsletter column. (Thank you to those writers!) In the process I have gained a real appreciation of those birders who have 200+ birds in many or all Minnesota counties. It certainly takes a lot of time and energy to reach 200+ birds in any single county.

My focus here is my home county. There are certainly great birding spots within reasonable driving distance, such as the area around 320th Street Marsh in Watonwan County and Swan Lake in Nicollet County. In winter I enjoy birding the sunny northern side of the Minnesota River valley. As some have noted, this side of the valley with many spruce trees, protection from the northwest winds, and facing into



LeConte's Sparrow, Brown County by Michael Oetken

the sun, is like a micro-climate. Overwintering birds, such as Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Townsend's Solitaire are occasionally found here. However, for the non-winter times of the year, I find myself driven to find my nemesis birds in my resident county, Brown. Thanks in big part to our local birding network, I was fortunate to add seven new county birds this year.

Brown County is 90% cropland, with 93% of that in corn and soybeans. Two percent of the land is woodland, and 4% is other (presumably grassland). I believe Wayne Feder's description of Faribault County—"agricultural desert"—might describe Brown County as well. The only woodlands of note are in Flandrau State Park or along the Minnesota River. The greatest concentration of grassland and wetlands occurs in the southwest corner of the county. There are scattered areas of interest to birders in the county, such as the Sleepy Eye WTP and Wildlife Management Areas. These are certainly worthy of inspection, as evident last fall when all three scoters and a Long-tailed Duck appeared within three miles of each other at the Sleepy Eye WTP and Sleepy Eye Lake. The Black Scoter and Long-tailed Duck were first county records.

I have two favorite local patches, though. The first is a southwest patch that includes sloughs and grasslands, and the second a stretch along the Minnesota River. Both routes involve a little travel, since a single area with grassland, marsh, and woods is difficult to find in my area.

The southwest patch includes the extreme northwest end

of Mulligan WMA along 300th Avenue just south of County 18 in extreme southern Brown County. This area is extremely vulnerable to flooding, but when water and mudflats are present, shorebirds can be especially prevalent and diverse during both spring or fall migrations. One notable day, May 15, 2020, we found a total of 17 shorebirds, including 14 White-faced Ibises and a single White-faced/Glossy hybrid. Also present were three Hudsonian Godwits, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes, Sora, Virginia Rail, and a variety of peeps. Last fall we found both LeConte's and Nelson's Sparrows in a grassy area around the marsh.



Prothonotary Warbler, Brown County, by Michael Oetken

If one returns to County 18 and travels one mile west, the road becomes 110th Street. A large grassland/marshland area extends one mile west to 320th Avenue and then north on both sides to 120th Street. This area is probably my favorite place to experience sunrise, with songs of Eastern and Western Meadowlark, Dicksissel, Bobolink, Sora, Wilson's Snipe, and (rarely) an American Bittern. Grassland sparrows, such as Henslow's Sparrow, or LeConte's in fall, come to the road for gravel. This area has been productive for Henslow's Sparrow during breeding season as well. Indeed, on May 15, the Ibis day, I found a Henslow's on territory. Nelson's Sparrows, though rarer than LeConte's, have been seen on occasion too. At the northeast corner of 320th Avenue and 120th Street is another parcel of grassland, which has been good for Grasshopper Sparrows. And the stretch from 320th Avenue north to County 20 has also yielded Gray Partridge.

If one continues west on County 20 for four miles, the road turns to gravel at Highway 258. Here begins another area that's great for sparrows. The grasslands on both sides of the road (near the 1963 B-47 crash site) have yielded Henslow's Sparrows, and in September of 2020 Brian and I had at least 20 LeConte's Sparrows here. When I returned here a few days later, several Gray Partridge flew into the same area. But not only for sparrows. Sedge Wrens are abundant here too, as well as raptors. In March 2019 Brian and I found a Prairie Falcon just south of this area near the city of Comfrey.

My second favorite area, the one I visit most often, is the Minnesota River Valley. The area consists of two segments along the river, broken by a stretch not accessible by road. The first stretch is County 10 on either side of State Highway 4. This wooded area is consistently good for warblers, vireos, and other migrants during spring and fall migration. A favorite spot is a spur, Eden Road, about three miles upriver (northwest) from Highway 4. The road spirals out of the river valley up to farmlands. This heavily wooded road is, as its name implies, idyllic. This road is a summer home to Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird, Wood Thrush, and other typical summer residents. Just upriver from the base of Eden Road is a public access area where for years Cerulean Warblers were present. Unfortunately, none has been noted for several years now. Downriver has been productive in recent years for Prothonotary Warbler. This may be reflective of water levels on the river, but in the last few years they have been found in three different locations along this stretch of County 10. In addition, about a half mile east of Highway 4 is an area often flooded by the Minnesota River. This large area of mudflats has been productive for shorebirds, and occasionally both godwits, Greater Egrets, American White Pelicans, and Great Blue Herons. A scope is required, but this area is well worth scanning for unusual species.

The second segment of the Minnesota River Valley is more commonly known as KC Road. This secluded gravel road runs northwest out of New Ulm. This river valley road is about six miles of shaded woods on both sides of the road. West of the road is a rather steep wooded hill that effectively cuts down on the amount of wind. This makes for ideal listening conditions, and most of the unusual birds mentioned here were discovered by call before sight. It is always good during migration; however, lately it has produced some birds uncommon to this area. A few years ago Brian Smith found an Acadian Flycatcher along one of the springs that flow out of the wooded hillside. These springs are always worth a stop and listen. I have noted Winter Wrens here and last August I had a Carolina Wren present and calling for part of a week. Not far from the Carolina Wren location, in May of 2018, Brian Smith found a Kentucky Warbler. In May 2020, along a six-mile stretch, I heard nine separate Wood Thrush calling. It is not uncommon to hear either Black or Yellow-billed Cuckoo, along with Barred Owl.

As I reviewed my MOU database, I noted 197 species seen in Brown County in 2020. Most of these birds were found in my two favorite patches plus Sleepy Eye WTP or Sleepy Eye Lake. Birding in 2020 was a godsend, which I am sure it was for you readers as well. I feel fortunate to have a hobby that brings such joy to life and brings me into contact with an amazing group of fellow birders.

Mike Oetken is a retired pharmaceutical research chemist who enjoys birding while visiting his daughters in New Mexico and Maryland.

MOU Calendar

March / April 2021

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	MARCH 1	2 Along the Speciation Continuum..., Mpls Audubon Chapter	3	4 Invasion of the Vole Snatchers, Friends of Sax-Zim Bog	5 International Festival of Owls, Intl. Owl Ctr, (March 5-7) Owl Prowl, Int. Owl Ctr.	6 ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
7 "Owls for Peace," Intl. Owl Ctr	8	9	10 H.O.P. webinar Bluebird Trail, DNR	11 Owls in Northeastern Minnesota, Friends of Sax Zim Bog Restoring Prairie and Savanna in Western MN, St Paul Audubon Society	12	13 WI campus Bird Hike, CNC
14	15	16	17	18 Sax-Zim Bog in all Seasons, Friends of Sax-Zim Bog Birding Northern Peru, MN Global Birders	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27 MOU Spring Birding Primer (see announcement in this newsletter)
28	29	30	31	APRIL 1	2	3 ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
4	5	6	7	8 Belwin, Bison, and Birds, St Paul Audubon Society	9	10
11	12	13	14	15 Woodcock Walk, ZVAS	16	17 Armstrong Wetlands & Rice Lake SP Field Trip, ZVAS
18	18	20	21	22	23	24 Rochester Reservoirs Field Trip, ZVAS
25 Root River County Park Field Trip, ZVAS	26	27	28	29	30	



MOU Calendar

March / April 2021

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

March 13: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. Hike various trails on our Wisconsin campus and learn to identify birds with local experts from the St. Croix Valley Bird Club. Face masks requested during check-in and when participants are closer than six feet. Meet at 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI. Program fee: \$5 suggested donation, free for SCVBC members and Friends of CNC.

DNR

March 10: H.O.P. Webinar – Essentials for a Personal Bluebird Trail

Details: 10–11 am. Join the Friends of Whitewater for our monthly H.O.P. into the Park (Healthy Older People) webinar! David Schmidt of the Bluebird Recovery Program of Minnesota will share about the history of bluebird conservation efforts in Minnesota and how you can play a role in the continued recovery of this species. Register for this free webinar at: <https://my.demio.com/ref/fKVi9afE7Z-zQGQoI>

FRIENDS OF SAX-ZIM BOG

Virtual Programs: Friends of Sax-Zim Bog is excited to be offering webinars this winter season. The webinars will be held on Thursdays, starting at 6:30 pm. Registration for these programs is required, but all webinars are free to attend. If you have questions about this series, please contact webinar instructor and Head Naturalist Clinton Nienhaus by email at naturalist@saxzim.org.

March 4: Invasion of the Vole Snatchers!

Details: 6:30 – 8 pm via Zoom with Sparky Stensaas. After an Introduction to the Sax-Zim Bog and why it's the "magic mix" for boreal birds, we'll learn about the invasion each winter of "vole snatchers." Owls, shrikes, hawks, ermines, martens, foxes, coyotes, and more survive and thrive on a diet of voles.

March 11: Owls in Northeastern Minnesota

Details: 6:30–8 pm, via Zoom with Clinton Dexter-Nienhaus. March is usually when our Evening Owl Program is scheduled, as owl activity starts to increase, with nesting season right around the corner for a number of species. Even though we cannot have an in-person program this year, we will still have our Owl Program in March.

If you have wanted to learn more about owls in Minnesota, owls in the Sax-Zim Bog, or you simply just like owls, this program is for you. We will talk about owl diversity in Minnesota, investigate some neat owl adaptations, and talk about the diversity of owls in the Sax-Zim Bog.

March 18: Enjoying the Sax-Zim Bog in All Seasons: Spring and Summer Strategies

Details: 6:30–8 pm, via Zoom with Clinton Dexter-Nienhaus. March sees the departure of many of our winter species, like Pine Grosbeak, Rough-legged Hawk, and redpolls. This leaves a full month or more waiting for green grass and blooming flowers. Why not take advantage of this period of inaction by planning a visit for the spring or summer?

This program will round out our Winter Webinar series by thinking ahead to May and beyond, helping you choose the best time to visit the Sax-Zim Bog if you are interested in bugs, birds, or plants. We hope to answer questions like: When can I visit with the fewest mosquitoes or flies? Can I still find birds in June? What is the best time visit to find butterflies? All of this and more will be answered through this webinar.



Rough-legged Hawk, by Steven Brown



Townsend's Solitaire, by Thomas Burns

INTERNATIONAL OWL CENTER

March 5-7: International Festival of Owls

Please find details at www.FestivalofOwls.com. Location: International Owl Center 126 E. Cedar St., Houston, MN

March 5: Owl Prowl

Details: 5:30 pm, International Owl Center, 126 E Cedar St., Houston, MN

Owls live all around us but are very good at evading detection. Come learn how to identify our local owls by size, shape, silhouette and sound. 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 International Owl Center no later than the listed. Plan to spend the first 30-45 minutes learning to identify owls by sound before going outdoors. You will drive your vehicle following our staff to 3-4 different locations within 10 miles of Houston. Calling will be done from the side of the road, so very little walking is required.

Masks are required for the indoor and outdoor portions of the program. Please note that if you want to meet our ambassador owls you should register for a daytime program, as our owls do not live at the Owl Center and will have gone home by the time of the owl prowl program. We only have 20 chairs that can be sanitized so all individuals must register and pay for the program,

March 7: Owls for Peace

Details: 1 pm, via Zoom. Presentation by Alexandre Roulin, 2021 World Owl Hall of Fame Champion of Owls Award winner, Switzerland. Join us from the comfort of your home. Register via the International Owl Center website. Once you register you will automatically receive an email with a link to use to join the program via Zoom. Although free, registration is required to attend the webinar. No registration is required to attend the YouTube livestream, but preference is given to webinar questions.

MINNEAPOLIS AUDUBON CHAPTER

March 2: Along the Speciation Continuum from North to South: Where Do All These Birds Come from Anyway?

Details: 7–8:30 pm. Join us via Zoom on an evolutionary adventure to learn more about how we can study this question and understand more about how the stunning diversity of birds we all love has come to be. Registration in advance is required for this webinar. Our Zoom account limits us to 100 participants, and these programs have been filling up FAST! Be sure to pre-register and sign in ~5 min. early. Zoom Registration Link at minneapolisaudubon.org/ events. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

March 18: Birding Northern Peru

Details: 7 pm. Online presentation via Zoom by Paul Budde. Details will be available on the Minnesota Global Birding and Minnesota Birding Facebook pages and sent out over the MOU-NET listserv.

MRVAC FIELD TRIPS AND PRESENTATIONS

Due to the current social distancing guidelines in place, there are no field trips sponsored by MRVAC for the months of March and April. Please find updates at <https://MRVAC.org>.

New MOU Members

Scott Anderson, *Minneapolis, MN*
Jon Blumenthal, *Edina, MN*
Robert Boyajian, *Minneapolis, MN*
Alex and Wendy Brown, *Waterloo, IA*
Matthew Buell, *Minneapolis, MN*
Alex Burchard, *Bemidji, MN*
Demelza Houdek, *Richmond, MN*
Donna Klepp, *Cokato, MN*
David Kordonowy, *Minnnetonka, MN*
Kevin Krueger & Linda Potts Krueger, *Hastings, MN*
Thomas Kylo, *Plymouth, MN*
Brandon Lentz, *St. Paul, MN*
David Palo, *St. Paul, MN*
Janet C. Peterson, *White Bear Lake, MN*
Carmen Gavin Vanegas, *Richfield, MN*
Terry and Colleen Wackerfuss, *St. Paul Park, MN*
Breanna Wagner, *Stewart, MN*
Mary Jane Watson, *Plymouth, MN*

SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

March 11: Restoring Prairie and Savanna Habitat in Western Minnesota

Details: 7–8:30 pm. Online presentation via Zoom. Marcie and Mike O'Connor will present "Prairie Haven: Prairie and Savanna Restoration on an Old Wisconsin Farm." The O'Connors bought the farm in 2000 and decided to restore the land back to the way it was before it was farmed. Marcie will talk about the restoration, and Mike will talk about his project of collecting recordings of birds and animals.

April 8: Belwin, Bison, and Birds

Details: 7–8:30 pm. Online presentation via Zoom by Lynette Anderson, Interpretive Naturalist and Restoration Assistant at Belwin Conservancy. Lynette will talk about the wide variety of habitats at Belwin, most notably prairie and oak savanna, and about the introduction of a bison herd onto their land.

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

Due to the current social distancing guidelines in place, there are no scheduled events for March and April.

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON

March 6: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10 am. Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk through Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public—no registration required. Masks and social distancing required.

Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester



Rusty Blackbird, by Mary Graves

April 3: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10 am. Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk through Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public—no registration required. Masks and social distancing required.

Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester

April 15: Woodcock Walk Field Trip at Chester Woods

Details: 7:30 pm. Leaders: Jim Peterson & Jerry Pruett. Every spring the Woodcock perform one of the strangest and most interesting mating rituals. We will observe it up close, beginning at dusk. Masks and social distancing required. Location: Meet in the horse corral parking lot at Chester Woods County Park.

April 17: Armstrong Wetlands & Rice Lake State Park Field Trip

Details: 7 am–early afternoon. Leaders: Terry & Joyce Grier. Dress for the weather, bring your own binoculars, lunch, snacks and water. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. We'll visit the wetlands first, followed by Rice Lake. Trails are generally good in the park, but be prepared for uneven ground and muddy or wet areas. We should see waterfowl, herons, raptors, woodpeckers, early arriving warblers, and possibly Sandhill Cranes in both locations. *NOTE: if the wetlands and lake are still frozen, or the weather is very rainy, this trip will be rescheduled.* *Watch for updates.* Masks and social distancing may still be required.

Location: Meet in the Hy-Vee Barlow's south parking lot (nearest Civic Center Dr) at 7 am to carpool/caravan to the wetlands located just north of Rice Lake State Park.

April 24: Rochester Reservoirs Field Trip

Details: 8 am–noon. Leader: Lance Vrieze. The flood control reservoirs around Rochester have created some of the best bird habitat in Olmsted County and are more often than not where local rarities are found. We will visit several to see what we can turn up during migration. There will only be a few short walks totaling less than a mile. Bring a scope and binoculars if you have them. Masks and social distancing may still be required. Location: Meet in the east parking lot at the Heintz Center (1936 Collegeview Road East, Rochester, MN) to car pool/caravan.

April 25: Root River County Park Field Trip

Details: 8:30–11:30 am. Leader: Sandy Hokanson. We'll look for early migrating birds and spring wildflowers such as snow trillium. Trails can be muddy here. This trip will be cancelled if it's raining harder than a light sprinkle. Masks and social distancing may still be required. Location: Meet at Root River County Park, which is just south of Rochester near Simpson.

Savaloja Grant Report

Staring Lake Nature Center “Owls of Minnesota” Educational Program

by Stan Tekiela

The Staring Lake Nature Center (Eden Prairie, MN) led an “Owls of Minnesota” program for third graders of Prairie View Elementary School on November 17 and 18, 2020. The program was funded with a Savaloja Grant.

We provided the students with 100 owl pellets, which were sterilized and wrapped in foil so they could dissect them and discover what was inside. Discovering a mouse skeleton inside the pellets is always a huge hit with the children. Agnieszka Bacal, our lead raptor handler and trainer, gave two one-hour “Owls of Minnesota” PowerPoint presentations via Zoom for the students. Each presentation was given to three classrooms at a time. They took place on two different days in order to allow time to work with all of the third graders. The program highlighted all of the owls found

in Minnesota, as well as other owls from around the U.S. At the end of each presentation we took questions from the students.

At the time, the students were doing a combination of in-school learning and distance learning. A total of 100 students participated in the program in in-school sessions, and about six children joined via Zoom from home.

It was an excellent program, and I am sure all of the third graders greatly benefited by learning about all of the owls in Minnesota. This opportunity would not have been possible without the generous support of the Savaloja Grant from MOU, which paid for the owl pellets and staff time to put together the presentation and deliver the program to the students.



Red-tailed Hawks by Brad Abendroth

Birder Bio: Jean Brisance



Tell us about yourself.

I am a lifelong Minnesotan. I grew up on the shores of Mille Lacs Lake in Isle, and I currently live in Maple Grove, where I work in the compliance department of a medical software company. My first name is often a source of confusion, as it is not pronounced “Gene.” It is the French “Jean” (like Jean-Luc Picard!).

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

My parents kept track of bird migration dates as far back as I can remember, so I was indoctrinated at a very young age. My first really vivid bird memory was an experience with a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker when I was in kindergarten. It was pecking on a signpost near my rural school bus stop. I walked to within a few feet of it, and I was positively amazed.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

I like phenology in general, and the evolution of the seasons is always interesting and sometimes unpredictable

in this state. I enjoy spending time in familiar spots, seeing what is new or changing, and trying to anticipate what I might find in a specific place and when. Bird photography is also a pursuit of mine.

How did you originally become acquainted with the MOU?

My parents became members many years ago, and my late father, David, contributed numerous photos to the MOU website, *The Loon*, and other publications.

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

Cook County. The spring and fall migrations are always exciting, and the faithful year-round residents and occasional winter visitors keep us entertained.

Favorite bird or bird family?

Sparrows! I feel like the little brown birds are sometimes overlooked and underappreciated, but I think they are all remarkable, beautiful, and worthy of our attention.

Any advice on how to be a better birder?

A piece of advice that I always liked said you should get to know your common birds very well—their sizes, shapes, color patterns, mannerisms, and sounds. The better you know the usual suspects, it makes it all the more apparent when something different or unusual shows up that requires additional scrutiny.

Ever had an unusual experience while birding?

Years ago we were sitting in my parent’s yard in Lutsen with our binoculars, and some beverages, on a summer day. There was a loud thump from something bouncing off the roof, followed by a low aerial duel between a Bald Eagle and an Osprey. Further investigation revealed a Lake Superior pink salmon on the ground next to the house, which was obviously dropped during the tussle. We were thankful the fish did not land on one of us, as that would have quickly ruined happy hour!

What new bird would you most like to see most?

Lewis’s Woodpecker. I struck out when I was on vacation in the Black Hills a few years ago.



Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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