



Minnesota BIRDING

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Tennessee Warbler, by Allan Meadows

Conservation Column Items for Action

by Carrol Henderson

There are three key conservation issues at play to call to attention of MOU members. They include threats to Minnesota's Great Blue Herons, loons, Bald Eagles, and grassland sparrows. Please take the time to make a difference on these issues in the next week or two.

1. Unique Rochester Great Blue Heron rookery threatened by a housing development

In the northwestern corner of Rochester Township is a newly-discovered Great Blue Heron rookery that possesses many unique features, including a long history that goes back five to six decades. The rookery is in a unique upland mature forest habitat where the rookery has been self-sustaining for many years. There is little contiguous upland mature forest left in this entire township—perhaps only 100 to 120 acres. Considering that there are about 23,040 acres in Rochester township, 120 acres comprise only 0.005% (1/200th) of the remaining contiguous mature forest left in Rochester township. Now a developer wants to clear a linear 29-acre strip of development in that tract for ten housing projects through the middle of that remaining forest, including trees that currently sustain a significant portion of the Great Blue Heron rookery.

With no more than perhaps 30 pairs of herons nesting in that forest, clearing those nesting trees for a roadway through the forest threatens survival of the colony.

This is the only Great Blue Heron rookery in all of Olmsted County. Its unique features described below suggest that this rookery would be a good candidate as a state Scientific and Natural Area. Local citizens have rallied to protect the rookery. Local supporters call themselves the "Rookery Rookies." Support is coming from the state Izaak Walton League, the local Audubon Chapter, and area citizens and landowners. The proposal is currently in litigation related to the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act, and an Environmental Assessment has been ordered to review the impacts of the project on the colony.

Unique qualities of this heron rookery:

1) It's one-of-a-kind.

There were 90 Great Blue Heron colonies identified during Minnesota's statewide Breeding Bird Atlas conducted from 2009-2013. However, this colony was not identified in that survey because of its secluded location: it's in a tract of upland mature upland hardwood forest only

two miles west of Rochester, Minnesota. This is the only Great Blue Heron colony in all of Olmsted County, and it is the only colony of its kind in Minnesota that is not associated with a major lake, river, or beaver pond.

2) **Its long-term sustainability.**

One common feature of Great Blue Heron colonies is that their droppings are quite acidic. Over time, the acidic soil tends to kill their nesting trees. This is because the colonies are typically on flat terrain. The acidic concentration in the soil increases over multiple years of nesting. Not so in this case. The Rochester rookery is on hilly, sloping terrain that is underlaid with limestone. Rainfall tends to wash the acidic heron droppings downhill, and the higher pH of the limestone also would contribute to neutralizing the acidity of the excrement. The trees in the Rochester Rookery do not show any cumulative loss of nesting trees over time.

3) **The herons here maintain a long-term carrying capacity in balance with their upland forest habitat.**

The Rochester rookery has achieved a long term “carrying capacity” of about 30 pairs of herons. This is not a large colony by some traditional standards, but it is apparent that the size of this colony is related to the limited abundance of aquatic food available to them in small streams or other aquatic habitats in the Rochester area. While herons can fly out as far as about 30 miles from a colony site, most foraging flights are more likely in the range of two to three miles. It is likely that the prey utilized by these herons would differ from the aquatic species eaten by herons at colonies in more northerly portions of Minnesota, since much of their food would be from smaller streams. (It would make a fascinating research project to learn more about how these herons have adapted to life in Rochester’s mature upland forest.)

In sum, based on my familiarity with Great Blue Heron colonies across Minnesota over the past 45 years, I feel that the uniqueness of the Rochester Rookery is so different from any other heronry in Minnesota that it would be an appropriate selection for designation for state “Scientific and Natural Area” or even as a protected state Wildlife Management Area closed to hunting. It could also be an appropriate site for designation as a protected Olmsted County natural area if local officials and citizens prefer that designation.

add your support for protection—financially or otherwise—of this heron rookery. Primary contacts are Leal Segura (*se-gura.leal@mayo.edu*), Jenna Didier (*jenna.didier@gmail.com*), and John Rust (*john.rust@verisk.com*). The Save the Rookery Group incorporated and formed a 501C-3 nonprofit. They will have a donate button on their website within a day or so to help acquire property to preserve the colony site. Check out: www.savetherookery.com.

You can also make your support and opinion known by contacting these members of the Rochester Township Council:

Matt Kitzmann, Seat 1
507-398-5576 Email: Matt@SSCcleans.com

Brian Mueller, Seat 2
507-252-8078 Email: muellerbrian88@yahoo.com

Jeff Orth, Seat 3 (Board Chair for 2019)
507-254-6358 Email: jefforth155@aol.com



Great Blue Heron, by Carrol Henderson

ACTIONS FOR MOU MEMBERS TO HELP PRESERVE THE ROOKERY:

Please consider joining the citizens of Rochester and

Brian Zmolek, Seat 4
507-951-8852 Email: brian.zmolek@gmail.com

Jamie Neisen, Seat 5
507-258-5215 Email: jpneisen@yahoo.com

This is important for all MOU members, but especially for residents of Rochester and Olmsted County!

2. Lead ammo to be allowed for deer hunting.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to open 90 National Wildlife Refuges to hunting, thus creating more lead poisoning problems for Bald and Golden Eagles. **Public comments are needed by JULY 6!** View this website: <https://www.regulations.gov/document/FWS-HQ-NWRS-2021-0027-0001>. Their statement:

We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), propose to open, for the first time, seven National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) that are currently closed to hunting and sport fishing. In addition, we propose to open or expand hunting and sport fishing at 83 other NWRs, and add pertinent station-specific regulations for other NWRs that pertain to migratory game bird hunting, upland game hunting, big game hunting, and sport fishing for the 2021-2022 season. We also propose to open hunting or sport fishing on one unit of the National Fish Hatchery System (NFH). We propose to add pertinent station-specific regulations that pertain to migratory game bird hunting, upland game hunting, big game hunting, and sport fishing at this NFH for the 2021-2022 season.

This proposal allows continuing and expanded use of lead ammo for deer and big game hunting on National Wildlife Refuges, and I suspect for upland birds like grouse, pheasants, quail, and turkeys as well. In November of 1974 I picked up an immature Bald Eagle that was dying of lead poisoning at the Lac qui Parle Wildlife Refuge in western Minnesota. It died the next day. This is the first Bald Eagle I became aware of in my career that displayed symptoms of lead poisoning from use of lead ammunition. Another eagle was found dead in 1975 at a National Wildlife Refuge in Maryland after being diagnosed with lead poisoning from hunter use of lead ammunition for waterfowl hunting.

That was over 40 years ago! Now, in 2021, Bald and Golden Eagles are still dying from lead ammo used in deer hunting. Why has the USFWS not taken corrective action to prevent our national bird from being poisoned by the continued use of neurotoxic lead in ammunition when nontoxic ammo alternatives are now effective and available? The cost of alternative nontoxic ammo has become comparable to that of lead, it is available from retail and online outlets, the performance is exceptional even up to ranges of 700 yards, and its effectiveness in terms of penetration of big game is

about 20 percent better than that of lead bullets. It appears that big game hunters and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have run out of excuses about why they can't make the transition to nontoxic ammunition for hunting. California has already made the change, and the change is working as hunters discover the benefits and effectiveness of nontoxic ammo for hunting,

Also, it's worth noting that lead ammo is toxic to humans who eat venison as well, and because women, youths, and children who eat venison have lighter body weights, they are even more vulnerable to the detrimental medical effects of lead poisoning than their typically heavier adult male counterparts.

This proposed change in legislation, while well-intended, should acknowledge that lead ammo for rifles, shotguns, or muzzleloaders would be a continuing source of lead poisoning for Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles in any state where eagles occur either as nesting or migratory species. There should be a blanket requirement in all of those states that prohibits use of lead ammo for hunting on all 90 of the National Wildlife Refuges in this proposal for all states that meet this criterion.

This proposal, if passed in its present form, also means that the federal government would not be in compliance with the Bald and Golden Eagle Act of 1940, which prohibits poisoning of Bald and Golden Eagles.

Also, with this proposal the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may not be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916, because Great Britain—and therefore Canada as well—was a signatory to that International Convention. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act included provisions for the signatories to protect migratory birds both in the U.S. and Canada. This would include protection of Bald and Golden Eagles that nest in Canada and migrate through the U.S. to wintering destinations. This includes National Wildlife Refuge lands, where they would be exposed to lead poisoning caused by consumption of lead ammunition fragments in the gutpiles of big game taken on NWR lands.

ACTIONS FOR MOU MEMBERS:

Please make your opinion known on this issue! Eagles need your help so they don't keep getting poisoned after every deer season. **Comments are due by July 6, 2021.**

3. Help Loons. Use non-toxic jigs and sinkers. Report and turn in dead loons.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency is moving ahead with its "Get the Lead Out" program with funds provided through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with remediation funds from the BP oil spill settlement. Steven Yang is leader of the crew who has been hired to coordinate that effort with a variety of educational and promotional events to get anglers acquainted with nontoxic fishing tackle. If

you wish to help prevent loons from getting lead poisoning associated with ingestion of lead tackle, you have several options. Contact Steven.Yang@state.mn.us to find out how you can get involved with events like sponsoring a lead tackle exchange at a lake association event, at a local sporting goods store, or at an event sponsored by the National Loon Center at Cross Lake. Contact Jon Mobeck at jon@nationallooncenter.org. (Use of nontoxic jigs and sinkers also provides benefits for protecting Trumpeter Swans from lead poisoning.)

The National Loon Center in Cross Lake will be collecting dead loons for necropsies this summer to determine the cause of death. The necropsies will be carried out by the Diagnostic Clinic at the University of Minnesota. If you find a dead loon, call Jon Mobeck at 218-692-LOON (5666). Photograph the loon as it was found, with closeups for any details or injuries. Report freshly deceased loons only. Double-bag the bird in a garbage bag, freeze it, and make a label recording the date, lake, location, and county where it was found. Jon will send you a data sheet for recording this information. Decomposed loons will not be necropsied but can be photographed, with relevant data when and where found, and, if possible, taken to a vet office for an x-ray to determine presence of lead tackle.

4. Ramsey County grassland threatened by development.

A 77-acre grassland in Ramsey County currently used by uncommon and endangered sparrows is threatened by

development plans, as reported to me on May 28 in this communication from Julian Sellers:

Hi, Carrol,

Last November, John Zakelj alerted me to the threat of destruction of a 77-acre parcel of mostly grassland adjacent to Battle Creek Regional Park in Maplewood, Ramsey County (44.935, -92.990). John and I are both members of Saint Paul Audubon, and John is a board member of Friends of Maplewood Nature. We were soon joined by Catherine Zimmer, also a Saint Paul Audubon member, and founder of the Legacy of Nature Alliance. We have recently begun coordinating efforts with contacts in Friends of the Mississippi River.

The property is owned by Ramsey County, and it is managed by the adjacent corrections facility. It is off-limits to the public, but John and other birders have, in recent years, managed to photograph grassland bird species from the perimeter, including Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrow, and Clay-colored Sparrow. We have suspected that additional declining grassland species also nest there, and now we know this to be true.

The county intends to sell the property for housing development. We fully understand the need for more housing, especially affordable housing, but we have been trying to persuade Ramsey County and Maplewood officials that the grassland should be preserved and incorporated into Battle Creek Regional Park as an "Environ-



Nesting Loon, Big Mantrap Lake, by Carrol Henderson

ment Natural Area” (the county’s terminology).

We did persuade the county to perform an ecological assessment before making a final decision. That has now begun, and the bird surveyor, on 5/25, found a wonderful array of species, including six Henslow’s Sparrows and 16 male Bobolinks.

I sent an earlier version of the attached document to Ramsey County and Maplewood officials and their development consultant firm to inform them that construction on all or part of the grassland would eliminate those bird species. At that time, we did not have documentation of Henslow’s, Grasshopper, and Field Sparrows. After the 5/25 eBird report, I have updated the document to include those species.

The process for development of the property is proceeding. The Ramsey County Commissioners express strong support for development. The consulting firm has presented its recommendation (for development) to the county, and will present to the City of Maplewood on 6/14. The city would then, presumably, re-zone the property for housing, and continue the process.

Here are the names and email addresses of the Ramsey County commissioners:

- Commissioner Nicole Joy Frethem,
District 1: District1@ramseycounty.us
- Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire,
District 2: District2@co.ramsey.mn.us
- Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo,
District 3:
trista.matascastillo@co.ramsey.mn.us
- Commissioner Toni Carter,
District 4: Toni.Carter@co.ramsey.mn.us
- Commissioner Rafael E. Ortega,
District 5: Rafael.E.Ortega@co.ramsey.mn.us
- Commissioner Jim McDonough,
District 6: Jim.McDonough@co.ramsey.mn.us
- Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt,
District 7: Victoria.Reinhardt@co.ramsey.mn.us

And here are contacts for the Maplewood mayor and city council members:

- Marylee Abrams, Mayor:
marylee.abrams@maplewoodmn.gov
- Kathleen Juenemann, Council member:
Kathy.Juenemann@maplewoodmn.gov
- Bill Knutson, Council member:
William.Knutson@maplewoodmn.gov
- Rebecca Cave, Council member:
Rebecca.Cave@maplewoodmn.gov
- Nikki Villavicencio, Council member:
Nikki.Villavicencio@maplewoodmn.gov

We are working in cooperation with:

- The Saint Paul Audubon Society
- Friends of the Mississippi River
- Friends of Maplewood Nature
- Legacy of Nature Alliance

All of these organizations fully support our efforts.
Julian

On June 19 I received this update from Julian:

Hi, Carrol,

Thank you for following up. The consultants, Perkins & Will, presented the same recommendations to the city of Maplewood as they had presented to the county:

1. Sell the golf course to a company that will maintain it as a golf course, or build housing and commercial space on the golf course.
2. Build housing and commercial space on the 77-acre grassland.

The Maplewood mayor and city council members are very much in favor of saving the golf course, and most of them have expressed willingness to allow development on the grassland. One council member (Juenemann) expressed concern for the grassland environment, and requested that no decision be made until after the ecological assessment is complete (after September).

Our meeting with Liz Harper (DNR) left us disheartened. It seems that Minnesota’s designation of a migratory bird species as endangered protects only against direct physical harm to the bird or its nest. The prohibition against “taking” an endangered species does not prevent destruction of the nesting habitat when the bird is not present. Furthermore, a developer can obtain permit to take, or the developer may destroy the habitat and pay a fine.

We hope to meet with additional county commissioners and Maplewood city council members to try to enlighten them, but it appears that we may need to engage an attorney to bring a suit for protection of the grassland under the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act (MERA). If you have any recommendations for an attorney, please let us know.

Julian

ACTIONS FOR MOU MEMBERS:

Contact the mayor and members of the Maplewood City Council. This is important for all MOU members, but especially for residents of Ramsey County!

So, MOU members, please take a few minutes to register your thoughts and express your opinions on all of these issues to the appropriate authorities. The birds will benefit!

Message from the President



Yellow Warbler, by Thoma Burns

2021 is a year to remember. Covid-19 vaccines for adults and older children became available and widely distributed. The pandemic started to fade, and our activities started returning towards normal. Just when we thought we could enjoy the spring with birding, eating out, and visiting others, the daily temperature rose to record levels, and we stayed inside. Even the birds slowed in their visits to the feeders. As I am writing this column (June 19), we still haven't really returned to normal, whatever that may be.

Our lives have changed forever, both because of the pandemic and because of the social unrest and existing lack of justice for many. Work is different now, and the drives and rewards that accompany it have been changed. We are just starting to play as we did before the pandemic, but many of us feel unsure of how to proceed. And the daily reminders of the lack of equitable social justice are overwhelming. The times are changing, and the MOU needs to change too, to stay vibrant and relevant.

I recently finished reading *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding* (2007) by Scott Weidensaul, and that book helped me understand how birding evolved to the current state of field guides, list-keeping, and so on. We now have many different field guides and books to reference (though I suspect that most of us favor one). We also

have access to wonderful optics and cameras, so that we can study the birds we see. Early ornithologist and naturalists had to create their own bird drawings or paintings, often from collected specimens, and they did not have a generally accepted list of bird names, so the names differed from one person to another. Although a few guidebooks became available in the early 1900s, they were not widely distributed and were generally found in libraries rather than pockets. Roger Tory Peterson is recognized for providing the first useful and widely used field guide in 1933, and we now have a large variety of guides, apps, and cameras to help us identify the birds we are watching and recording. Exquisitely sensitive genetic studies now help define the true relationships between bird groups and families; we no longer rely simply on variations in feather color, beak shape, and location. Listing is moving on to data submission and tabulation for large number of citizen scientists on platforms like eBird.

It is my conviction that an organization like the MOU needs to evolve and expand to accommodate these changes and reach a wider audience of birders. For example, many people just like to be outside and look at birds. They may recognize the birds they see but they are not interested in keeping lists and do not consider themselves part of the birding community. Local bird stores are frequented by urban and suburban birders in search of feed, equipment, and information about their backyard birds. Perhaps the largest group of people who are not part of the usual birding community are those from minority populations, such as black, brown, and Indigenous people (BIPOC), who have been excluded from birding activities for many different reasons, including racial and economic ones.

In the last issue of this newsletter, I discussed the formation of an **MOU Inclusion and Equity Working Group**, and I asked members to send me their ideas and suggestions for moving the MOU forward. One idea, which is already being implemented, is a series of four "Beginning Bird Watching for BIPOC" events organized by Melanin in Motion (www.melanininmotion.org) and supported by the MOU. At the first event, held on June 5 at Theodore Wirth Park, sixteen birders joined in a walk and discussion led by Dudley Edmondson. Creating welcoming spaces through events like these is a start. Does the MOU provide the appropriate or needed services for an inclusive birding organization? What are your ideas for making the MOU a better organization for all birders? This will work only if many members participate, so please send your thoughts and suggestions to me at richardallenking@gmail.com.

Richard King, MOU President

Birding the Minnesota River Valley in the Late 1940s

by Bob Janssen

The Minnesota River Valley has always been an exciting area for Minnesota birders. That was true for me as a beginning birder as well. I started serious birding in 1947 when I reached 15 years of age. At that age I could get a Minnesota drivers license with no questions asked, just pay the fee. This changed my birding life. I could now drive a car and travel to exciting birding areas. I bought a 1935 Ford and I was excited about going places. Until then, I had been confined mainly to walks along Minnehaha Creek, which was near our home in Edina near 52nd Street. I had birded my familiar trails as often as I could, but now with the car I could expand on my own to the Minnesota River Valley, where my father had taken me duck hunting on Rice Lake since I was ten years old.

I can remember seeing huge flocks of migrating ducks, geese, and Red-winged Blackbirds, plus hundreds of migrating shorebirds feeding on the shores of Rice Lake when the water level was down in the fall. I also remember seeing migrating sparrows up close while in the duck blind. I especially remember the many sparrows in their beautiful golden fall plumage. At first, I didn't know what they were, but as I became more adept at bird identification, I realized they were LeConte's Sparrows. There were probably Nelson's Sparrows as well, but it took a number of years for me to be able to identify that species.

Back to the car. I planned a birding route that took me into the Minnesota River Valley. Starting from my home in Edina, I went first to Bush Lake and Anderson Lake, and then to Purgatory Creek. After that I proceeded to an old road called the "Sheep Farm Road," which ran along



Red-necked Grebe, by Thomas Burns

the north shore of Grass Lake. Above this road there was a lookout, along Highway 169, that gave a beautiful view of the river valley from Shakopee to Fisher Lake. From Grass Lake, my route took me to Rice Lake, where we had our duck hunting pass, then through a piece of Carver County, after that into Shakopee and Scott Counties, and finally back across the Minnesota River to the Purgatory Creek area. I covered this 40-mile route at least once a week. This whole area was a bird paradise at that time and a great place for a beginning birder to learn Minnesota birds.

I met a gentleman named Jim Wilkie (he is the one whose name was given to the MVNWR unit around Fisher Lake), who lived along Purgatory Creek where it flowed into the Minnesota River. Jim was a very cordial, friendly, and interesting man who was interested in what I was doing in the area. We often met on Saturday mornings. We became friends, and he gave me permission to roam and bird his property, which covered hundreds of acres. I birded this area for over 20 years, building my Minnesota list. I developed a shorebird "lookout" on the north shore of Rice Lake just off of Highway 169. It was here that I learned, close up, the identification of Minnesota shorebirds.

The road that I referred to as "Sheep Farm Road" above ran downhill from the upland area along the river and the north shore of Grass Lake. It disappeared many years ago when this area was developed as residential property. At the old farm I had great migration birding, plus good winter birding, which included Red-winged and Rusty Blackbirds, White-throated Sparrows, juncos, and woodpeckers of all kinds. To the north of that road, up the hill toward what is now Flying Cloud Airport, was a grassland used by nesting Western Meadowlarks and Lark, Clay-colored, Song, Grasshopper, and Vesper Sparrows. On one occasion I flushed a small flock of Gray Partridge, the only time I have ever seen this species in Hennepin County. In the fall, this whole area from Grass Lake to Rice Lake was a paradise for wetland birds.

As I grew older, I expanded my Minnesota birding to the whole state and tried to learn where good birding spots were located throughout the state. But I will always remember this part of the Minnesota River Valley as very special to my early birding days. At the time, I told everyone that it was the best spot in Minnesota for birding. Yes, it *was* the "best spot," but as it has turned out, there are many "best spots" for birding in the state.

Olga Lakela:

Pioneer Ornithologist of Northeastern Minnesota

by Jan Green



Olga Lakela

When my husband John and I moved to Duluth in the fall of 1958, Minnesota—not to mention the entire Midwest—was *terra incognita* to us. John had taken a teaching and research position in the Geology Department at the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD). We had just been doing field work in the forested mountains of northern New Hampshire, and my teenage years had been spent in a declining mill

city in Rhode Island. So when we arrived via the estuary bridge from Wisconsin, my first view of Duluth was a bit of a shock; I recognized it as a familiar “rust-belt” city. Fortunately, Duluth sits on the shore of Lake Superior and has many wild natural areas. I soon discovered Minnesota Point, the Harbor estuary marshes, and the St. Louis River all the way to Fond du Lac. Exploring for birds has been a motif in my life ever since being infected by birding experiences during our honeymoon in the Canadian Maritime Province and field mapping in the New England North Woods.

During those first years of birding in Duluth, I was mentored by a professor in the UMD Biology Department, Olga Lakela, who was a botanist and also an accomplished ornithologist. Miss Lakela (I never addressed this somewhat formidable older woman by her first name, but here she will sometimes be referred to as Olga) had been a founder of the Duluth Bird Club in 1937 (later Duluth Audubon Society) and the Minnesota Ornithologists’ Union (1938). In the 1930s and 1940s, Olga published many articles and notes about birds and her field studies in the MOU magazine, *The Flicker* (now *The Loon*). At Olga’s suggestion, I took my birding seriously and joined the Duluth Bird Club, of which I served as president from 1963 to 1965.

Olga Korhonen Lakela’s life in America began in 1906, when the Lakela family emigrated from Finland and settled in Biwabik. She was 16 years old. Two years later she headed to Valparaiso, Indiana, where she enrolled in an English language course and a two-year primary teaching program. In fulfillment of her commitment to that program, she

taught in Minot, North Dakota from 1910 to 1912. In 1912 she returned to Minnesota, where she began both teaching and pursuing higher education degrees, first a Bachelor of Science Degree (1921) and then a Master of Science Degree (1924). Upon completion of her Master’s, she went back to Minot, where she took a position at North Dakota State Teachers College and served as head of the Biology Department.

In 1930, Olga was once again in Minnesota, where she completed work on a Ph.D. in Botany and Zoology at the University of Minnesota and began her scientific research. In 1935 she accepted a teaching position at UMD and ultimately became head of the Biology Department. Her tenure there included creating the Lakela Herbarium, establishing a research fund for its support, and amassing a collection of 31,000 plants, which included 400 specimens from Minnesota Point alone. Her monumental work, *A Flora of Northeastern Minnesota*, was published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1965. After her age-required retirement in 1958 from UMD, she began another chapter in her botanical career by moving in 1960 to the University of South Florida at Tampa. She died in Clearwater, Florida on May 17, 1980, and is buried at the Finnish Cemetery in Palo, White Township, St. Louis County, Minnesota. [Note: The biographical information here is drawn from an article of April 13, 2020 on the UMD website, “Discovery in a New World.”]

Olga Lakela was an indefatigable field scientist. She traipsed all over the bogs, forests, and fields of six counties in northeastern Minnesota: Cook, Lake, Koochiching, St. Louis, Carlton, and Aitkin. Closer to home, often with her friend and field companion Mary Elwell, a math professor at UMD, she spent many hours on Minnesota Point, not only collecting plants but making bird observations. In the 1930s and 1940s, fledgling years for the MOU, Olga Lakela and Mary Elwell were mainstays of the organization, serving in various capacities, Mary in official positions (Secretary, President, etc.) and Olga by promoting the field study of birds. Their activity also encouraged membership in MOU, which is shown by a published membership list of 1943: Duluth and surrounding towns accounted for one third of the two hundred MOU members (*The Flicker* 15:20-24). Always the teacher, Olga urged her students and her colleagues in the Duluth Bird Club to study birds carefully and to document what they observed. In a 1946 article in *The Flicker*, she wrote: “Through field study the club membership has made an effort to contribute notes, nesting data and

population counts to THE FLICKER.” Looking at “Notes of Interest” and articles in the early issues of *The Flicker*, one can see that her teaching bore fruit. In that 1946 article, she explicitly mentions records of the Red-throated Loon, Varied Thrush, and nesting data for the Piping Plover.

Bird watchers are known for keeping lists. Scott Weidensaul even made a list of the lists, observing that birders are “a little fanatical about keeping records—daily checklists, life lists, state and county lists, records of first arrivals, seasonal late dates, out-of-range rarities, breeding confirmations, and much more” (*A World on the Wing*, 2021). Olga Lakela was a pioneer in this endeavor as well, although it is doubtful that she considered herself a fanatic. In *The Birds of Minnesota* (1932), Thomas Sadler Roberts had compiled many species lists by seasonal status categories. In 1958, Olga published MOU’s first comprehensive regional checklist. It was titled “A Check-list of Birds from Northeastern Minnesota based on Observations made mostly in the Duluth Area” (*The Flicker* 35:30-35). Like Roberts’ list, hers included notations for status categories, columns for first and last dates, and nesting dates. The period covered was 1937 to 1947 (with one exception for a 1948 rarity). It included her own observations, as well as some from her local Duluth network. Her species total was 244 birds (not including subspecies), of which 16 were designated Accidental or Rare.

There are two older comprehensive bird lists for the State of Minnesota as a whole: P. L. Hatch’s multiple lists from 1874-1892 and T. S. Roberts’ complete list of species in *The Birds of Minnesota*. The published lists by Philo Louis Hatch in the Minnesota Academy of Natural Sciences (1873) and *The Geological and Natural History Survey of Minnesota* (1880) are commonly considered unreliable. However, Roberts’ list is the foundation for Minnesota’s avian history. Roberts identified a list of 266 Regular species by adding up all of his seasonal categories: Permanent residents (39); Summer residents (164); Transients (47); and Winter visitants (16). He added several other categories: Accidental and Rare (53); Introduced (4); and Extirpated and Extinct (6). The Complete List then included 329 species. At the end of his Complete List, Roberts added a Hypothetical category: 24 species (plus citations); all but one of these (Fish Crow) are now accepted on the MOU official list (2020). Additionally, a puzzling name—“Thick-billed Red-wing”—on Roberts’ accidental list is McCown’s Longspur, now called Thick-billed Longspur.

The impulse that the birding community, both scientific and recreational, has for creating lists has some common uses: memory bank for events, history, change, discovery, and loss. With their lists, both Roberts and Lakela were establishing time markers on the avian landscape. Roberts created a statewide Minnesota baseline of 266 species (dated about 1930); Lakela created a regional northeastern Minnesota bird list of 244 species (dated about 1950). Different checklists are not always directly comparable, because dif-



ferent factors may have been used to create them (area covered, skill of the observer, number of observers, time in the field, habitat niches explored, and access). However, for the Roberts and Lakela lists, data are available to measure the areas covered: statewide (86,943 square miles), and for the six northeastern counties (15,595 square miles). So Lakela’s list covered an area only 18% as large as Roberts’. These lists provide avian knowledge markers for those areas and dates. Obviously, at that time Roberts and Lakela did not consider their accumulation of records as “listing.” Olga also contributed records from Martin County (1923-29) and Duluth (1936-37) to Roberts for his *Logbook of Minnesota Bird Life, 1917-1937*, and her copy of that book, in the UMD Herbarium, contains Robert’s inscription to her.

Lakela’s list expanded and highlighted several aspects of Minnesota birdlife since Roberts’. Those include first records for the state and specialties of Duluth. **First state records:** a Varied Thrush was seen in the Congdon neighborhood, Duluth, on February 7, 1941 (*The Flicker* 13:18) by Mrs. W. S. Telford, and it continued at her feeder (nutmeats) during the winter. The first specimen of the Varied Thrush was collected by Dr. Wm. P. Abbott at his cabin near Grand Marais on November 26, 1941 (*The Flicker* 14:16). The other first state record Lakela documented was an immature Ivory Gull that she spotted on December 27, 1948 (*The Flicker* 21:21) in a flock of Herring Gulls at a fisherman’s dock just east of the French River. **Duluth specialties:** Roberts (1932) considered the Piping Plover an “infrequent migrant,” with only a few records from 1893 to 1929. The first nesting records documented in *The Flicker* were from the

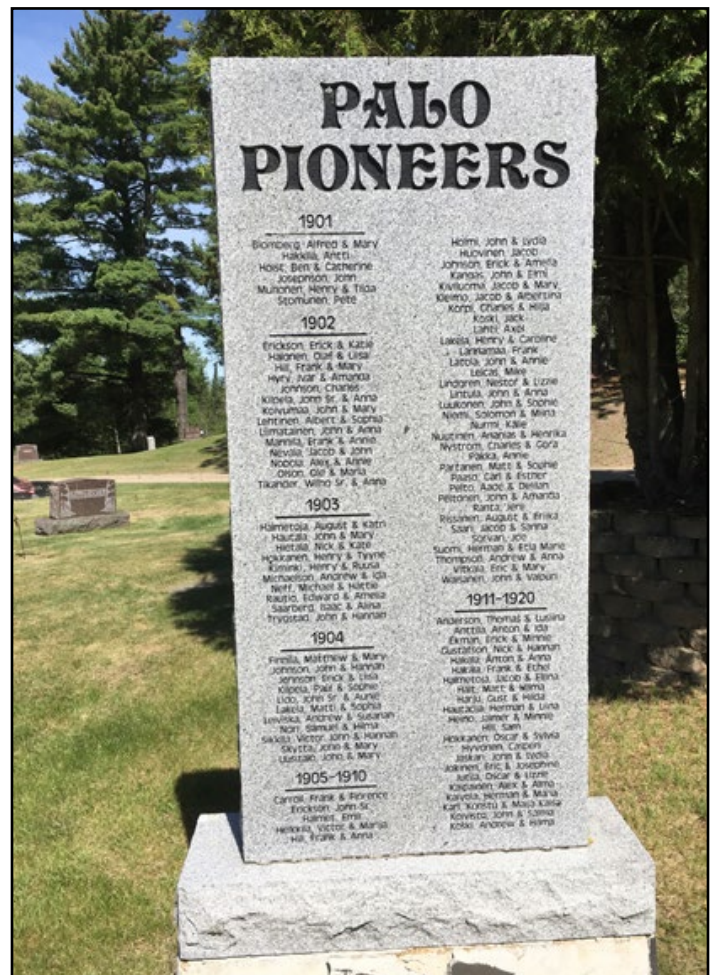
Piping Plover “colony” on Pine and Curry Islands, Lake of the Woods, 1932-1938. Lakela documented the first Duluth breeding of the Piping Plover in 1935 and 1936 at a Bayside Beach south of the Minnesota Point Recreation Area (*The Flicker* 18:11). She presented a paper about this colony at the second annual meeting of the MOU in Duluth in 1939 (*The Flicker* 11:18). Breeding evidence through 1942 from this small colony was documented in seasonal reports in *The Flicker*. Olga commented that the original sandfill had become vegetated and the open beach was not suitable for nesting because of disturbing recreational activity. She went on to write: “their brief residence . . . has been an endless source of information, wonder and joy” (*The Flicker* 12:34). Plover nesting activity was again discovered in the Duluth Harbor on a dredge spoil island in 1945. Plovers continued to nest on this island, Harbor Island (aka Hearing Island), in small numbers (usually singles) from 1945-1948. Olga’s students and members of the Duluth Bird Club documented this nesting activity during yearly censuses (most published in *The Flicker*) that they made for all nesting species on the dredged sediment islands in the harbor. These studies of sandy dredge/fill habitats along Minnesota Point were done in 1938 for Southworth Marsh (*The Flicker* 10:1-3) and 1960 for Harbor Island (*The Flicker* 32:73-75).

The Red-throated Loon was the other species whose local presence Olga wanted to highlight. She credited members of the Duluth Bird Club for helping to place this species on record in the state (*The Flicker* 18: 7). Roberts (1932, p. 144-5) and gave details of two Red-throated Loon records: a mounted specimen by T. J. Storey, a Duluth taxidermist, dated December 31, 1900, which had been caught in Lake Superior in a fishing-net, and another recorded by T. Surber, who had examined a male shot from a large flock of loons passing over Cramer, Lake County on Sept. 21, 1924. Lakela considered the presence of the Red-throated Loon in Duluth on Lake Superior as mostly occurring in June and July. The next documented record was collected by a local taxidermist, Lloyd Hackl, on June 17, 1939 (*The Flicker* 11:21). That Note of Interest recording that bird also states: “The specimen was donated by the Department of Biology, Duluth State Teachers College to the Museum of Natural History, University of Minnesota.” (Confusingly, this event is described somewhat differently in another Note of Interest in *The Flicker* 13:37-38.) Olga’s first record on her checklist was June 15, 1940, and the last record was July 8, 1945. Continuing through the 1940s and 1950s, occasional spring migration observations were published as Notes in *The Flicker*; single birds or small (<10) flocks were mentioned. In the 1960s, the MOU started publishing a Seasonal Report column and observations of one to three loons are listed yearly. The Red-throated Loon was considered a rare migrant on Lake Superior until high counts were made in the 2020s. These counts were taken mostly off Minnesota Point and culminated in records of 102 birds on May 27,

2010 and 355 birds on May 8, 2013 (R. B. Janssen, *Birds in Minnesota*, 2019). Olga would be amazed and maybe urge birders to establish yearly recording stations.

This past Memorial Day, my curiosity about Olga Lakela led me to take a trip, along with three family members, to the east Iron Range in order to explore some of the local heritage. Our first stop on the Vermilion Trail, County Hwy Road 4, was the Rauha (peace) Finnish Cemetery in the community of Palo (fire). It is a beautiful, well-kept cemetery on the shore of Frying Pan Lake. The Lakela plot was easy to find on a knoll; a nearby monument, Palo Pioneers, gives the date of the Lakela’s family arrival in America as the cohort of 1905-1910. May Olga Lakela’s memory as a pioneer and important early scientist endure.

Janet (Jan) Green served as MOU Vice-President 1962, MOU Secretary 1963–1972, and President of the Duluth Audubon Society 1963–1964 and 1973–1975. Her state list of 370 species includes five that were first documented state records Ruff (5/23/64), Black-legged Kittiwake (12/15/64), Green-tailed Towhee (12/15/66), Little Gull (5/17/73), Arctic Tern (5/27/73). Exploring and birding and listing were fun when the world was new.



Palo Pioneers monument at Rauha Cemetery, by Martha Green Nielsen

MOU Calendar

July / August 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wedday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				July 1	2	3 ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk CNC MN Campus Bird Walk
4 Birding in the Big Woods, DNR	5	6	7	8 Mississippi River Morning Stroll, Itasca SP, DNR	9 Friday Night Hike, Buffalo River SP, DNR	10 CNC WI Campus Bird Walk
11	12	13	14	15 "Lima and the Galapagos," MOU Global Birders,	16 Friday Night Hike, Buffalo River SP, DNR	17 Bird Banding, Carver Park Reserve, 3RPD
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31 Explore Western Minnesota, MOU Field Trips
August 1	2	3	4	5	6	7 ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk CNC MN Campus Bird Walk
8	9	10	11	12	13	14 CNC WI Campus Bird Walk
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31	30			



— MOU Calendar —

July / August 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

July 3: MN Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. Join an expert birder on a morning hike around the Nature Center. Learn to identify birds by sight and sound. Field guides and binoculars are available to use or bring your own. Program fee: \$5.00 or free for “Friends of CNC,” Hastings Environmental Protectors, Hastings High School students, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. Pre-registration is required. Call 651-437-4359 to reserve your spot.

July 10: 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 6 feet. Meet at 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI. Program fee: \$5.00 suggested donation, free for SCVBC members and Friends of CNC.

August 7: MN Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. See July 3 description above.

August 14: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8–10 am. See July 10 description above.

DNR

Events may be added, so check https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_parks for updates.

July 4: Birding in the Big Woods

Details: 9–10 am. Location: Nerstrand Big Woods State Park. Many species of colorful birds call the Big Woods home. Learn the basics of bird identification on this easy, 1.5-mile guided walk. Free. Meet at the Group Campground.

July 8: Mississippi River Morning Stroll

Details: 9:30–10:15 am. Location: Itasca State Park. Morning along the Mississippi River... birds are singing, mammals are moving, bugs are buzzing, flowers are blooming. Discover nature’s morning activity as we stroll the pathways around the Mississippi River. Free. Meet under the plaza at the Mary Gibbs Mississippi Headwaters Center.

July 9 and 16: Friday Night Hikes

Details: 5:30 pm. Join one of Buffalo River State Park’s expert volunteers on a hike around the park and/or Bluestem SNA. This is an amazing opportunity to walk and learn about the birds and wildlife of the region. Free. Location: Buffalo River State Park. Both hikes meet in the picnic area at 5:30 p.m.



Bobolink, by Jerry Pruett



Golden-winged Warbler, by Allan Meadows

MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

July 15: The Lima Area and the Galapagos

Details: 7 pm. Online presentation via Zoom. Is your travel companion a non-birder who seeks more than birds when traveling? A trip to Lima, Cuzco, the Sacred Valley, and Machu Picchu in Peru and Quito and the Galapagos in Ecuador will provide ample opportunities to bird and to experience natural beauty, non-bird wildlife, culture, art, and food. Peru is home to more than 1,800 bird species, with about 120 of them endemic to Peru. 177 species have been observed on the Galapagos islands with about 45 endemics. Leslie Gillette will share her November 2019 trip. Highlights include several tanagers and hummingbirds and Blue-footed and Nazca Boobies, Galapagos Penguins and Lava Herons among other Galapagos endemics. Details will be available on the Minnesota Global Birding and Minnesota Birding Facebook pages and sent out over MOU-NET listserv.

MRVAC FIELD TRIPS

August 29: Miesville Ravine in Dakota County

Details: 7:30 am. We'll start out in Miesville Ravine Park in SE Dakota County looking for early warbler migrants and cuckoos. After our hike on the upper trail, we'll head over to the Industrial Park by Randolph for grassland specialists and then check out Lake Byllesby. Bring lunch if you want to stay for the afternoon birding. Moderate effort- some walking on trails. Contact Steve Weston at 612.978.3993 with questions. Open to all & no reservations. Location: 27970 Orlando Trail, Cannon Falls (meet at north parking lot).

MOU FIELD TRIPS

July 31: Explore Western Minnesota

Details: 8:30 am. Join Josh Wallestad and Garrett Wee on a trip through the extreme western part of Minnesota. We will search for shorebirds and other early southbound migrants. Some stops will include Browns Valley/Lake Traverse, Big Stone Lake, Marsh Lake, Big Stone National Wildlife refuge, Ortonville for lunch/bathroom break and others. Meet at Pomme de Terre Park in Morris, Stevens County at 8:30 a.m. Equipment needed: Binoculars and spotting scope recommended. Registration required ahead of time. No walk-ons accepted. Maximum of 12, not including trip leaders. Send registration requests to: garrettwee@hotmail.com or text/call 507-829-8187.

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

Events may be added, so check <https://threeriversparks.org> for updates.

July 17: Bird Banding

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

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON

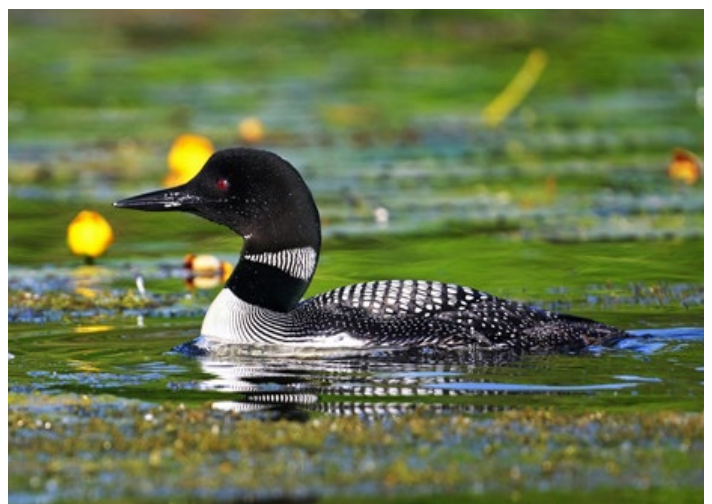
July 3: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10 am. Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk at Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public; no registration required. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester

August 7: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9–10 am. Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk at Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public; no registration required. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester

Common Loon, by Thomas Burns



A Black Polymorph Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Koochiching County

by Allan Meadows

From April 23-27, 2017, I photographed a female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius*) drilling and feeding from sap wells in a birch tree on our property. Being familiar with juvenile sapsuckers showing little or no red plumage, I only slowly realized that a breeding plumage female should typically show a red crown. I checked my copy of *The Sibley Guide to Birds* (1st edition), and the plumage I had photographed was not shown.

Intrigued, I shared a photo with other experienced birders; none recalled having seen one like this. So, I emailed David Allen Sibley, who kindly responded that a similarly plumaged female was now represented in the 2nd edition of the *Sibley Guide*. He allowed that he had personally seen a few similar individuals, but that he may have overlooked others. He added that he had seen reports of this plumage from North Dakota and Ohio. He included a link to a scientific paper that references it: “Nesting Behavior of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers,” by Lawrence Kilham (*The Wilson Bulletin* (vol. 89, no. 2, June 1977). Kilham’s study areas were in New Hampshire. The author briefly references “black polymorph females” and states: “In the course of studying sapsuckers over 25 years and finding 69 nests, I have encountered 12 females that were ‘black polymorphs’ having black or nearly black crowns. Attempts to find consistent differences in their breeding behavior have been unsuccessful.” I assume that his concern was that a lack of red crown in the female might alter the bird’s courtship and nesting success.

With Sibley’s and Kilham’s references to females only, I began to wonder whether there might be a sex-linked genetic trait that, in some individual females, inhibits their ability to synthesize the red pigment normally found in sapsucker crowns.

I then re-read pertinent sections of the excellent *Bird Coloration* by Geoffrey E. Hill (National Geographic Society, 2010) in an attempt to gain a better understanding. Hill states, “Color polymorphisms typically do not involve carotenoid pigmentation, and they are rare in songbirds.” However, the lack of red crown in a black polymorph sapsucker would appear to involve carotenoid pigmentation (the red, yellow, and orange pigments synthesized from dietary sources). And, of course, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are considered a songbird. Hill further states: “Many of the genes involved in the coloration of birds...are found on the sex chromosomes,” and also that “most plumage polymor-

phisms in birds occur in both males and females.” What few references I have found to this plumage seem to indicate it is present only in females.

I emailed Professor Hill at Auburn University to learn more. His initial response was that he had never heard of this before. He went on to say:” I do not think that the black crown is likely related to lack of red. There are some red feathers in the crown of the bird you photographed. Rather, I think melanin [dark pigmentation synthesized irrespective of dietary source] is now overlaying the red and obscuring it. If it is true that this only occurs in females, then we would suspect that it is at least a hormonally regulated trait, not necessarily that the gene for a black cap is on the sex chromosome (although it might be). Regardless of the genetics, it is certainly a rare case of female-limited color polymorphism.”

On May 26, 2021, I photographed another female Yellow-bellied Sapsucker black polymorph on our property. A comparison of photographs between the 2017 and 2021 sightings would indicate these are two distinct individuals.

Allan Meadows is a retired environmental engineer living on Rainy Lake east of International Falls. He and his wife Myrna are lifetime members of MOU.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Black Polymorph, by Allan Meadows

Birder Bio: Michael Sack



Michael Sack

Tell us about yourself.

I've lived for most of my 47 years in Little Canada, Minnesota, about 44 of them in the same 121-year-old house! I purchased my mom and pop's house when they retired and moved to Florida (for winters) and Isle, MN (for summers) in 1996. As for employment, I work in the quality engineering department of a large medical device company. I've been involved with quality in the medical device field for almost 25 years now.

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

I got into birding in my forties, in part after I saw a Baltimore Oriole visiting my neighbor's yard. At the time, Dana Sterner was living with me, and when we spotted it, we were both a little shocked and also in awe. We had no idea that these birds could be found in or around our yard. So, we decided to mount some feeders to see what we could find. Once different birds started coming to our feeders, though, we had no idea what they were. Since Dana paid more attention to our feeders, I decided to buy her a *Birds of*

Minnesota Field Guide to learn and identify who we were sharing our yard with. We decided to keep track of each bird that we found in our yard and after tallying around 15 birds, I exclaimed both excitedly and proudly that we'd probably find up to 25 birds in our yard. Fast forward five years, and I've now had 126 bird species in my yard. My highlights include Red-headed Woodpecker, Sora, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill, Belted Kingfisher, Hoary Redpoll, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Shrike, and a resident Broad-winged Hawk.

How did your interest expand after that first experience?

I believe that it was the discovery of eBird, mounn.org, and the Minnesota Birding Facebook page. We started to notice that there were a lot more birds that we could find by venturing out to our neighborhood parks. Once I started exploring the state and discovered a Ferruginous Hawk in Lac qui Parle County with Dana Sterner...it was game on!

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

A list of things, really. I love the excitement and anxiety of a rare bird chase, the solitude and peacefulness of walking by myself at a park with nobody around, the comradery of meeting other familiar birders in the middle of nowhere. I dig that there is an endless amount of learning involved and somehow, it's fun to gather as much knowledge as possible. I truly enjoy the beauty of the hidden areas in Minnesota—and across the country—that I would never have ventured to and discovered had it not been for seeking out birds. Finally, it's incredibly uplifting simply being surrounded by nature. It's therapeutic.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, by Richard Gotz

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

My favorite place in Minnesota would be Sax-Zim Bog. I've traveled the nation and I've never found another place like it. I also adore many Ramsey County parks—close to home and full of beauty!

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

Generally, I simply go Zen-birding with no expectations or targets. I just pick a place and walk to see what I can find. I also like to bird with my girlfriend, Molly. She's about a year into birding, so it's exciting to see all of her new discoveries. That said, I like to comb the north shore with the Muffin Runners and Croissant Jaunters too! It's high speed and fun as hell!

Favorite bird or bird family?

This is a tough one! My favorite bird is on constant rotation. Clay-colored Sparrow stands out to me right now. Cutest ever! Ask me tomorrow, though, and it will likely be something else.

Any advice on how to be a better birder?

Bird with a group. Bird with a friend. Bird alone. I think that all of these types of birding make a big impact on learning and becoming a better birder.

Ever had an unusual experience while birding?

Nothing really unusual, but a few things that stand out

to me. I saw a Blue Heron swimming in the middle of Lake Phalen. I've had a Cooper's Hawk swoop down and try landing on my camera while I was taking a photo of a Green Heron. I've had a large Black Bear walk past me at Sherburne NWR while watching a Grasshopper Sparrow. Lastly, while floundering in a low spot of my life on December 21, 2018, I decided to go visit Sax-Zim Bog. On this trip, the sun was shining bright, and little shiny crystals of snow fell from the sky. All of a sudden, a Townsend's Solitaire flew up to me and decided to hang around for a few minutes. This was the first Townsend's Solitaire found in Sax-Zim Bog proper, so it was completely unexpected. It was such a magnificent experience that when I drove back to the Twin Cities, I was fixed. I was happy and felt great about my future.

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

I have many hobbies, but my favorite two besides birding would be breweries and motorcycles. I've been to 185 breweries in Minnesota and 339 around the country. I think birding and beer go together perfectly. While on vacation, I bird all day, but once the sun sets, I hit breweries all night! And motorcycle riding: I love to ride through the countryside of both Minnesota and Wisconsin. Also, charity rides are a blast!

What new bird would you most like to see?

Well, there are 80 birds on my eBird Minnesota target list. So, any of them will do just fine.



Dickcissel, by Allan Meadows

New MOU Members

NB: Please remember to notify the MOU Membership Secretary (membership@moumn.org) when you change your address or email. If you are renewing for more than one year, please indicate that on your check.

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- Zacharia Strunk, *Crystal, MN*



Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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Hastings, MN 55033

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Designer: Thomas Benjamin Hertzell

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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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