



Minnesota BIRDING

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Introducing Birdability

by Michael Hurben, Bloomington

For many of us, there are few barriers to birding. We may lack the time to go afield as often as we'd like, and unless we have significant financial resources, we won't be able to travel to and hire guides at every exotic locale we might dream about. But beyond these common limitations, questions about accessibility may not even cross our minds. We often take for granted that we have the capabilities to ascend a winding mountain trail, or brave a narrow boardwalk that has fallen into disrepair, or trudge through the snow that covers our route.

But the state of being able-bodied is a transitory one. Everyone, eventually, will face obstacles that affect their mobility, or will lose some sensory fidelity, or will experience some other issue that negatively impacts their birding. Some may have decades to go before they encounter any problems, while others may have dealt with a disability their entire lives. We may each occupy a different place on this spectrum, but we all move in the same direction, and it isn't the one we'd prefer. This is why a new non-profit organization, Birdability (birdability.org), should be of interest to anyone that has lifted a pair of bins or listened to birdsong.

The Birdability mission statement reads: "Through education, outreach and advocacy, Birdability works to

ensure the birding community and the outdoors are welcoming, inclusive, safe, and accessible for everybody. We focus on people with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, chronic illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental illness, and those who are neurodivergent, deaf or hard of hearing or who have other health concerns. In addition to current birders, we strive to introduce birding to people with disabilities and other health concerns who are not yet birders so they too can experience the joys of birding."

Birdability was founded by Virginia Rose of Austin, Texas, a wheelchair user and avid birder. In the spring of 2018, she decided to do a solo Audubon Bird-a-thon, a full dawn-to-dusk Big Day, in order to illustrate both the unique obstacles she faced and the kind of determination needed to independently engage in such a challenge. Her efforts attracted so much attention, including that of the National Audubon Society, that she was inspired to start a national and worldwide movement.

Virginia later teamed up with Freya McGregor, an occupational therapist, who became the new non-profit's Coordinator. I learned about Birdability when Freya reached out to me several months ago. Her specialty is assisting those with visual disabili-



Barred Owl, by Michael Hurben

ties, and she'd found some of my writings on birding and low vision (I am legally blind due to a genetic condition). I was thrilled that she asked me to share my perspectives and experiences, and also that they would take me on as a "Birdability Captain" for Minnesota. I hope to help in some way to improve birding for people who might think it is not for them, whether due to low vision or another accessibility challenge.

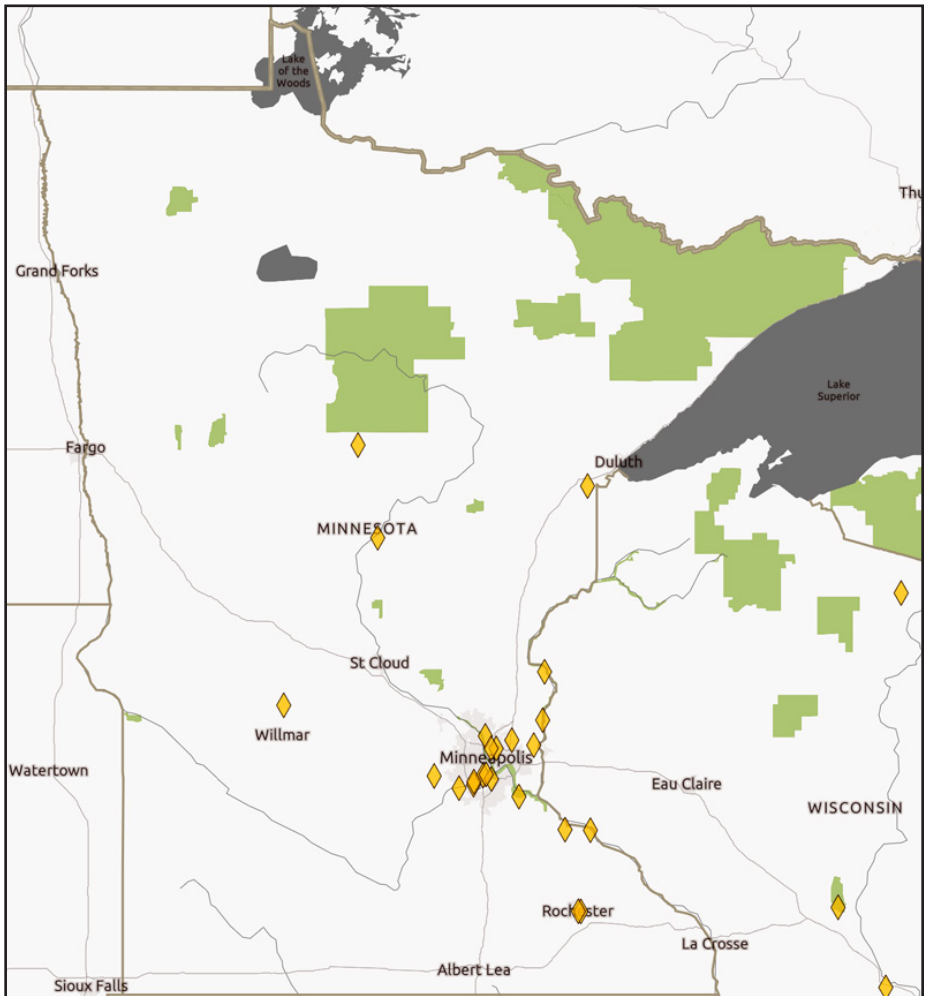
Some years ago, I had asked the eBird directors at Cornell if they could incorporate something akin to Wikipedia pages for hotspots; these pages could be edited and maintained by local users. It would be like a digital, evolving guidebook to birding locations, with information about where to park, safety concerns, fees, trail conditions, and so on—most of which cannot be gleaned from eBird. They didn't have much interest in this, but now, thanks to Birdability and their partnership with National Audubon, such a resource exists and is growing: the Birdability Map (<https://gis.audubon.org/birdability/>). This crowd-sourced tool provides accessibility details and more for a growing number of birding locales. It only works, though, if volunteers make the effort to assess a site and submit a report. The good news is that it is quick and easy to do, and it provides a great opportunity for anyone to help Birdability grow and become more useful.

Because of the fiscal sponsorship of the Travis Audubon chapter, Birdability shares in their full 501(c)(3) non-profit status; so tax-deductible donations are another way to help. If you'd like to become even more involved, consider joining the Birdability Captains, who act locally in

whatever capacity they can. Or give some thought to an accessible birding event for this October, when the second annual "Birdability Week" will be held. Beyond that, they are always looking for novel ways to bring birding to a wider audience, especially those that never realized how much enjoyment birds can bring or for whom the barriers have been too high. I encourage everyone to brainstorm new ways to do this, big or small. You can submit your ideas, questions, and comments directly on their website, or email me at hurbenm@gmail.com.

Some may wonder why we should make an effort to improve accessibility when it appears that there are no disabled birders in the field to help. One reason is obvious: you won't see them if they cannot get out there. Another is that some disabilities are not at all obvious (under some circumstances, few people would realize that I am legally blind, for example). It is an investment for all of us, because there will be a day when it will not be so easy to do what we love. And the more inclusive and accommodating we can be, the more we can grow the ranks of those that will be voices for conservation. And what could be a more important outcome to spring from our passion for birds?

Michael Hurben, Bloomington, is an avid global birder and retired physicist. He has been an MOU member since 2014.



Message from the President

I hope that all of you have been safe and free of Covid-19. Fall is nearly upon us, and we had expected this pandemic to be fading by now rather than spreading, but this has not happened. We had a few brief months where we felt that we were returning to normal, but the increased spread of Covid-19 has made us feel vulnerable again. Fortunately, we have effective vaccines that are slowly being used, and there is hope that we can get beyond this virus and remain healthy. Life is precious and can be lost at any time, as I have learned again recently. Be well and stay with us.

Our stress levels are high, with pandemic effects on fall activities, prevalent social and international unrest, political divisions, and constant access to news reminding us how bad everything is. Birds are a major factor in helping us adjust. Birds clearly have major life stresses—migration, eating, mating, nest building, reproducing, and surviving another migration, only to do it again next year. Our stress is diffuse and rarely focused on a single issue. The stress for birds is immediate and related to the individual activity that impacts their survival at the time. Yet they seem to act normal when we watch them come to our feeders, fly between branches high in the trees, feed on lakes, or walk across the grass. Maybe we can learn this type of focus to manage our stress and enjoy life. Birds continue to teach us important

life lessons.

The annual MOU Paper Session and Business Meeting is scheduled to be held in person in the North Star Ballroom of the UMN St Paul Student Center from 8:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. on December 4, 2021. As before, there will be a book sale at the meeting. Kara Snow (snwx043@d.umn.edu) is the planning committee chair, and inquiries about potential presentations should be directed to her. The Board of Directors will meet on Friday, December 3, from 2:00–4:00 p.m. (location to be determined), and the new MOU officers will be introduced during the Paper Session Business Meeting. We look forward to seeing everyone in person again rather than via Zoom.

The request for input and suggestions for making the MOU more inclusive and equitable in the last Minnesota Birding newsletter led to information about Birdability (www.birdability.org), an organization focused on making the birding community accessible to people with disabilities and other health concerns (see accompanying article in this newsletter). I am delighted with this input and I encourage others to send suggestions and thoughts for making the MOU a better organization for all.

Richard King, MOU President

Seeking 2021 MOU Awards Nominations

by Susan Elliott, Chair, MOU Awards Committee

If you added a rare bird to your life or state list this year, consider nominating the person who first found that bird for the Brother Theodore Voelker Award. If you know someone who has devoted many volunteer hours to help birds or birders this year, consider nominating that person for the Volunteer of the Year Award. Do you know a young birder whose involvement in birding and bird-related organizations stands out? Consider nominating that person for the Young Birder Award. How about the birder who you've admired for years, who maybe mentored you, who has made a name for themselves in bird-related endeavors? Consider nominating that person for the Thomas S. Roberts Award. **NOW** is the time to nominate your birding hero/mentor/inspiration by nominating her/they/him for an MOU Award, to be presented at this year's December Paper Session.

You can find award descriptions and the names of all past award recipients on the MOU website at <http://moumn.org/awards.html>.

(Presentation speeches for the awards are also available online from 2010 and forward). Making a nomination is simple. Just provide the Awards Committee with a description of the qualifications and contributions which you believe makes your nominee a worthy recipient of an award. Your written description typically forms the basis for the award presentations, and we encourage you to present the award should your nominee win. We know that not all folks like to write—or speak publicly—so please contact us if you would like assistance in either regard. **Nominations are due by October 16**, and should be sent to Awards Committee Chair Susan Elliott at honeywarbler@gmail.com. Nominees do not have to be members of the MOU. Current MOU officers and Board members are not eligible for Awards.

The MOU, the Awards Committee, and your birding heroes, mentors, and role models all thank you in advance for your interest and input in these Awards.

Conservation Column

Drought and Birds: Adapting to Extreme Conditions

by Andy Forbes

At the time of the writing of this article in August 2021, much of the western United States is stuck in a summer of record-breaking heat and drought. Closer to home, 98% of Minnesota is currently rated at least “moderate” drought conditions (per the U.S. Drought Monitor), 52% at least “severe” drought, and 4% “extreme” drought, a rating not seen in the state since April 2013. While occasional periods of drought are a part of natural cycles that are nothing new, extreme and widespread drought can have a major detrimental impact on wildlife species that are already under stress from a variety of other factors, such as habitat loss, pollution, etc. Birds are no different, although they are arguably more resilient to extreme climatic conditions in general than many other taxa. Below are some of the ways that birds deal with drought and a summary of the impact that drought can have on them.

Move to a Different Area

The ability to fly provides many bird species to move to locations where conditions are better when they do not like what they see. Grassland bird species are particularly good at this, as they have to be to persist. With or without drought, grassland conditions are often very different from year to year at the same location. These dynamic ecosystems are maintained by disturbance (such as grazing and fire), which results in variable structure and vegetation over time. To cope with this, most grassland bird species have low “site fidelity”—i.e., they don’t always breed in the same place from year to year. Dickcissels are perhaps the poster child for this strategy. The core of this species’ range is typically in the southern Great Plains/Midwest. However, if conditions aren’t favorable there, they shift to the northern portion of their breeding range. 2021 has certainly seen that pattern bear out, as Dickcissels are abundant in many parts of MN where they are typically not, and have been documented in all 87 counties this year.

Birds that live in the mountains can sometimes escape the heat by going to higher elevations. I got to experience this firsthand this summer during a birding trip to southeastern Arizona, which was experiencing record heat and drought at the time. We had to go way up in elevation to find many species that were typically easier to find at lower elevations. (Sadly, Elegant Trogon was not among the species that we were able to locate, but my continuing unsuccessful quest for that species is the subject of another article for another time, perhaps.)

Planning Ahead, and Taking Advantage of Abundant Resources

For birds, life is all about finding food, and their ability to take advantage of times of abundance has given them the ability to survive on every continent on the planet in a variety of challenging conditions.

Low water levels can concentrate small fish and amphibians, which can make for a short-term feast for waterbirds such as egrets and herons. Extensive mudflats can also provide great habitat for migrating shorebirds as they pass through our part of the world. For birders, this can also make them easier to find, since they are more concentrated around fewer water sources. Unfortunately, concentrations of birds can also facilitate the spread of diseases, which can cause large mortality events.

Many species, such as chickadees, jays, and woodpeckers, survive periods of food shortages (be it drought, heat, or cold) by storing food. Anyone who has a bird feeder has undoubtedly noticed this behavior, as chickadees often seem to store more food than they actually eat! Woodpeckers will collect acorns and store them as well. The Acorn Woodpeckers of western North America create “granary trees” that can contain more than 50,000 holes for storing acorns. These trees can provide food over multiple generations during tough times.

Impact of Droughts on Birds

Even with their versatility and ability to endure, birds and other wildlife live on a razor’s edge, and in some years conditions will simply not support their normal activities, especially during the breeding season, fast-growing young demand a lot of food. In drought years, birds may not show in areas where they are typically common, or they may nest later and/or have fewer broods per season. In extreme years, they may forego breeding altogether and avoid expending energy on a doomed effort. Even if conditions are good in the breeding areas, drought on the wintering grounds can have a similar impact on breeding success. American Redstarts that experienced drought-related stress on their wintering grounds arrived later and had fewer broods and young than those that wintered in areas that were not subject to these conditions.

As I stated earlier, drought is a natural (and necessary) phenomenon that birds have lived with for millions of years. A few dry years here and there are unlikely to have a major impact on bird populations. Extreme prolonged drought,



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, by Richard Gotz

however, can have a major impact on bird populations, especially those with shorter lifespans, such as passerines. In California, several consecutive years of droughty and hot conditions have raised concerns that many species that are already rare and/or declining may be pushed over the edge.

Common, adaptable species can have trouble in extreme years like this one. The presence of a network of suitable habitats across large scales and across the full annual cycle is critical in helping birds endure these difficult times. There are many things that you can do at home to help as well. Native plants tend to be more adapted and resilient to local climatic conditions and thus provide better food for insects, which in turn provide more food for birds. Planting native species on your property can provide surprising benefits to birds, in years like this as well as those that are more “normal.” While birds get some of the moisture that they need through their food, providing water either naturally or through artificial means such as bird baths can also help, although be sure to take special care to clean them (and bird feeders) frequently during the heat—and make sure to stop for a little while should you see any signs of sick or diseased birds.

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.

Update on Battle Creek Grassland

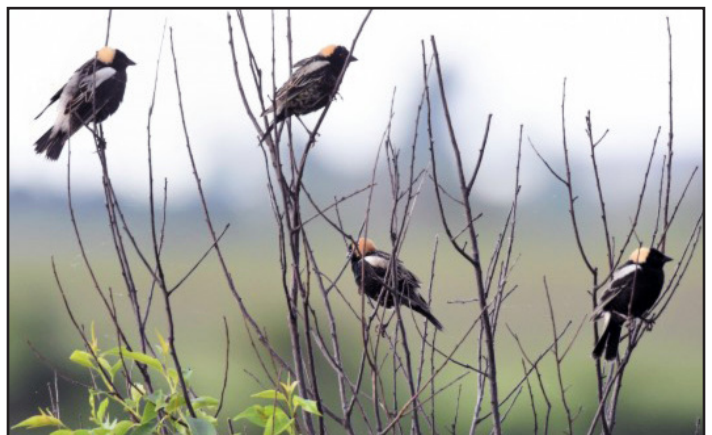
by Carrol Henderson, Chair, MOU Conservation Committee

Julian Sellers (St. Paul Audubon), John Zakelj (Friends of Maplewood Nature), and Catherine Zimmer (Legacy of Nature Alliance) have added Ramsey County Commissioner Frethem and Maplewood Mayor Abrams to the list of officials with whom they have met online to discuss the future of the Battle Creek grassland. Several bird surveys were done in May: Midwest Natural Resources, Inc. conducted bird surveys in the grassland on May 18 and 25. The May 18 report identified one Henslow’s Sparrow present, but the May 25 report identified 38 species, including Grasshopper Sparrow (2), Clay-colored Sparrow (1), Field Sparrow (1), Savannah Sparrow (7), Henslow’s Sparrow (6), Bobolink (16 males; females were probably on nests on the ground), Eastern Meadowlark (2), and Orchard Oriole (1).

Ramsey County commissioner Frethem and Maplewood Mayor Abrams believe that the county and the city of Maplewood are in a holding pattern pending the completion of the ecological survey of the grassland. That report is expected sometime in September.

Please contact Julian, John, or Catherine for updates on

their progress and suggestions of whom you may wish to contact to support preservation of this grassland as an addition to Battle Creek Regional Park. Their e-mail addresses are: Julian Sellers (juliansellers@msn.com), John Zakelj (jzakelj@yahoo.com), and Catherine Zimmer (wow-mn@usfamily.net).



Bobolinks, by David C. Keyes

Savaloja Grants Awarded

by Steve Wilson, Chair, MOU Savaloja Committee

Terry Savaloja was a well-known, respected Minnesota birder and T.S. Roberts Award recipient who died in 1992. Each year, the MOU gives grants to bird-related projects from the Savaloja Memorial Fund. This year, eight diverse education, research and bird appreciation projects received a total of \$13,475 in Savaloja Grant support, thanks to the ongoing generosity of you, MOU's members and donors, including the Savaloja family's donation in memory of John Savaloja, Terry's brother.

Following are the projects approved by MOU's board, based upon the recommendation of the Savaloja Committee (Ann Kessen, Pam Perry, Chuck Neil, Sue Keator, Mike North, Ezra Hosch, and Steve Wilson). Your donations make these grants possible. You can support future grants that promote education, research and monitoring projects designed to benefit birds by upgrading your membership or making a donation. Simply go to MOU's home page (<http://moumn.org/>), click on the "Donate" button at the top, and contribute whatever you can. (Under "Add special instructions to the seller," please enter "Savaloja donation.")



Canada Warbler, by Jean Brisance

Birding Unit for Chik-Wauk Nature Center: John Savaloja Memorial Project

Gunflint Trail Historical Society received \$1420 donated by the Savaloja family in honor of John Savaloja. The donation will be used to develop a bird unit to complement their existing nature education programs. The grant will allow purchase of a mix of seven pairs of adult and youth binoculars and a variety of teaching aids. Program participants will be schooled on the ins and outs of becoming a birder, while focusing on the relationship between bird diversity and a healthy environment.

Northern Hawk Owl Research

Hannah Toutonghi (UMN-Duluth), received \$1790 to study Northern Hawk Owls, primarily in the Sax-Zim Bog and surrounding area. She will use the funds to purchase cellular transmitters to track the birds' activity, movement, and habitat use during winter and spring. This is a novel research project for a poorly understood species.

Indigenous Bird Knowledge

South High School (Minneapolis) was awarded \$2425 for their Indigenous Bird Knowledge Project. Using the book *Ojibwe Bird Stories*, written by Charles Grolla with support of a previous Savaloja Grant, the project will bring Ojibwe bird stories and basic birding skills to 135 Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee students and their families at South High. This project will include two webinars and a classroom visit by Mr. Grolla, helping to raise awareness among community members of birds' ecological and cultural importance and how we can improve urban habitats for them.

Northern Shrike Research

Abigail Valine (UMN-Duluth) was awarded \$2085 to attach geolocators to wintering Northern Shrikes in northeast Minnesota. The objective is to increase our understanding of Minnesota's overwintering shrikes' morphology, migratory routes, and timing of migration, about which very little is known.

Barn Owl Research

International Owl Center (Houston) received \$2070 to expand last year's pilot project testing the feasibility of locating Barn Owls in southeastern Minnesota by deploying two passive acoustic monitors. This year's grant allows deployment of two additional monitors in order to better document the presence or absence of Barn Owls.

Youth Birding Programs in Diverse Anoka County Communities

Wargo Nature Center (Anoka County) received a grant of \$1715 to purchase 15 youth-sized binoculars to accommodate the growing demand for youth birding programs, particularly in diverse communities like Columbia Heights. The grant will also be used to market a free introduction to birding event and birding hikes to diverse and underserved areas to help members of those communities develop their birding skills, increase their appreciation and understanding of birds, and provide information on how they can benefit birds in their community.

Black-capped Chickadee Banding and Tracking

Sugarloaf: The North Shore Stewardship Association was given \$655 for an equal-parts research and education project on Black-capped Chickadees. The chickadees will be banded and fitted with “pit tags” so each bird’s visits to the nature center’s feeders can be monitored and displayed

during their interpretive programs for visitors to the nature center.

Cultural Healing Practices through Birding

Urban Bird Collective was awarded \$1315, continuing MOU’s support of this fledgling organization’s capacity- and trust-building in Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBT communities, a pioneering effort to involve and welcome members of these communities into Minnesota’s birding community.

Your donations make these grants possible. You can support future grants that promote education, research and monitoring projects designed to benefit birds by upgrading your membership or making a donation. Simply go to MOU’s home page (<http://moumn.org/>), click on the “Donate” button at the top of the page, and contribute whatever you can. (Under “Add special instructions to the seller,” please enter “Savaloja donation.”)

Savaloja Grant Report

Youth Birding Programs in Diverse Anoka Co. Communities: Wargo Nature Center

by Todd Murawaski, Recreation Program Coordinator, Anoka County Parks

Participation numbers and requests for birding programs have grown significantly in Anoka County over the past few years. In particular, we receive many more requests for youth and school-aged activities, which has been a wonderful addition to our programming schedule. With the Savaloja Grant funds, Anoka County Parks was able to purchase high-quality youth-sized binoculars. This has allowed us to better accommodate the increased youth birding programs and better equip young people so that they enjoy, learn about, and appreciate birds even more.

Wargo Nature Center, as part of Anoka County Parks,

strives to educate participants on the outdoors. An increasing part of that goal has included providing bird-related programming for youth and diverse communities. Having additional high-quality equipment that is properly fitted for youth allows the programming unit of Anoka County Parks to better incorporate birding into our camp curriculum. The improved success of the kids viewing birds with the new equipment was noticeable. They are better able to adjust the smaller binoculars to their faces and in turn get on birds faster and focus more easily.

The photos are from Anoka County’s summer camps.



Summary of MOU Board Minutes

August 7, 2021 Meeting

by *Kathrynne Baumtrog, Recording Secretary*

These minutes are preliminary, pending approval at the next Board meeting.

Meeting Date:

August 7, 2021, 10:00 a.m., via Zoom
(recorded by the host, President Dick King)

In attendance:

Dick King, Michelle Terrell, Bob Dunlap, Bob Janssen, Gerry Hoekstra, Liz Stanley, Steve Wilson, Cindy Smith, Carrol Henderson, Jennifer Vieth, Garrett Wee, Kathrynne Baumtrog, Mark Lystig, Kara Snow, Anthony Hertzell, Tom Tustison, William Marengo, Dave Cahlander

Absent:

Peter Nichols, Ann Kessen, Susan Barnes Elliot, Kate Kelnberger

I. Call to Order

II. Approval of Minutes for April 3, 2021

Ann Kessen asked that the Bell Museum Anniversary discussion reflect the amount of \$10,000.00 that was discussed. Correction made.

III. Treasurer Report (Ann Kessen, Treasurer)

The Board was very pleased with the monies earned from the Yearly Planner: \$750.00+ from the 2021 Planner. Plans are to sell a 2022 Planner.

A question was raised about the Bob Holtz Fund that appears on the report and has not changed. This is from the Biology Bob Binocular Endowed Fund/Minnesota Ornithologists' Robert Holtz Binocular Fund. Kevin Smith, as the prior Young Birders Committee leader, has the kits. MOU needs a new leader for this committee to hand off this program & equipment.

IV. Membership Report (Cindy Smith, Membership Secy.)

MOU had two new Life Members and 16 new Annual Members join recently.

V. Committee Reports

A. Information Technology Committee (Liz Stanley)

Liz discussed the work of the Committee for the last few months and gave a wonderful demonstration of what a potential "facelift" to the current site would entail. This update would cover all the coding and user interface part of running a site, as well as the

webpage's design and ease of use for current and new members. This should make it easy to update and hand off the work in years ahead to new web designers. The Board discussed the work that students from Prime Digital Academy conducted for their school project and how that helped the committee in their work. The Board encouraged Liz to continue to build this relationship. There is a goal for a Board meeting specifically devoted to the website later this fall.

B. Education – Spring Birding Primer/State Fair (Jen Vieth, Chair)

We're hoping for a great Minnesota State Fair event this year. MOU is using a new app, Sign-up Genius, to sign volunteers up for covering shifts at the MOU Booth. It seemed to work very well. We're waiting for guidance from the DNR and the State Fair regarding Covid precautions and still waiting for tickets. Thank you to Publications Committee for the bookmarks and the new Minnesota bird lists.

C. Conservation Committee (Carrol Henderson)

Carrol spoke about four conservation concerns:

1. The 77-acre Ramsey County grassland threatened by a Development
2. The Rochester Great Blue Heron rookery.
3. Lead ammunition permitted in NWRs
4. Non-Toxic fishing sinkers and jigs.

Carrol submitted a report to the Board regarding all these issues and will draft a letter for Board to submit.

Members are encouraged to write in support of the Rochester Rookery preservation. Kara Snow informed the Board of actions already taken by NRRI.

D. Paper Session Committee (Kara Snow, Chair)

Plans are being made for an in-person 2021 Paper Session. It will also be available in a virtual format for those not able to attend. Recordings of the speakers will be available again on YouTube for a short period afterward. Alex Sundvall will host the book sale. More free time will be built into the schedule this year for catching up with friends and exchanging ideas.

E. Field Trips Committee (Garrett Wee, Coordinator)

Garrett reported excellent participation in MOU Field Trips thus far and discussed the plan for future trips late summer and fall 2021. The committee could use some more leaders for these trips. For those who are interested, please contact Garrett Wee at (507) 829-8187 or garrettwee@hotmail.com for more information.

F. Finance Committee (Mark Lystig, Chair)

No changes to report

G. Publication Committee (Anthony Hertz, Chair)

The latest publications are for the State Fair, in addition to *The Loon* and *Minnesota Birding*. The MOU gives away beautiful bookmarks at the State Fair. In addition, a “new birder” bird list entitled “Backyard Birds of Minnesota” was created focusing on general habitat preferences to assist new birders in identification.

H. Ad Hoc By-laws Committee Update (Dick King)

The newly revised by-laws for the MOU are almost

completed and hoping to present these at the Paper Session to the MOU membership.

VI. Other business and announcements

Bob Dunlap reminded the board that we need a new Vice President to serve after the Paper Session, since his term is ending. Anyone interested to serve in this capacity should contact the MOU. Recommendations are also appreciated.

Gerry Hoekstra, editor of *Minnesota Birding*, reported that Gene Bauer will take over as MOU calendar editor for the newsletter.

V. Close

No committee reports from Awards (Susan Barnes Elliott), Avian Information (Bob Janssen), Electronic Communications (Dave Cahlander), *Minnesota Birding* (Gerry Hoekstra), MOURC (Tom Tustison), Savaloja Grants (Steve Wilson), Social Media (Pete Nichols).

Next Board meeting:

Friday, December 3, 2021, 2:00–4:00 p.m.

Meadowlark Identification

In Fall and Winter

by *Bob Dunlap*

A singing meadowlark perched atop a small tree or fencepost in summer is a sight to behold. It's loud, and its yellow breast with a bold black “V” is obvious even from a distance; it's utterly conspicuous in a grassland setting. We know it's a meadowlark that we're seeing and hearing, and since it's the breeding season we know (or at least we're pretty sure) which meadowlark it is.

But seeing one of these birds in fall or winter, maybe skulking along a lakeshore or foraging in a cow pasture, is a different story. We can tell it's a meadowlark, to be sure, even though its yellow breast and black “V” are muted. Its upper side looks duller and buffier as well, and its face lacks the contrasting intersections of white, black, and yellow. And, perhaps most frustratingly, it's not saying anything! Is it an Eastern or Western?

Before we attempt to answer that question, we need to understand a brief point about meadowlark biology. Meadowlarks exhibit a basic molt strategy, which essentially means that as adults they only molt once a year, in the fall. There is no molt from drab winter plumage into bright spring plumage as in American Goldfinch; rather, the drabber, buffier plumage of meadowlarks we see in fall is actually fresh plumage. By early spring, the bird's plumage is a result of those feathers wearing away to reveal their brighter

basal colors. The European Starling is another songbird that exhibits this molt strategy.

This, of course, renders certain “classic” plumage differences between the two species meaningless in the fall and winter. During the breeding season, for example, a silent meadowlark with yellow in the malar is usually confidently identified as a Western, whereas a lack of yellow usually implies Eastern. After the fall molt, the fresh malar feathers of both species are tipped with buff, obscuring the basal feather color and resulting in the malar looking neither white nor yellow, but buffy. Observers without knowledge of this change may still try to assign the malar color to either yellow or white, likely resulting in a misidentification. These same buff tips are also present on fresh feathers throughout much of the rest of the bird. Oft-cited identification features, including darkness of head stripes and flank striping versus spotting are therefore of little value in separating meadowlarks at this time of year.

Other plumage differences may be more consistent throughout the year, and these include the thickness of dark barring on tertials and central rectrices, the amount of white in outer rectrices, and the presence or lack of rufous color in the upperparts. However, all of these differences fall on a scale with extremes on each end and increasingly inter-

mediate forms in between, and it's not always easy to identify an individual as exhibiting the typical traits for a given species without a full understanding of this variation. It's possible that quality photos might capture these traits well enough in the fall and winter to offer some level of confidence in identifying an individual, but such photos are too often difficult to achieve. In addition, none of these features seem to be diagnostic by themselves.

Not too long ago, there used to be more of a dividing line from north to south separating the two species in Minnesota during the breeding season; Eastern was more common in the eastern two-thirds of the state, while Western was more common in the western third. This general rule was thought to extend to meadowlarks seen during migration as well (with the North Shore of Lake Superior being a notable exception; Westerns continue to be more frequently encountered there), and finding meadowlarks overwintering anywhere in the state was a rare occurrence. Nowadays, these lines have blurred extensively, as Easterns have been increasingly found in the western third of the state and winter observations of both species have likewise increased. It's clear that where you are in the state doesn't matter as much as it used to.

Vocalizations are probably the surest and easiest means of identifying meadowlarks at any time of year. That being said, even these can be problematic. It has been well-documented that adults of either meadowlark species can sing the song of the other species as a result of behavioral learning, often due to the presence of both species in a given location during the breeding season. In addition, sometimes the song of an individual meadowlark sounds atypical or "mixed" with an influence of the other species' song (and occasionally songs of unrelated birds). Calls are typically more diagnostic, and these include both the short call (higher "zeert"

in Eastern and lower "chuck" in Western) and the rattle call of each species (drier and sharper in Eastern, sweeter and duller in Western). However, see my article documenting an individual that gave the primary calls of both species in *The Loon* 90: 143-148. Typically, calls of songbirds are innate and not learned; a meadowlark giving calls of both species begs the question of how diagnostic these calls really are.

So, given the above, what is a birder to do when encountering a meadowlark in Minnesota in the fall and winter? I present the following simple approach to meadowlark identification during this time, roughly October through February:

- A meadowlark not heard giving a diagnostic vocalization (song, short call, rattle call) is left unidentified to species.
- A meadowlark heard giving a diagnostic vocalization can be identified to species unless it is also heard giving mixed vocalizations or vocalizations of the other species.

That's it. Of course, this means that many of the meadowlarks we see in fall and winter in Minnesota will remain unidentified, since it seems that coming across a readily vocalizing individual isn't very common. I recognize that leaving birds unidentified is anathema to many of us. But the game of birding is also a test in confidence, and that includes being confident in when *not* to identify a bird. Did we really see all the correct field marks to identify the bird to species? Did we really hear the bird give a diagnostic vocalization? These are the questions we should be asking ourselves when identifying birds at any time of year, and they're especially important when identifying fall and winter meadowlarks.

Bob Dunlap has been birding in Minnesota since age 5. Although he has studied birds throughout the state, his greatest expertise is in grassland birds. He has served many positions in the MOU, mostly recently as President in 2018 and 2019.

*Meadowlark in Rice County
Winter 2021
by Gerald Hoekstra*



MOU Calendar

September / October 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			SEPTEMBER 1	2	3	4 Warbler Walk, Hyland Lake Park, MOU Field Trips MN Campus Bird Hike. CNC Bird Walk, ZVAS
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 WI Campus Bird Hike, CNC Bird Walk, Rapids Lake, MRVAC Birding by Canoe, Richardson NC, 3RPD Young Birders Club, Richardson NC, 3RPD
12	13 Bird Walk, Old Cedar Ave, MRVAC	14	15	16	17	18 Nelson's/LeConte's Sparrows, MOU Field Trips Bird Banding, Lowry Nat. Ctr Biking for Birds, Richardson NC, 3RPD
19 Root River Bird Walk, ZVAS Raptors up close, Lowry NC	20	21	22	23 "Basics of Bird Migration," CNC "Biodiversity & Research in SZ Bog," MRVAC	24 CNC Public Bird Banding	25 Raptor Release, CNC Fall Sparrow Walk, ZVAS
26 Raptor Count/ Hawk Watch, CNC Bird Walk, Bass Ponds, MRVAC	27	28	29	30	OCTOBER 1	2 MN Campus Bird Hike, CNC Fall Sparrow Walk, ZVAS Bird Walk, ZVAS
3 Bird Walk, Rapids Lake, MRVAC	4	5	6	7	8	9 WI Campus Bird Hike, CNC Sparrow Search, Tiger Lake WMA, MOU Field Trips
10	11 Bird Walk, Bass Ponds, MRVAC	12	13	14 "A Walk in the Woodson," SPAS	15	16 Pelican Migration, SPAS Bird Walk, Old Cedar Ave, MRVAC
17	18	19 Field Trip: Sandhill Cranes at Crex Meadows, SPAS	20	21 "Red-headed Woodpecker Project," MRVAC	22 Bird Banding, CNC	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	NOVEMBER 1	2	3	4	5	6 Chisago County Sea Duck Search, MOU Field Trips



MOU Calendar

September / October 2021

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

CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Minnesota Campus:

12806 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN

Wisconsin Campus:

300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

Sept. 4: MN Campus Bird Hike

Detail: 8-10:00 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 or free to 'Friends of CNC,' Hastings Environmental Protectors, high school students, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. *Space is limited, and registrations are required.* Please RSVP by calling 651-437-4359.

Sept. 11: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8-10:00 am. Hike trails on our Wisconsin Campus and learn to identify birds with local experts from the St. Croix Valley Bird Club. Meet at 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI. Program fee: \$5 per participant or free for SCVBC members and 'Friends of CNC.' *Space is limited, and registrations are required.* RSVP by calling 651-437-4359.

Sept. 23: "Basics of Bird Migration"

Details: 7-8:00 pm. Join Steve Betchkal at the CNC to learn about bird migration. Fee is \$5, or free to 'Friends of CNC.' *Space is limited, and registrations are required.* Please RSVP by calling 651-437-4359.

Sept. 24: Public Bird Banding

Details: 8 am-12:00 pm. Join the CNC staff and volunteers to learn how songbirds are banded. Information collected by CNC bird banders becomes part of national databases that are used to study birds and understand their dynamic populations. Program fee: Free. For more questions, please call 651-437-4359.

Sept. 26: Raptor Count/Hawk Watch

Details: 10-2:00 pm. Join the CNC team of spotters to count thousands of raptors and other migrants including songbirds, gulls, and other southbound migrants that follow the St. Croix/Mississippi River Flyway south to their wintering grounds. Program fee: Free. For information, call 651-437-4359.



Green Heron, by Britt Dalbec

Oct. 2: MN Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8-10:00 am. See September 4 description above.

Oct. 9: WI Campus Bird Hike

Details: 8-10:00 am. See September 11 description above.

Oct. 22: Public Bird Banding

Details: 8-10:00 am. See September 24 description above.

MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY

AUDUBON CHAPTER

Note: The Minnesota River Valley Wildlife Refuge staff has informed us that the Visitors Center can be expected to be unavailable for meetings for the foreseeable future. We are planning on holding virtual meetings for September, January, February, and March. We are hoping that our October and meetings from April through June can be in person in the Visitors Center. Virtual meetings will start at 7:30 p.m., with links sent out about a week before. In person meetings, whenever possible, will begin at 7:00 p.m., with a social gathering before the meeting starting at 7:30 p.m.

Sept. 23: Biodiversity & Research in the Sax-Zim Bog

Details: 7:30 pm via Zoom. Speaker: Clinton Dexter-Nienhaus, Head Naturalist at Sax-Zim Bog. While research at Sax-Zim Bog includes surveying Golden-winged Warblers, owls, and supporting organizations or individuals studying specific species in the Bog, it can also include documenting biodiversity by citizen scientists through organized surveys such as our annual BioBlitz and Christmas Bird Counts or reports on iNaturalist. Clinton will review the different surveying and research projects happening in the Sax-Zim Bog and share some of their interesting and exciting results.

Oct. 21: Red-headed Woodpecker Project

Details: 7:30 pm (see note above re whether in-person or via Zoom). Speaker: Elena West. Find out what an intense study of Minnesota's largest concentration of Red-headed Woodpeckers has revealed. Migration routes and wintering locations have been discovered from tracking devices strapped on the backs of some birds. Nest cavity cameras have uncovered all sorts of nesting information and some surprising stories. Learn about some of the new technology that has been and will be utilized in this project.



*Red-headed Woodpecker
by Jerry Pruett*



American Goldfinch, by Jean Brisance

MRVAC BIRD WATCHING TREKS

at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

Explore some of the best Refuge units for bird watching in the fall season. We will spend time on these walks searching for birds only seen on the Refuge during migration. We will study the different species of birds and learn about some other locations to search for birds during the fall migration. Birders of all skill levels are welcome to attend these walks. Bring along your binoculars and favorite field guide, and dress appropriately for the weather. All hikes from 8:00-10:30 a.m., led by Craig Mandel.

Bass Ponds Trailhead

2501 86th St. E., Bloomington
Sunday, September 26, and Monday, October 11

Old Cedar Ave Trailhead

9551 Old Cedar Ave S, Bloomington
Monday, September 13 and Saturday, October 16

Rapids Lake Environmental Education & Visitor Center

15865 Rapids Lake Rd, Carver
Saturday, September 11 and Sunday, October 3

MRVAC FIELD TRIPS

Sept. 16-17: Kandiyohi County Birding Days

Details: 7:00 am start time. Led by Craig Mandel. With two days of birding in Kandiyohi County, we will have plenty of time to bird many of the key birding locations in Kandiyohi County, some of which are: Sibley State Park, Robbins Island Park, Bergquist Wildlife Area, and the Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center. Please contact Craig Mandel at 952-240-7647 to register.

Oct. 7-8: Itasca County Birding Days

Details: 7:00 am start time. Led by Craig Mandel. On this two-day trip, we will be exploring Itasca County. There will be some large lakes to search for waterfowl and lots of parks to search for sparrows and late migrants. Please contact Craig Mandel at 952-240-7647 to register.

MOU FIELD TRIPS

Sept. 4: Warbler Walk at Hyland Lake Park

Details: 7:00 am. Join Trey Weaver at Hyland Lake Park for a walk searching for warblers and other songbirds in their migration back south. This park has a diverse array of habitats and attracts many different types of songbirds: it has recorded over 215 species and is a migrant trap for many neotropical birds. Bring binoculars. Meet in the parking lot adjacent to the playground. Meeting coordinates: 44.8250,-93.3724. To register, contact Garrett Wee at garrettwee@hotmail.com or text/call 507-829-8187.

Sept. 18: Nelson's and LeConte's Sparrow Search

Details: 8:30 am. Join Garrett Wee on a search for some of Minnesota's most elusive and secretive sparrow species. We will be scanning and searching the marsh edges of the Minnesota Valley NWR. We'll keep an eye out for other hard-to-find marsh birds, such as bitterns and rails. Meet at Old Cedar Ave Bridge main parking lot. Equipment needed: binoculars and muck boots, possibly waders. Bug Repellent encouraged. To register, contact Garrett Wee at garrettwee@hotmail.com or text/call 507-829-8187.

Oct. 9: Sparrow Search at Tiger Lake WMA, Carver County

Details: 7:00 am. Join Trey Weaver at Tiger Lake WMA for a walk through marsh and grassland searching for Nelson's and LeConte's Sparrows and other songbirds. This WMA has a history of attracting marsh birds that are often difficult to see. October is a great time to find vagrants and rarities passing through Minnesota. Don't miss out. It should be a great trip! To register, contact Garrett Wee at garrettwee@hotmail.com or text/call 507-829-8187.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, by Jean Brisance

Nov. 6: Chisago County Sea Duck Search

Details: Meeting time and location TBD. Join Erik Collins on a search for some of Minnesota's rarest duck species. Referred as "sea ducks," these species commonly inhabit coastal areas but sometimes are found inland. Target species include Black Scoter, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, and Harlequin Duck. Chisago County has a lot of potential for these amazing birds. Equipment needed: binoculars and spotting scope. Don't miss out! To register, contact Garrett Wee at garrettwee@hotmail.com or text/call 507-829-8187.

ST. PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Oct. 14: A Walk in the Woodson

Details: Presentation via Zoom. featuring a tour of the renowned museum of bird art in Wausau, WI. Woodson Art Museum assistant director Matt Foss and curator of education Catie Anderson will share art works, insights, and stories during a virtual visit to the 2021 Birds in Art exhibition. Check the website, www.saintpaulaudubon.org, for up-to-date details and Zoom links.

Oct. 16: Pelican Migration at Pigs Eye Lake

Details: 9-11 a.m. Join us for birding at Pigs Eye Regional Park—North Unit, 2165 Pigs Eye Lake Rd, St. Paul. Each fall flocks of American White Pelicans gather in migration at the north end of Pigs Eye Lake. Here they rest up and refuel on minnows. We may also see grassland and woodland songbirds, swallows, Wild Turkeys, Bald Eagles, and more. If the timing is right, we may be able to watch the Corps of Engineers build dredge spoil islands in Pig's Eye Lake.

Directions: Meet in the public parking lot off Shepard Road at Chestnut Street in St Paul. There is a Caribou Coffee, 230 Spring Street, adjacent to the lot. We will car caravan from there to Pig's Eye. The Pig's Eye site is difficult to find the first time, so car caravans can help us all get there safely. There are port-a-potties at the park. Better facilities can be used at Caribou Coffee, where we will rendezvous. Difficulty: We will be walking on unpaved field trails with gentle slopes. There are spots of uneven ground and ruts. We will walk at a leisurely pace, birding along the way. After about 20 minutes we will arrive at our observation point. Bring a scope if you can. Leaders: Kiki Sonnen 651-331-9560, Kikisonnen@gmail.com and Chase Davies.

Oct. 19: October Field Trip Sandhill Cranes at Crex Meadows

Details: 4-8:15 pm. Details to come.
See www.saintpaulaudubon.org.

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

Sept. 11: Birding by Canoe (Richardson Nature Center)

Details: 10 am–12 pm. Float into the world of bird watching while canoeing on the scenic Turtle Basking Pond. Learn basic paddle strokes, parts of the canoe, and how to safely enter and exit the canoe. Discover tips and tricks for wildlife watching from naturalists. Equipment and binoculars provided. Reservations required by two days prior. To ensure small group sizes in compliance with Minnesota Department of Health guidelines, everyone attending this program must register. Fee: \$10. Participants ages 13 years and younger must be accompanied by a registered adult from the same household. Call 763-559-6700 to register.

Sept. 11: Young Birders Club: Wonderful World of Woodpeckers (Richardson Nature Center)

Details: 10 am–12 pm. Woodpeckers have many fascinating adaptations that help them find food and build homes in trees. Learn how to identify woodpeckers and go on a hike to search for birds and signs in our woods. Three Rivers Young Birders Club is for ages 9-12, helping you discover the wonder of birds and meet other kids interested in them too. Fee: \$5.00. Free for Young Birders Club members (discount applied at checkout). Reservations required by two days prior. Call 763-559-6700 to register.



Bobolink, by Gerald Hoekstra

Sept. 18 Biking for Birds (Elm Creek Park Reserve)

Go on a guided bike tour of Elm Creek Park Reserve and stop at different habitats to look and listen for birds. Participants must be able to bike six miles at a slow-to-moderate pace and provide their own bike and helmet; binoculars provided if needed. Reservations required. To ensure small group sizes in compliance with Minnesota Department of Health guidelines, everyone attending this program must register and pay. Fee \$7.00. Participants ages 13 years and younger must be accompanied by a registered adult from the same household. Call 763-559-6700 to register.

Sept. 18: Bird Banding (Lowry Nature Center)

Details: 9 am–12 pm. Meet at Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria. See wild songbirds safely banded and discuss what scientists learn. This program is for all ages and free. Participants ages 13 years and younger must be accompanied by an adult from the same household. Call 763-694-7650 for details.

Sept. 19: Raptors Up Close (Lowry Nature Center)

Details: 3-4:30 pm. Meet at Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr., Victoria. Get to know the current captive raptors and learn about these amazing birds of prey. This program is for all ages and is free. Participants ages 13 years and younger must be accompanied by an adult from the same household. Call 763-694-7650 for details.

ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

Sept. 4: ZVAS Bird Walk

Details: 9-10:30 am. Meet at the Quarry Hill Nature Center located at 701 Silver Creek Road NE, Rochester. Terry and Joyce Grier will lead a casual bird walk which is free and open to the public. No registration required.

Sept. 19: Root River Bird Walk

Details: 9-11:30 am. Meet leader Sandy Hokonson at the Root River County Park south of Rochester near Simpson. The Park has a two-mile loop walking trail through a diverse habitat with a wide variety of birds. This trip will be cancelled if it's raining harder than a light sprinkle.

Sept. 25: Fall Sparrow Walk

Details: 8-10:00 am. Meet in the parking lot on the east side of the Kalmar Reservoir (East Landfill Reservoir) just off 19 St. NW and Valleyview Ct. Bring waterproof footwear as the grass will probably be quite wet.

Oct. 2: Fall Sparrow Walk

Details: 8-10:00 am. See September 25 description above.

Oct. 2: Monthly Bird Walk

Details: 9-10:30am. See September 4 description.

Birder Bio: Andrew Longtin



Tell us about yourself.

I was born and raised in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, bought my first house in New Hope, and moved to Corcoran in 1999 to get out of the main metro area a bit. Too bad development is following me there now. I've managed to see 149 species in/from my yard, but with the destruction of all the surrounding habitat by the coming development, I'm guessing that's as far as I'll get.

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

We had a good-sized yard growing up in White Bear Lake, and I was always interested in birds and wildlife. My father for a time worked for the DNR in fisheries before I was born but was always talking about plants, wildlife, everything nature related. I was the one that put up bird feeders or bird houses in our yard.

How did your interest expand after that first experience?

Once I got my first house with my own yard, I started putting up feeders and bird houses to attract birds for my enjoyment. It was always enjoyable to me to have feathered friends in the yard and hear the calls and the sounds they bring to your yard.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

These days the main attraction for me is the enjoyment and relaxation of being out birding. For me it relieves the day-to-day stress and gets me outside in nature.

How did you originally become acquainted with the MOU?

OK, this might date me but back a bit. When the internet start getting popular, I found news groups, ended up getting on REC.BIRDS reading posts, and started responding also. It was in those posts that I found out about MOU, Hawk Ridge, and other spots and groups related to birds. As I got more into birding and wanting to keep track of birds, I joined MOU to allow me to enter data and get all the provided lists and data. I also found out about Project Feeder Watch and did that for 20 years, starting in New Hope, but mostly at my Corcoran home.

Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

I don't really have a favorite place. I just basically bird wherever I am at the time. I have been to 46 of our 50 states, and have at least started a life list in all but Idaho and Oregon, which I need to revisit and start lists. I still need to get to Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Hawaii to start one. The two states I have decent life lists for are Florida and Washington State. I've never been birding outside the U.S. yet.



I also keep life lists for all the MBL ball parks that I've been to. I figure it I have time between innings and between pitches, so why not? By the way, my Target Field list is at 31 species.

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

I usually bird alone. I have one of those 24/7/366 on-call type jobs, and I don't think it's fair to subject other people to my pain when or if the phone rings and I have to drop what I'm doing and leave for work.

I do a lot of wondering around the state birding, so I currently have 100+ species in all 87 counties; I'm working on getting that to 150+. Because I pretty much bird every day really in some form, I guess you could classify me also as a day lister. Depending on my mood, I go for county birds to close out county lists or look for birds to close out specific days.

One thing I'm generally not is a chaser, I only have a measly 292 species on my state list, all but 5five found on my own. I'm also currently working on getting those five birds so as not to need a "Personally found" list.

Favorite bird or bird family?

Don't know that I have a favorite, but high on the list are Corvidae, Paridae, and Sittidae.

Any advice on how to be a better birder?

One thing I always do is ask any birder I meet out birding if they want to know what species I've seen before I tell them (spoiler alert if you will). I assume they are like me and want to find any potential lifers for themselves. Also look up! You never know what's flying high overhead. That habit I picked up from volunteer counting at Hawk Ridge for many years.



Northern Parula, by Jean Brisance

Ever had an unusual experience while birding?

While birding in Big Stone County one time, I was parked on a road looking over a wetland area from my truck with my spotting scope on my window mount; I had both windows mostly down and was watching an American Bittern in the distance. As I was watching, Barn Swallows started flying around the truck and kept passing in front of my field of view. Next thing I know, I can feel the light air current go past my face, the swallows were flying in and out of my truck windows and making loops around the inside of my truck cab with me. It was like they thought my truck was like a barn on wheels, I guess.

What new bird would you most like to see most?

I need to find for myself Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-tailed Duck, Snowy Egret, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and Kentucky Warbler. Finding these would make my MN Life List my Personally Found list also.

Swamp Sparrow, by Tom Gilde



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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Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

Carpenter Nature Center
12805 Saint Croix Trail South
Hastings, MN 55033

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12805 Saint Croix Trail South
Hastings, MN 55033
Email: mou@moumn.org
Web: <http://moumn.org>

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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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Birding Hotline

Northwest: 800-433-1888

MOU Contacts

Minnesota Birding Editor: newsletter@moumn.org
President: president@moumn.org
Vice President: vicepresident@moumn.org
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The Savaloja Grants supports research and other projects selected by the MOU for special attention. Your contributions help fund a better future for birds in Minnesota. You can add a contribution to your membership check.

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