

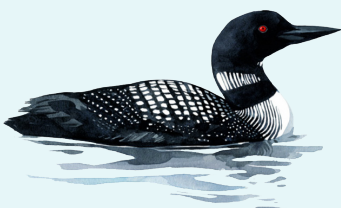


Minnesota BIRDING

March
April
2023
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Conservation Column

The Connecticut Warbler in Minnesota and Beyond: What We Know, What We Don't, and What's Next

by Steve Kolbe

The Connecticut Warbler is in trouble. Throughout much of the species' range, populations are showing consistent declines (Table 1). Some of these numbers, especially those at the southern edge of the breeding range, are alarming. Perhaps even more upsetting is that the reasons for this decline are poorly understood.

Connecticut Warblers are difficult to study for several reasons: they often nest in relatively low densities, breed in inaccessible (and insect-infested!) habitats, and are very secretive when not singing. Birders know this well. Finding a singing male Connecticut Warbler can be relatively easy given a little patience (and a headnet!), but finding a migrant is another story.

What little we do know about Connecticut Warblers comes from the breeding season. In Minnesota and adjacent states and provinces, this species breeds primarily in forested peatland forests dominated by either black spruce or tamarack. Connecticut Warblers also breed in jack pine forests in the eastern portion of their North American range and in aspen forests in western Canada. This habitat plasticity is one of the many oddities about this species. It appears that Connecticut Warblers are not habitat

specialists per se but are instead habitat structure specialists. Whether black spruce, jack pine, tamarack, or aspen, Connecticut Warblers select breeding microhabitats in each that show two consistent traits: widely spaced trees and dense understory. The tree structure is a bit of a Goldilocks situation: not too dense, not too open. This arrangement is relatively uncommon within black spruce and tamarack forests in Minnesota. Anyone who has taken a drive through Lake of the Woods or Beltrami County will have been struck by the large amount of this habitat on the landscape but also likely wondered where all the Connecticut Warblers were! In the eyes of the Connecticut Warbler, not all black spruce or tamarack is created equal: it must be "just right."

Beyond habitat associations of singing males, our knowledge of Connecticut Warbler natural history is largely lacking, and this is problematic for many reasons. Other life cycle needs of a species often do not perfectly overlap with the needs of a singing male. That is, just because a male Connecticut Warbler is singing from a tamarack stand in northern Minnesota does not necessarily mean that the site has everything a female Connecticut



Figure 1. A Connecticut Warbler nest found in the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area in 2020

Warbler requires for nesting or that which their potential offspring needs to survive once it fledges. The latter — the post-fledging period — has received increased attention for many species during the last two decades. The first few weeks of a bird's life after it leaves the nest is the time of highest mortality risk in its life (Cox et al. 2014). Predation, starvation, and exposure to the elements are all threats to a young bird, especially before it has fully developed feathers and mobility. It is important to understand microhabitats and movements of fledgling birds; some will use very different habitats after fledging than those used for nesting. If these diverse habitat needs are not taken into consideration by land managers, they could inadvertently alter or destroy necessary habitats without knowing it.

Since this information was entirely lacking for Connecticut Warblers, the Avian Ecology Lab at the Natural Resources Research Institute at the University of Minnesota Duluth investigated breeding and post-fledging movements of Connecticut Warblers to better understand potential reasons for this species' decline. An added benefit of this research is that we added much-needed information about basic natural history of this species; much of what we knew about Connecticut Warbler nesting ecology, for example, was based on a single nest! In 2019, we worked in the Sax-Zim Bog, and in 2020 we worked in the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area. In both areas, we focused our efforts on tamarack stands that held significant numbers of singing Connecticut Warblers.

Between myself and my field technicians Brett Howland and Kara Snow (both of whom are now graduate students conducting bird research at UMD), we were able to find 11 Connecticut Warbler nests over the two-year study (Figure 1). This is a significant increase in the number of nests ever documented, and we were able to collect valuable microhabitat information at each. As described above,

however, the main goal of finding these nests was to document the post-fledging period in the species.

To do this, we monitored the activity of the eggs and nestlings in each nest until the nestlings were a few days from fledging, at which point we attached small, light-weight transmitters to a subset of the nestlings (Figure 2). We then visited the study site each subsequent day and tracked every tagged bird and marked its location with a GPS. A few days later, after the bird had moved away, we returned to the GPS location and collected detailed habitat information at the bird's location as well as at a random nearby point where the bird was not found. This allowed us to understand the specific microhabitats juvenile Connecticut Warblers were using during this particularly vulnerable time in their life cycle. The GPS points collected from each bird also allowed us to describe the distance each bird moved between days and the distance moved from the nest over time.

We were able to track 14 birds from five nests, and the information gleaned from these individuals is quite interesting and valuable. We found that Connecticut Warblers fledge very quickly — between seven and eight days after hatching. Because of this short period in the nest, fledglings are small and have very poorly developed wings and tails. As a result, they do not move far from the nest for the first week after they fledge: the average distance from their nest during this time was 35.5 meters with a maximum distance of 104 meters. Similarly, Connecticut Warblers were not documented making daily movements greater than 55 meters until eight days after leaving the nest and it took until 19 days post-fledge for birds to move more than 100 meters



Figure 2. Connecticut Warbler nestlings in the Red Lake Wildlife Management Area in 2020

per day. Microhabitats that fledgling Connecticut Warblers chose during the post-fledging period had a higher density of stems and other vegetation than the surrounding unused habitats.

These results are very important for our increased understanding of the Connecticut Warbler life cycle. We now have greater confidence that Connecticut Warbler fledglings use habitats that are like those used by singing males and nesting females and do so throughout their most vulnerable days. We also have a more detailed understanding of the ground cover traits that this species uses. If land managers can identify and protect forest stands with singing male Connecticut Warblers, they are likely preserving the appropriate habitats that females and juveniles of the species will need throughout the summer until they migrate away in the fall. Of course, because fledglings do not appear to shift habitats, this also means that these habitats have an even greater importance for Connecticut Warblers than previously known.

Connecticut Warbler habitats in Minnesota are facing multiple threats. Since the start of the latest outbreak in 2001, Eastern Larch Beetle (ELB) has impacted 69% of Minnesota’s tamarack forests (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2022). While ELB is a native pest, climate change and the associated growing season extension appears to have changed the life cycle of the beetle, which can now complete two generations in a single year instead of only one as in the past (McKee 2015). The effects of this on Connecticut Warbler populations is unknown and a detailed investigation is sorely needed. Black spruce harvests have increased in the state in recent years, and the effects of this are hardly surprising. Clearcutting large tracts of spruce while leaving minimal trees in reserve does not create or maintain anything resembling habitat for Connecticut Warblers or other forested peatland specialists such as Boreal Chickadee, Canada Jay, or Palm Warbler. We should all advocate for large tracts of black spruce and tamarack to be protected and remain on the landscape, especially on public land. Since the Goldilocks-esque Connecticut Warblers require a specific type of forest structure, preserving large patches of these habitats increases the chances that the right microhabitat is present for the species while also ensuring habitats for other peatland specialists remains on the landscape.

Connecticut Warblers likely face trouble during other portions of their annual cycle outside of Minnesota. The details of their annual journeys are fuzzy, but it appears that the typical Connecticut Warbler migrates to the East Coast of the United States — typically somewhere in the Mid-Atlantic or southern New England region — before launching itself over the Atlantic Ocean following the passage of a cold front. The next time it will land is typically a short stopover on a Caribbean Island or in northern South America before arrival on the nonbreeding grounds some-

Table 1. Connecticut Warbler population trend estimates as documented by the North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS; 1966-2019) and by researchers at the Natural Resources Research Institute (1995-2022).

Method	Region	Rate (%/year)
BBS	Survey-wide	-0.8
BBS	USA	-1.8
BBS	Canada	-0.8
BBS	Minnesota	-1.6
NRRI	Chippewa and Superior National Forests	-8.7

where in south-central South America. In the spring, Connecticut Warblers chart a more westerly course that takes them once again through the Caribbean Islands but then through peninsular Florida before heading northwestward to the breeding grounds.

Threats during this remarkable annual journey certainly include issues with finding quality stopover habitat, encounters with outdoor cats, loss of habitat on the nonbreeding grounds, and collisions with human-made structures. All these risks undoubtedly reduce the number of Connecticut Warblers in the world. However, the fact remains that the only place where more Connecticut Warblers can be added to the population is on the breeding grounds. And the most recent population-scale research on Connecticut Warblers suggests that issues of breeding habitat loss and fragmentation are the most likely cause of population declines in this species (Hallworth et al. 2021).

Our research team at the Natural Resources Research institute recently helped form a Connecticut Warbler working group. This collection of researchers from every state and province in which this species breeds will shine a light on the plight of the Connecticut Warbler, gather and synthesize the current knowledge about the species, and guide research needs and conservation action in the future. We have been and will continue to be strong advocates for the Connecticut Warbler and other species that require peatland forest habitats in Minnesota and beyond. If you would like to help, we would love to hear from you!

In the meantime, as much as you are able, keep doing the simple things that will help all birds, including Connecticut Warblers. You know the list: consider your carbon footprint, keep cats indoors, drink shade-grown coffee, and reduce the risk of window strikes at your home. If you are feeling bold, consider commenting on the Minnesota DNR annual forest stand exam lists and sharing that you believe conserving bird habitat is an important consideration in

these decisions, especially on lands designated for wildlife. I hope that with all our efforts combined, we will be able to share the excitement of hearing a Connecticut Warbler's song ringing out from a northern Minnesota black spruce bog or catching a glimpse of one skulking around at a local migrant trap for many decades to come.

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Message from the President

Michelle Terrell

As a birder and historian, I enjoy reading back issues of *The Loon* and even older copies of *The Flicker* (<https://moumn.org/loon/atomz.php>). From my current position, I find the messages written by past presidents of particular interest. Through the decades, the annual cycle of the organization has a familiar cadence. Also recognizable are the gratifying moments and occasional challenges of leading a statewide organization. A particular note that echoes through the years from one president to another is the pleasure of working with other members of the board in support of the MOU's mission.

Now in my second year as president and fourth year on the board, I would like to take a moment to thank my fellow board members. The MOU Board is comprised of the five elected officers, the journal and newsletter editors, the past president, and the chairs of the organization's 14 standing committees. This structure requires that, in addition to serving on the board and making decisions for the organization, board members volunteer considerable time through leadership of their respective committees or publications or through the performance of the duties of their office.

This year marks a transition in the membership of the board. At the end of 2022, four committee chairs stepped off the board. I would like to thank departing chairs Steve Wilson (Savaloja Grants), Susan Barnes Elliott (Awards & Recognition), Garrett Wee (Field Trips), and Liz Stanley (Information Technology) for the time they devoted to the board and their committees.

For ten years, Steve Wilson has steered the Savaloja Grants Committee through the annual grant cycle. Steve brought to the position a commitment to supporting inclusion and diversity in the Minnesota birding community. The committee's new chair, Kristina Dexter-Nienhaus, is also a proud

advocate for underrepresented communities and is committed to advancing that aspect of the grant program together with its support of ornithological research and education.

Since 2020, Susan Barnes Elliott has led the Awards & Recognition Committee in the important task of acknowledging those who have contributed to our birding community. Before that, from 2016 through 2019, Susan served as the Recording Secretary. She will be missed on the board, but happily has joined the Education Committee. Awards & Recognition Committee member Liz Harper has stepped into the role of chair and looks forward to continuing and augmenting the work of this committee.

Garrett Wee became the chair of the Field Trips Committee in 2021. Garrett took on the challenge of rebooting the MOU's field trip program while at the same time being responsive to the COVID pandemic. Trey Weaver has stepped into the role of Field Trips chair and is already planning a slate of interesting field trips for 2023.

Liz Stanley joined the board in 2020 to lead the newly created Information Technology Committee. During her time on the board, Liz completed an analysis of the MOU website and made recommendations for future development. The position of Information Technology Committee chair is currently open.

If you have the opportunity, please thank these past board members for their service to the MOU and welcome our new board members.

Spring will soon be in the air and my calendar is quickly filling with birding activities. I am looking forward to the Spring Birding Primer, the Hastings Area Earth Day Birding Festival, and the Salt Lake Birding Weekend. I hope to see many of you at these events!

Happy Birding!

45th Salt Lake Birding Festival

April 28 - 29

by Jason Frank

The MOU and MRVAC are pleased to announce that, after a three-year hiatus, the Salt Lake Birding Weekend is once again happening! Join us in Lac qui Parle County as Minnesota's oldest birding festival celebrates its 45th year. With shorebird and waterfowl migration peaking, this is a great place to find rare and interesting migrants like godwits, avocets, ibises, and grebes, including dancing Western Grebes. We never know what western species will make a surprise appearance. Sharp-tailed Grouse have been seen lekking in recent years. Also, water levels are down now, promising a chance of finding mudflats awash in shorebirds. This is also typically the start of warbler migration.

On the evening of Friday, April 28, beginning at 5:30, birders are invited to stop by Madison Mercantile for a potluck dinner and live music. The mercantile is a coffee shop/art gallery that also serves adult beverages. During April, the gallery will be featuring bird-themed works from regional artists.

Birders will meet at the American Legion in Marietta at 7:00 AM, Saturday, April 29, with breakfast and coffee available for a modest fee. We will assemble with your guides

into caravans for the day. While most of the birding takes place in Lac qui Parle County, we generally also make our way to sites in Big Stone and Yellow Medicine Counties as well. Maps and checklists will be provided. Our guides will communicate via group text, so any extraordinary sightings will be quickly known to all. After returning to the Legion at noon to buy lunch, we will share our finds and then embark on the afternoon leg of the journey.

At 7:30 p.m. we will meet at the Sons of Norway Lodge in Madison for supper and the final tally. Dinner is fried chicken, stuffing, mashed potatoes, corn, and pie for \$15. Reservations are necessary for dinner with prepayment preferred; please contact Bernice Oelien, Sons of Norway, at oelmal@farmerstel.net (507) 829-0676 or (320) 752-4757. Gluten-free and vegetarian options are available upon request. Payment at the door will be \$20 per dinner (limited meal availability).

Some of your guides will still be around birding on Sunday, so feel free to make inquiries on Saturday night if you plan on lingering in the area.

The Salt Lake Birding Weekend is free and open to all, though advance registration is appreciated, to help us with the planning. To register, go [here](#). Any questions can be sent to Jason Frank, event coordinator, at jmfrank@gmail.com. Lodging information, an area map, and the latest event details can be found online (www.MOUMN.org/saltlake/).



Cattle Egret at Salt Lake, by Jason Frank



Marbled Godwit at Salt Lake, by Jason Frank

Second Call for Savaloja Grant Applications

by Steve Wilson, Chair, MOU Savaloja Committee

MOU will award grants for bird-related projects to be funded from the Savaloja Memorial Fund in 2023. Grants can be awarded for projects that increase our understanding of birds, promote preservation of birds and their natural habitats, or increase public interest in birds. Proposals that include those currently underrepresented in Minnesota's birding community are welcome as a means of broadening public support for birds and their habitat.

Awards typically range from a few hundred dollars up to as much as \$4000. In 2022 three proposals were received and awarded grants totaling \$8,000. Further details on past projects and application information can be found at <https://moumn.org/grants.php>. For 2023, we anticipate that more than \$12,000 will be available for grants. The deadline for receipt of grant applications is **January 20, 2023**. Grant recipients will be notified by April 1, 2023. If your organization has an idea for a great project, please consider applying!

Thanks to you, MOU has supported a diverse array of worthy projects over the years. Last year's pandemic-related downturn in grant applications is unlikely to be replicated next year, and MOU will again be faced with difficult decisions over which important projects won't be supported because there isn't enough money to go around. You can help MOU make sure fewer worthy projects go unfunded by upgrading your membership next time you renew, or donating now by following the Donate button at the top of MOU's homepage, being sure to note "Savaloja Fund" in the instructions to the seller. Minnesota's birds will appreciate it!



Northern Flicker
by Robert Kirchberg

Tell Us about your Nemesis Bird!

by Gerald Hoekstra, Editor, Minnesota Birding

Do you have a nemesis bird? Or *did* you have one, one that you were finally able to get? Would you be interested in writing a paragraph or two about it? Other birders would be love to hear the story of your quest. And your frustrations. If so, please contact me at newsletter@moumn.org.



Golden-crowned Kinglet
by Allan Meadows

Website Manager, Design Volunteers Needed

The MOU is seeking assistance with our website (moumn.org), since David Cahlander plans to retire after decades of maintaining it. Help is needed with regular monthly, quarterly, and seasonal operations, as well as periodic updates to pages. The website uses programming languages HTML, PHP, CSS, PDF, JavaScript, and PERL and also makes heavy use of a MySQL database. David is willing to mentor a new website manager or team. Web design volunteers are also needed. If you are interested in helping with the website, please contact David (david.cahlander@gmail.com) or Michelle Terrell (mterrell.mou@gmail.com).

MOU Calendar

March / April 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			MARCH 1	2	3 IOC: International Festival of Owls	4 IOC: International Festival of Owls CNC: MN Campus Bird Hike RBNC: Bagels & Birds ZVAS: Quarry Hill
5 IOC: International Festival of Owls	6	7	8	8 MGB: Birding Ireland & France	10	11 CNC: WI Campus Bird Hike ZVAS: Mississippi River Bald Eagles
12 FSZB: Late Winter Birding	13	14	15	16	17	18 TRPD/LNC: Bird Banding at Lowry
19 MRVAC: Bass Ponds Birding MOU: Lake Byllesby Waterfowl Migration	20	21	22	23	24	25 MRVAC: Bass Ponds Birding
26 MRVAC: Old Cedar Ave. Birding	27	29	28 MGB: Birding Namibia & Botswana ZVAS: Bird Behavior Zoom Program	30 MRVAC: Pope County Birding Days TRPD/ENC: Every body Can Bird	31 MRVAC: Pope County Birding Days	APRIL 1 CNC: MN Campus Bird Hike RBNC: Bagels & Birds ZVAS: Quarry Hill
2	3	4	5	6	7 MOU: Carver Park Woodcock Display	8 CNC: WI Campus Bird Hike MRVAC: Bass Ponds Birding
9	10	11 ACM: Bioacoustics for Species Monitoring	12	13 ZVAS: Chester Woods Woodcocks	14 MOU: Lebanon Hills Park Woodcock Display	15 MOU: Carver Park & Carver County MRVAC: Old Cedar Ave. Birding RBNC Peregrine Falcon Presentation TRPD/LNC: Bird Banding at Lowry ZVAS: Rice Lake State Park & Amrstrong Wetlands
16 ZVAS: Root River County Park	17	18	19	20 MRVAC: Carlton County Birding Days	21 MRVAC: Carlton County Birding Days	22 BRPM: Bluebird Recovery 2023 Expo CNC: Earth Day Birding Festival MRVAC: Rapids Lake Birding ZVAS: Rochester Reservoir
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						



— MOU Calendar

March / April 2023

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

AUDUBON CHAPTER OF MINNEAPOLIS

www.minneapolisaudubon.org/events

April 11: Bioacoustics for Broad-Scale Species Monitoring and Conservation

7–8:30 pm. Dr. Elena West will discuss the use of autonomous recording devices for studying wildlife, including Red-headed Woodpeckers across their statewide range, and its implications for long-term monitoring and conservation efforts. Dr. West is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at the University of Minnesota. Registration in advance for this webinar is required at: [Bioacoustics](#).

BLUEBIRD RECOVERY PROGRAM OF MN

www.bbrp.org

April 22: Bluebird Recovery 2023 Expo

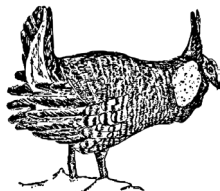
9 am–4 pm. The Bluebird Recovery Program board is excited to be hosting an in-person Expo for 2023, which will have presentations for both beginning and experienced bluebirders and nature lovers. Along with displays and experts to answer questions, there will be a silent auction, a catered lunch, coffee breaks, and much more. At Little Falls High School, 1001 5th Ave SE, Little Falls. More information and registration here: [Expo](#).

CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

www.carpenternaturecenter.org/events

March 4 & April 1: Minnesota Campus Bird Hike

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. Space is limited and reservations are required. Please call CNC at 651-437-4359. CNC, 12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings.



March 11 & April 8: Wisconsin Campus Bird Hike

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. Program fee: \$5 per participant or free for SCVBC members and “Friends of CNC.” Space is limited and reservations are required, please call CNC at 651-437-4359. Meet at the Al & Laurie Hein Visitor Center, 279 South Cove Road, Hudson, WI.

April 22: Hastings Area Earth Day Birding Festival

7 am–5 pm. An all-day celebration of Earth Day, including guided field trips, youth birding competition, bird banding, live raptor presentation, and keynote speakers. Fee is \$5 or \$15 with box lunch. Registration required. Call CNC at 651-437-4359 and speak to Jennifer Vieth. 12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings. For full information go to: [Festival](#).

FRIENDS OF SAX-ZIM BOG

www.saxzim.org/events

March 12: Late Winter Birding Field Trip

8 am–2 pm. By the end of March, many overwintering species begin their migrations back to the Arctic for breeding. Species that might have been common all winter are more difficult to find (like Pine Grosbeak), while species that have not been present all winter begin to become much more common (like Rough-legged Hawk and Snow Bunting). We hope to find some of our winter specialties like Rough-legged Hawk and Northern Shrike, as well as resident species getting ready for the spring, like Canada Jay and Boreal Chickadee. Join us on the final field trip of the winter season. Meet in the Lois King Education Center at the Welcome Center. Register for this field trip here: [Late Winter Birding Field Trip](#).

INTERNATIONAL OWL CENTER

126 E Cedar St., Houston

March 3, 4 & 5: International Festival of Owls

For full program details, go to the www.festivalofowls.com. Note a change in keynote speaker due to visa delays, Roar Solheim from Norway will speak about his adventures with owls and owl people in North America instead of Milan Ruzic from Serbia. Registration required.

MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

NOTE: *This informal group of people interested in birding in other countries has monthly online gatherings. Details on registering for these Zoom events provided when available via MOU-Net and on “Minnesota Global Birders” Facebook page a few weeks prior to the session.*

March 8: Birding Ireland & France

7–9 pm. Roy Zimmerman will discuss his birding trip to Ireland and France, one of the few presentations we have had focused on Europe.

March 28: Birding Namibia & Botswana

7–9 pm. Scott Clark and Bob Dunlap will give a presentation on birding Namibia and Botswana.

MINNESOTA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

www.moumn.org

For questions, please contact Trey Weaver, MOU Field Trip Chair: fieldtrips@moumn.org

March 26: Lake Byllesby Waterfowl Migration

8 am–noon. Leaders Matthew Thompson, Tate Putman, and Anna Bataglia. Expect large numbers of waterfowl, all five expected goose species, and interesting gulls. Late winter passerines and owls are possible in the cedars at the regional park. Both meadowlarks, longspurs, Horned Larks, and many other open habitat specialties are possible at Great Western Industrial Park. Participants will meet at the dam on the southeast side of the lake, 5001 MN 19, Cannon Falls, and will be encouraged to carpool. Come prepared with muck boots for possible slippery conditions on the trail to the lake from the cemetery on the northwest side of the lake. To register, go to: [Lake Byllesby](#).

April 7: Carver Park Woodcock Mating Display

8:30–9:30 pm. Join Trey Weaver for a chance to experience the American Woodcock's mating display. Carver Park Reserve is excellent habitat for this species and other nocturnal species could be encountered, including Barred and Great Horned owls. The group will meet at the Grimm Farm parking lot, 7400 Grimm Rd., Waconia. To register, go to: [Woodcock](#).

April 14: Lebanon Hills Park Woodcock Mating Display

8:30–9:30 pm. Matthew Thompson, Tate Putman, and Anna Battaglia lead the group on a nocturnal trip in the prairie habitat for a chance to experience the American Woodcock mating display. Other nocturnal species are possible, including Barred and Great Horned owls. Meet at the Lebanon Hills main visitor center parking lot, 860 Cliff Rd., Eagan. To register, go to: [Woodcock](#).

April 15: Carver Park Reserve and Carver County
7 am–3 pm. Join Trey Weaver for a bird walk through hardwood forests and grasslands. Meet at the horse trail-head parking in Carver Park Reserve, 7400 Grimm Rd., Waconia. The group will also caravan around Carver County to look for waterfowl at locations such as Lake Waconia, Swede Lake, Tacoma Ave., and New Germany. Stay with the group for as long as you want; we may go all day if weather and migration make for good birding. To register, go to: [Carver Park](#).

MN RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

www.mrvac.org

NOTE: *For information about birding events contact* Craig Mandel at 952-240-7647.

March 19, March 25 & April 8:

Bird Watching at Bass Ponds

8–10:30 am. Search for birds that visit the Refuge during their spring migration. Bring binoculars and a field guide. Registration required at [signup](#). Bass Pond Trailhead, 2501 E. 86th, Bloomington.

March 26 & April 15:

Beginning Bird Walk at Old Cedar Ave.

8–10:30 am. Learn some basic bird watching skills on this walk. Bring binoculars and a field guide. Registration required at [signup](#). Old Cedar Ave. Trailhead, 9551 Old Cedar Ave. S., Bloomington.

Common Redpoll, by Jean Brisance



March 30 & 31: Pope County Birding Days

7 am. In late March Pope County should be a great time to look for migrating waterfowl. There are parks to check and some interesting WMAs to search for migrants. Glacial Lakes State Park is good for woods birds and sometimes waterfowl. Other locations may include, Barsness Park, Lake Minnewaska, and Lake Emily. Time permitting, we may also check some locations in Southern Douglas County. Our base for this trip will be Glenwood. \$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members. Please contact Craig to register: 952-240-7647 or EgretCMan@msn.com.

April 20 & 21: Carlton County Birding Days

6:30 am. We will spend a couple days birding Carlton County, checking some lakes for waterfowl and with luck, find some species associated with the local boreal forests. Locations we may have time to check include the Moose Lake sewage ponds, Moose Lake Park, Jay Cooke State Park, and a few WMA's. Base for this trip will be Cloquet. \$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members. Please contact Craig to register: 952-240-7647 or EgretCMan@msn.com.

April 22: Bird Watching at Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center

8–10:30 am. Search for birds that visit the Refuge during their spring migration. Bring binoculars and a field guide. Registration required at [signup](#). Rapids Lake Education & Visitor Center Trailhead, 15865 Carver Highlands Dr., Carver.

RIVER BEND NATURE CENTER

www.rbnc.org

March 4 & April 1: Bagels & Birds

10–11 am. Free program on the first Saturday of the month. Join us for bagels while watching birds through the windows on the bird feeders and wild viewing area. River Bend Nature Center, 1000 Rustad Rd., Faribault.

April 15: Live Peregrine Falcons Presentation

10:30–11:30 am & 12:30–1:30 pm. Jackie Fallon of the Mayo Clinic Peregrine Falcon Program will present live Peregrine Falcons and discuss their natural history and the effort being made to ensure their survival. Fee: \$5 for members/\$10 non-members. Please register for one of these sessions here: [Peregrine](#).

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT: EASTMAN NATURE CENTER

13351 Elm Creek Rd., Maple Grove

NOTE: For more information on these events please go to the [Eastman Nature Center website](#).



Saw-whet Owl, by Dennis Randall

March 30: Everybody Can Bird

9–10 am. Accessible and inclusive birding for every body! Borrow binoculars. Practice birding by ear. Enjoy the company of other birders. Go birding with a naturalist on the sidewalk around the nature center and move inside to the Observation Room where birds visit the feeders right outside the windows. For more detailed accessibility information go here: [Everybody](#). All ages and skill levels welcome. Participants ages 11 years and younger must be accompanied by an adult. Free.

THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT: LOWRY NATURE CENTER

Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr., Victoria

NOTE: For more information on these events please go to the [Three Rivers Park District website](#).

March 18 & April 15: Bird Banding at Lowry

9 am–noon. See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied, and banded with numbered rings. Find out what scientists learn from these banded birds. Drop in anytime. Participants ages 11 years and younger must be accompanied by an adult. Free.

March 4 & April 1: Quarry Hill Bird Walk

9 am. Leaders: Terry & Joyce Grier. Join us on a casual walk around Quarry Hill Park. Meet by the [Quarry Hill Nature Center](#) entrance. Bring binoculars if you have them. Dress for the weather. Stay for any length of time. Walks usually last 60-90 minutes. Free and open to the public, no registration required.

March 11: Bald Eagle Viewing Trip to the Mississippi River

9 am–mid/late afternoon. Leaders: Terry & Joyce Grier. Meet to car pool in the east parking lot of the [Heintz Center](#), 1936 Collegeview Rd. E., Rochester. Bring water, lunch, snacks, and binoculars. We will drive along the Mississippi to view Bald Eagles as they congregate before ice out.

March 28: Understanding Bird Behavior

7–8 pm. A Zoom program presented by Dr. Wenfei Tong, writer, artist, photographer, guide, and teacher. Birds are intelligent, sociable creatures that exhibit a wide array of behaviors – from mobbing and mimicking to mating and joint nesting. Dr. Tong has written two books about this subject with the goal of inspiring as many people as possible to relate to and care for the natural world. You won't want to miss this engaging look into the private lives of birds! Learn more about Dr. Tong at www.wenfeitong.com. This program is free and open to the public, but limited to the first 100 people who log in. Login link will be available in mid-March.

April 13: Woodcock Walk at Chester Woods

7:45–9 pm. Leader: Michael Degerstrom. Every spring woodcocks performs one of the strangest and most interesting mating rituals. We hope to observe it up close, beginning at dusk. Meet in the horse corral parking lot at [Chester Woods County Park](#) southeast of Rochester.

April 15: Armstrong Wetlands Rice Lake State Park Field Trip

8 am–early afternoon. Leaders: Terry & Joyce Grier. Meet in the [Hy-Vee Barlow's](#) south parking lot (nearest Civic Center Drive) to carpool to the wetlands, about a 45-minute drive. Dress for the weather, bring your own binoculars, lunch, snacks, and water. Trails are generally good at Rice Lake but be prepared for uneven ground and muddy/wet areas. At the Armstrong Wetlands we will be parking on the edge of a gravel road. Between both locations we should see several kinds of waterfowl, shorebirds, herons, raptors, woodpeckers, early arriving warblers, and possibly Sand Hill Cranes. Note: Vehicles entering Rice Lake State Park must have a MN State Park sticker or purchase a day

pass. This field trip will be postponed if the wetlands are still ice-covered.

April 16: Root River County Park Field Trip

9 am–noon. Leader: Sandy Hokanson. Meet at [Root River County Park](#), just south of Rochester near Simpson, to look for early returning migrants, spring wildflowers and more. The park has nice walking trails and good diverse habitat for a wide variety of birds. It's also one of the few places in southern Minnesota where Snow Trillium can be found. Dress for the weather. Trails can be slippery in wet conditions and gnats can be abundant in warm weather. Walk will be rescheduled if the ground is still covered with snow or if it's raining.

April 22: Rochester Reservoir Field Trip

8 am–noon. Leader: Lance Vrieze. Meet to carpool in the east parking lot at [The Heintz Center](#), 1936 Collegeview Rd. E., Rochester. The flood control reservoirs around Rochester have created some of the best bird habitat in Olmsted County and are where local rarities are often found. There will only be a few short walks totaling less than a mile. Bring a scope and binoculars if you have them. This event may be re-scheduled if there is still ice on the reservoirs.

New MOU Members

Welcome to the MOU!

Note: Please notify the Membership Chair (membership@moumn.org) of any email or address changes so you can continue receiving the MOU's two publications. We would also appreciate notification when a MOU member dies.

James Blassey, *Merrifield, MN*
Ricky Bonilla, *Owatonna MN*
Daniella Collier, *Bloomington, MN*
Nancy Docherty, *Oak Park Heights, MN*
Craig Falkum, *Wabasha, MN*
Larry Fonder, *Dayton, MN*
Donald Lewis, *St. Paul, MN*
Philip Martin, *Ester, AK*
Steve Moe, *Minneapolis, MN*
Jennifer Olson, *Shoreview, MN*
Mark Paller, *Minneapolis, MN*
Elizabeth Potter, *Shorewood, MN*
Lorna Rupp, *St. Paul, MN*
Michael Thomsen, *St. Paul, MN*
Craig Zimprich, *Elysian, MN*

Birder Bio: Justin Watts

Note from the editor: Since Justin is the current MOU Vice President — and thus will be our next President — I thought having him as the subject of the Birder Bio column would be a good way to introduce him to the members. I am pleased that he accepted my invitation. Although we birders often meet each other out in the field, we often know little about each other, and this column serves to rectify that, at least in a small way. GRH



Justin and Annabelle

Tell us about yourself.

For the weekday hours of nine to five, I'm a physicist with a specialty in design and nanofabrication of electronic devices, including transistors and magnetic field sensors. My partner, Annabelle, is an expert in sustainable chemistry. These two fields are well supported in the Twin Cities, and that motivated our move from Santa Barbara to Minneapolis in 2013.

Prior to moving to Minnesota, I had spent a total of two or three weekends vacationing in snowy locales (ski resorts), so I had a very poor understanding of cold weather. There was a lot to learn over my first winter in Minnesota! Attracted to the novelty at first, I quickly became infatuated with Minnesota winters. Lots to love about the ice formations along the Lake Superior coast, the untrodden snow drifts blanketing the prairies, and the opportunities for ice skating across an ungroomed lake. Not to mention the truly exceptional birding experiences and adventures (or misadventures) that can only take place in such an environment. Besides birding, I'm a big advocate for night sky watching and aurora chasing, kayaking, backpacking, surfing, hydroponic gardening, and a bit of foraging (mostly grapes, blueberries, raspberries, juneberries) when the weather is right and the birds are quiet.

What is the main attraction of birding for you?

Birding for me is the most direct way to connect with nature and to try to understand habitats around me. I compare the thrill of identifying a new bird to discovering a secret hidden in plain sight. Although the world is filled with countless natural wonders big and small, birds are almost always present and wildly diverse in color, shape, and sound, so they easily draw attention compared to the sulkier, quieter worlds of most other wildlife.

The cherry on top is that there is so much to learn about the niches that make this diversity possible, and so much we can learn from birds about what makes wilderness and natural areas truly invaluable. Birds motivate me to keep reaching to protect the world we share and the importance of sharing what we protect.

Where are your favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?

Near my home in the Twin Cities, my favorite parks are Crow-Hassan Park Reserve and just about anywhere within the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, especially the Louisville Swamp area. Around the state, quiet trails with abundant wild spaces free from the din of cars or industry are a big attraction, since I'm usually carrying audio recording equipment. Heading to areas around Ely or Red Lake can be particularly rewarding. Annabelle and I also enjoy traveling, chasing birds, and good food.

What is your favorite bird or bird family?

There are many colorful birds around the world, but every time we come home, the chickadees are reliably waiting for us in the yard, cheerful and energetic no matter the weather, making them my year-round favorite.

What is your favorite birding style (i.e., by yourself, with others, etc.)?

I'm almost always birding with Annabelle, but once in a while I'll bird alone. Solo birding is especially accommodating when I'm attempting to record birdsong. To record songs, I carry a shotgun microphone, a handheld field recorder, and sometimes a bulky parabola dish. In my experience, far more folks on the trail are interested to stop and ask about the telephoto lens (and check if we've seen the eagle) than stop to talk to the strange hiker with headphones on, waving a fuzzy stick around at the canopy. Can't

guess why. I do enjoy talking in the field about the birds and sounds out and about that day. It's interesting to learn how other folks see the same space in different light.

I consider myself only a moderately obsessive lister. When I first became interested in birding about 15 years ago, it was in a competitive atmosphere, and I ticked nearly 300 species exclusively in my home county before the thought occurred to me that there might be good birding elsewhere. Lately, I try not to focus on political borders too much. I generally find a lot of satisfaction by targeting great birding locations in under-explored areas, rather than doing target birding, but I'm still susceptible to spontaneous six-hour drives for a lifer.

Have you ever had an unusual experience while birding?

At the end of 2015, Annabelle and I rented a cheap room near Duluth and spent four days birding the arrowhead. This was our third trip to see northern specialties that we had dipped on repeatedly. That trip was apparently a turning point. After seeing our stunning first Great Gray Owl in Sax-Zim Bog, we headed to explore CR 2 near Isabella. It was noon, quiet, cold, and I was ill-equipped, having forgotten my beanie at home. I pulled a floppy neck gaiter over the crown of my head to sacrifice vanity for slightly less discomfort. Birding by car was a bust, so we instead drove to a nearby trailhead, donned snowshoes, and clicked on the GoPro.

That hike was perfect: towering spruce coated from a

recent snowfall, still air, and untouched snow stretched for miles before us. About two miles in, I excitedly claimed we had found an exceptional life bird. There, in the middle of the trail about 300 feet in front of us, was a spruce grouse with its gaze locked upwards. We approached slowly, shaking with anticipation to get a better look. About 50 feet out, my voice dropped in disappointment: what we had seen was an extremely deceptively shaped branch submerged in the snow. The common "stick-bird," something we've fallen for before.

In disappointment, I gave up on stealth, and approached rapidly. That branch erupted from the snow with such a sudden shocking noise, and so quickly that I dropped my GoPro into the deep powder at my feet in surprise. The branch suddenly had a fantastically plump body with great wings, which it used to pump itself up into the tree tops along with five more companions that were secretly buried in the snow just a few feet from where we stood. This was how I discovered that "fool's hens" — a colloquial name for the cryptically patterned Spruce Grouse — shelter themselves from the cold by burrowing up to their necks in snow and often refuse to flush until nearly stepped on. It took me 20 minutes of sifting through deep snow on my hands and knees, with my scalp freezing, to find my dropped camera.

On that same trail we went on to find our first American Three-Toed Woodpecker, and shortly after, we jetted back to Duluth to see a just-reported Ivory Gull. Minnesota offers fantastic birding, no matter the temperature!

My Favorite Home Patch

Two Parks in Dakota County

by Drew Smith

Note from the editor: Do you have a favorite local spot for birding? I'd like to hear about it, and I'm sure other birders would too. Please send me a note at newsletter@moumn.org if you would like to write about your favorite local patch for this column. GH

This article will be a slight departure from what is usually done in this feature, as I'll mention two birding hotspots that could potentially benefit from more observers. The first is Thomas Lake Park in Eagan, Dakota County, located on the west side of Pilot Knob Road, between Cliff Road and Diffley Road. This is a very popular local city park, no doubt due in some part to its central location. A potential negative for some birders may be the numerous dog walkers, especially on weekends. There is a decent amount of parking, and all of the trails are paved. This also makes it an accessible location for any physically challenged birders, though there may only be one restroom facility.

But this is not the primary reason to pick out this interesting location. It has a fairly large native prairie area (currently undergoing restoration) with three potholes or ponds, oak and aspen parkland, along with some woodland remnants, and a good-sized lake. Also, on the drive in, notice the many tamarack pines and some good-sized cedars, which provide privacy from the traffic along Pilot Knob Road. The tamaracks have attracted Common Redpolls in winter, which also benefited from the nearby prairie area. Once I picked out a Hoary Redpoll in a flock during an invasion year. The cedars provide food and cover for sparrows and waxwings. Other interesting winter species can



Cooper's Hawk, by Jason Frank

be found as well. In most years a Northern Shrike seems to be attracted to the native prairie, perching in the treetops. The trail winds around behind an apartment complex where numerous residents have bird feeders. Looking through the brush and trees here can be rewarding with routinely found species, and maybe an interesting sparrow or other uncommon wintering bird.

As with most locations, the best time to visit for the largest diversity is during spring migration. Numerous warblers seem to favor the peninsula with the picnic shelter and its oaks and aspen trees. I have found several species with only a short visit. Also, these trees are a magnet for vireos, orioles, and grosbeaks. Occasionally even flycatchers join the fun. From the fishing pier, one can usually see several duck species, and the ubiquitous Canada Geese. Eastern Phoebes can be seen patrolling the wooded and brushy banks. Checking out the snags partially submerged at the water's edge, one can often pick out Green Herons and other water birds.

Diversity is more limited in summer, but I have found Eastern Kingbirds, Willow Flycatchers, Song Sparrows, American Goldfinches, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and several swallows and other birds enjoying the insect bounty of the prairie area. Sora and Virginia Rail have been found near the potholes, especially in the wetter years. Gray Catbirds and Brown Thrashers are present in the thickets.

Fall migration can be interesting as well. Surprises frequently turn up, like an odd Sedge Wren near the potholes. Warblers come through as well, plus numerous other expected migrants. Lots of sparrows can be expected, es-

pecially near the parking lot under the trees and along the mown edges of the trails.

I think that, with the variety of micro-habitats, this location has the possibility of drawing in a more unusual migrant. That's my hope anyway, and I continue to be on the lookout for one.

My second location is Patrick Eagan Park, located a little to the east, along the west side of Lexington Avenue between Diffley Road and Wescott Rd. It's tucked in behind the Eagan Art House. The name of the park seems to be known as either "Patrick Eagan Park, or "Patrick Egan Park." I'm uncertain why the different spellings.

This park is primarily woodland, but it includes a moderate sized lake. The lake can be interesting for the waterfowl it attracts, mostly Wood Ducks and Hooded Mergansers. A heron of some type is usually present, and not so long ago the area was reliable for Black-crowned Night-Heron. That species has become rare locally in recent years, but has the potential to turn up again. Lots of swallows enjoy the lake, and woodpeckers and flycatchers frequent in the dead trees along the banks. I have found Olive-sided Flycatcher here many times, a species that seems to elude many county listers. Bald Eagles are seen flying overhead, and Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks have been resident in summer.

Following the dirt trail system winding through the woods brings one to another lake, which also draws herons, kingfishers, and other water birds. This is roughly a two- to three-mile hike; it makes a nice loop back to the parking lot. Spring migration can be interesting for woodland birds, and observers should be alert for calling Barred Owls. Warblers and other migrants can be numerous, and surprises have turned up. There have been reports of Black-throated Blue and Prothonotary Warblers.

Things can be a little more challenging in winter, as trail maintenance seems inconsistent. However, an overwintering Long-eared Owl was found here once in the pines, so taking the walk has the potential to be rewarding.

This park is much less frequented, perhaps due to the dirt trails, and potential flooding of areas in wet years near the lakes. In an attempt to make the park more of a draw, the city has put a playground in by the parking lot. However, due to the funding used to create the park, development will be limited, and it has to retain its semi-wildness. As with Thomas Lake Park, this location has the potential to attract an interesting migrant. Its size and location make it a great spot, especially for those who live in the area and don't have unlimited time for birding.

Drew Smith has had a life-long interest in birds but started to pursue it a serious hobby while living in Colorado. Since relocating to Minnesota in 1990 his passion continues, and he enjoys chasing new birds for his State and County lists.



Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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The Mission of the M.O.U.

We foster the study and conservation of birds by amateurs and professionals. We promote the conservation of birds and their natural habitats. We support these aims primarily by publishing and sharing information, by serving as a repository for records, by conducting field trips, by awarding grants for research, and by supporting programs that educate members and the public about birds.

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