



# Minnesota BIRDING

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## Thomas S. Roberts, Minnesota's First Bird Clubs and the Birth of the MOU

by Janet C. Green

Birds have undoubtedly been in Minnesota since glaciers left 12,000 years ago. But bird-watching groups not so long. During the nineteenth-century settlement of the state, Thomas Sadler Roberts, his friends, and colleagues began the discovery of bird species in what was called the nation's "old northwest." Dr. Roberts was a medical doctor, but his abiding interest in birds from the 1870s through his death in 1946 defined his public life, and his influence has long endured. The capstone of his career was the publication in 1932 of his classic work, *The Birds of Minnesota*.

Dr. Roberts had a wide network of correspondents, friends, and naturalists whose avian interest was deep and enduring. After his iconic two-volume work was published, this network continued to provide observations for his bi-monthly seasonal report published in National Audubon's magazine *Bird Lore*. Those columns were compiled in a book published in 1938 by the University of Minnesota Press: *Logbook of Minnesota Bird Life, 1917–1937*. Roberts' book dedication was to that network: "This volume is dedicated to all the many nature-lovers and observers who have so generously and freely contributed their records and notes for the author's use." In the index to that book there were 35 people who made multiple observations. These people also contributed to the formation of the volunteer organizations, like the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union and Audubon, that began recording field observations and publishing them. These data were the early foundation of the knowledge about the seasonal abundance and distribution of Minnesota's avifauna.

The oldest Minnesota bird organization is the Minneapolis Audubon Society, formed in February 1915 in the Woman's Club by a group of women under the tutelage of Dr.



Left to right: Rex Campbell, Dennis Meyer, Liz Campbell, Jack Hofslund, Jan Green, and Ole Finseth at Hawk Ridge, September 15, 1962. *Duluth News-Tribune*.

Roberts. By April this group had become officially affiliated with the National Audubon Society. Dr. Roberts continued to be an advisor, and their programs included the study of birds and the education of the public about birds through various activities like lectures, exhibits, spring bird walks, and land conservation. The leaders were mostly women, and several were constant contributors of observations to Roberts' *Bird Lore* columns.

Another early bird group was the Minnesota Bird Club, whose first meeting was held in March 1929 at the Walker Branch Library in Minneapolis. It was self-described as "an organization of young men interested in acquiring of

more knowledge about birds chiefly those of Minnesota.” Its publication, *The Flicker*, was to “consist of short articles and notes on birds with also articles on natural history as a whole” (vol. 1, no. 3, p. 13). Staff from the Minnesota University Museum, William Kilgore and W. J. Breckenridge (who designed *The Flicker* cover), were active from the beginning giving lectures to this fledging group. In 1930 a focus on documenting nesting records was established with the compilation by E. D. Swenborg and publication in *The Flicker* of 13 pages of “the combined nesting records of several members of the Minnesota Bird Club” (vol. 2, no. 4 & 5, p. 24ff.). This activity continued with these instructions: “All members are urged to keep their records of nests found in Minnesota during 1932 in such shape that they may be compiled in the fall into a combined nesting record” (vol. 4, no. 2, p. 9). This purpose continued over the years, producing one of the best-documented records of nesting species for any state. Another enduring birding tradition was established in 1931 when “It was decided to hold a bird census on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, on which date all members are urged to be in the field so that results could be compared at the next meeting” (vol. 3, no. 2, p. 1).

A third purpose of the Minnesota Bird Club, described in 1933 at their fourth anniversary, was the camaraderie that bird-watching provides. That was described as reaching out and gathering “together many young men having a common interest, with the result that many firm and lasting friendships have been formed; monthly meetings provide good fellowship as well as entertainment” and the field trips which “have afforded not a few of the good times and thrilling experiences that stand out in our memory of the past” (*The Flicker*, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 1). All these traditions and experiences are continued by bird-watching groups today.

Another early group of like-minded naturalists was the Duluth Bird Club, which was organized in 1937 under the leadership of two women, Olga Lakela and Mary Elwell, friends and colleagues at the Duluth State Teachers College (subsequently University of Minnesota Duluth). Dr. Lakela was a botanist and Mary Elwell taught mathematics, but both were ardent field observers who wandered over northeastern Minnesota discovering records of plants and birds. According to Dr. Lakela, the Duluth Bird Club was at first an informal organization inspired by the work of Dr. T. S.

Roberts “through the living pages of his *Birds of Minnesota*” for “field excursions in the stimulating surrounding of Duluth” and for “the expressed purpose of promoting the study of Minnesota birds” (*The Flicker*, vol. 18, pp. 6-7). It met monthly at the College for programs on bird identification and nature study, sometimes led by national lecturers, and conducted many field trips. The club also “made an effort to contribute notes, nesting data, and population counts to *The Flicker*” and “helped to place on record in the state the red-throated loon and the varied thrush” as well as “nesting data of the piping plover” (*The Flicker*, vol. 18, p. 7).

The Duluth Bird Club leadership was mostly women, but several men were active, including Joel Bronoel, who led the members during the 1940s in a campaign to stop the annual slaughter of fall migrating raptors in Duluth, especially at a prominent ridge called Hawk Hill (subsequently Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve). In 1964 Joel Bronoel was on the board of the newly incorporated MOU and in 1972 figured in the

Duluth Audubon Society’s establishment of Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve. He is just one example of the long-term devotion to bird welfare of many early members of Audubon and MOU. Another Duluth group was organized in 1939 as The Lakeview Branch of the Duluth Bird Club. The two groups joined to become the Duluth Audubon Society in the 1960s.

By 1937–38 there were six local organizations devoted to birds: three in Minneapolis, two in Duluth, and one in St. Cloud. The St. Cloud group was called the T. S. Roberts Ornithological Club, and its members were mostly students of Prof. G. W. Friedrich of St. Cloud State Teachers College. The creation of the Minnesota Ornithologists’ Union began when George Rysgaard and other members of the Minnesota Bird Club in October 1937 met with the St. Cloud group to discuss forming a statewide bird group. The Duluth Bird Club was contacted in the spring by Dr. Gustav Swanson and invited to join. They agreed and sent Dr. Olga Lakela to attend the first meeting on April 13, 1938 at the University of Minnesota. A slate of officers was chosen that represented all three areas. The officers, as described in the MOU official publication, were President: G. N. Rysgaard, St. Paul; Vice-president: Mary Elwell, Duluth; and Secretary-Treasurer: Richard Voth, St. Cloud. The affiliated societies that formed



*Northern Parula*, by Jean Brisance

the Union were the Duluth Bird Club, the Lakeview Branch of the Duluth Bird Club, the Minneapolis Audubon Society, the Minneapolis Bird Club, the Minnesota Bird Club, and the T. S. Roberts Ornithological Club. Thus was the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union born. The magazine *The Flicker* henceforth became the publication of the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union, and it has remained the society's quarterly journal ever since (the name change to *The Loon* occurred in 1964).

The Second Annual Meeting of the MOU was held in Duluth on May 27, 1939, and that meeting established the format for many subsequent annual meetings. After a morning field trip to Minnesota Point at 5:00 a.m., a program held at the Duluth State Teachers College began at 9:30 and featured eight presentations followed by a business meeting. After lunch, there was a 1:30 field trip, again to Minnesota Point. The attending members numbered 41 from Duluth, 25 from St. Cloud, and 7 from the Twin Cities, including Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Sadler Roberts. The Third Annual Meeting was held on May 18, 1940 at the Minnesota Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota. The after-

noon program included 10 papers, but before it started a motion was made to make Dr. Roberts a permanent honorary president of the MOU. The field trip the next day was to the Long Meadow Gun Club.

By 1943–44 the MOU had 143 members. The membership was evenly divided between men and women and it included 20 joint memberships (couples) (*The Flicker*, vol. 15, pp. 20–24). With the addition of the Cloquet Bird Club and the St. Cloud Bird Club, there were now eight affiliated societies. Meetings rotated between the Duluth, St. Cloud, and the Twin Cities, where most of the members lived. During the years of the Second World War, activity declined, but the MOU leadership of Mary Elwell as president and Arnold B. Erickson as editor of *The Flicker* kept the organization viable. Twenty years later, on September 18, 1964, the MOU became incorporated by the State of Minnesota and it has been an active volunteer organization ever since.

*Janet (Jan) Green was MOU vice-president 1962 and secretary 1963–1972; she was president of the Duluth Audubon Society 1963–1964 and 1973–1975.*

## Message from the President

I'm one of the privileged few Minnesota birders that actually gets to go birding for my day job. Well, for one month out of the year, at least; the rest of the year I'm sitting in front of a computer entering data and managing databases comprising records of Minnesota birds and other wildlife submitted to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. But as part of the DNR's Minnesota Biological Survey program, during that one glorious month of June I get to be out surveying breeding birds somewhere in the state, waking up around 4:00 a.m. to greet the dawn chorus in a prairie, woodland, or bog.

There's something very refreshing and renewing about being out in the field as the birdlife around you goes about its annual business. Hike far enough into a bog, and bird-song will drown out any ambient noise from nearby highways or construction; you might even be the only person in a few square miles, greatly outnumbered by Palm Warblers, Lincoln's Sparrows, and Golden-crowned Kinglets. With a little focus you start to notice the less abundant summer residents like Yellow-bellied Flycatchers and Connecticut Warblers. You may even start to feel insignificant in the scheme of things, a very small part of something much greater and grander. It's really quite humbling.

These forays into nature have become a necessity in my life, a way to clear my mind and refocus on what's important. And I'm not just talking about clarity as it relates to birding. On the contrary, I believe my relationship with birds and nature not only makes me a better birder but also a bet-

ter person, friend, co-worker, son, and husband.

And I know I'm not the only one who feels this way. In fact, I'd be willing to bet that we all find some sort of strength and renewal in nature whether we care to admit it or not. Maybe it's that first flashy Yellow-rumped Warbler in our backyards in mid-April that marks another year lived and another year ahead. I have a couple friends near downtown St. Paul who ask me when the first nighthawk will arrive in their neighborhood, and I usually guess around May 15 each year (I'm usually off by just a day or two). And lest I be accused of bird-bias, I have met many Minnesotans who got excited when they found their first monarch caterpillar of the year on a milkweed plant in their neighborhoods. Yes, life goes on, regardless of our own joys, sorrows, troubles, or agendas.

For me, watching a Connecticut Warbler perched and singing atop a black spruce, its snappy song reaching hundreds of yards across a Koochiching County bog, is a reminder that I'm where I should be at this point in my life. I get the feeling that here and now is important, and yet I also think back to all the other times I saw this bird and the past experiences that have allowed me to become acquainted with its presence, its life. That brings me full circle, in a sense, to where I'm just a human being, standing in a bog, surrounded by something much larger and infinitely more important than myself.

May birds and the natural world have a similar effect on you.

– Bob Dunlap, MOU President

# Conservation Column

## Silent Nights? Disturbing Declines in Nightjars

by Andy Forbes

I remember the first time I heard Eastern Whip-poor-wills. It was summer, and my family was staying on Cape Cod, Massachusetts for a vacation with my cousins and grandparents. The house was surrounded by sandy, open pine “barrens.” My windows were open, and I was really excited when I heard the first one. Then the second. Then several more. My excitement dampened a little when I realized how long-winded they are (over 1000 calls in a row are cited in a paper from the 1940s). However, they became one of the things I fondly associated with summer and seeing extended family when school was out during the summer, along with owls, fireflies, and blueberries.

The Eastern Whip-poor-will, whose scientific name, *Antrostomus vociferous*, hints at its vocal endurance, is common in wooded regions of Minnesota, especially the northwest and southeast parts of the state. The species also occurs during breeding season throughout the eastern United States and southern Canada, and winters in the southern United States along the Gulf Coast and through eastern Mexico and northern Central America.

Whip-poor-wills are birds of wooded habitats with open understories, largely avoiding dense forests. Their feeding habits involve mostly capturing large flying insects on the wing using their oversized mouths (the scientific name literally means “cave mouth”). This method of capturing food requires an open understory; hence their avoidance of overly dense habitats.

For a species as widespread and well-known as the Eastern Whip-poor-will, you may be surprised to know that we still understand comparatively little about many basic facets of its biology. Its primarily nocturnal habits make it difficult to survey in general, and its great camouflage makes it very hard to study during the daylight hours. Whip-poor-wills lay their eggs on the ground without constructing any kind of nest, and their young, which are able to move around on their own not too long after hatching, are even more difficult to find and study. In my entire career of nest searching, I have stumbled (literally) upon one likely nest: an adult bird flew up from right in front me and

began a vigorous distraction display in which it repeatedly flopped around on the ground with its mouth open, trying to look as vulnerable as possible, in order to lead me away. Even though I had a very good idea of the small area where the eggs or young (more likely I think) were, I was unable to locate anything in the leaves and soon gave up.

Unfortunately, the species is showing widespread signs of decline throughout eastern North America. North American Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate an approximate decline of 3% per year throughout the species’ range. Populations in Minnesota seem to be undergoing a similar rate of decline, according to the BBS, although the data must be interpreted with caution due to a low sample size. Anecdotal information suggests these trends are likely accurate, as the species’ absence from areas where its song was once a common sound have been noted with concern throughout the Midwest. In my previous job, where I worked as an ornithologist in Missouri, one of the most frequent questions I got was “Where have the Whip-poor-wills gone?”

Pinning down the main culprits for this decline is somewhat difficult. Certainly the composition of wooded habitats has changed over the 50 years since the BBS was initiated. Forests that were present in the 1960s were often younger and more open in many parts of the eastern United States,



*Eastern Whip-poor-will, by Peder Svingen*



*Eastern Whip-poor-will nest and eggs, by Nathan Grosse*

and that provided good habitat for Eastern Whip-poor-wills. In many areas, both due to fire suppression and natural succession, these forests have in general become more “closed in,” making the habitat less suitable for species that prefer more open habitats.

There are also a lot more people now than there were back then, and with people comes more human-caused mortality. Ground-nesting species like Eastern Whip-poor-wills are particularly vulnerable to predation by free-ranging dogs and cats, as well as other predators which have done very well in human-altered landscapes, such as foxes, skunks, raccoons, etc. The Eastern Whip-poor-will’s habit of hunting along roads also leads to fatal collisions with automobiles.

Perhaps most troubling is a probable link between declines in Eastern Whip-poor-wills (and many other insect-eating birds) and declining insect populations. While standardized survey data is sparse for insect population numbers,

especially as you go further back in time, it is widely noted that many insect populations, including the large moths and beetles that Eastern Whip-poor-wills prefer, are much lower than they used to be. If insect populations are falling, the implications for all of the species that depend upon on them for food are indeed quite scary.

A recent study led by researchers from Simon Fraser University in Canada took a unique approach to trying to get a better handle on this. They examined and compared museum specimens of Eastern Whip-poor-wills collected long ago (dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century) with those collected more recently. Different kinds of insects accumulate different kinds of nitrogen in their bodies, and thus species that feed on them accumulate those different types of nitrogen accordingly in theirs. Samples collected from the feathers and claws of more recently collected birds showed a significant decline in nitrogen signatures from the larger insects that the species prefers. If Eastern Whip-poor-wills are forced to feed more on less nutritious smaller insects, they may be less able to endure the rigors of raising young, migrating, and avoiding predators.

While this is a cause for concern, it has led to calls for more research to gain a better understanding of the ecology of Eastern Whip-poor-wills (including on their wintering ecology, which is even less well understood) and other “aerial insectivores.” Every year more light is shed on this somewhat elusive species through research and monitoring. New partnerships are being formed that we hope will lead to solutions that help stop the declines of these birds, which play a critical role in the health of our ecosystems. Summer nights in the country just wouldn’t be the same without the call of the Whip-poor-will!

*Andy Forbes is the coordinator for the Upper Mississippi River/Great Lakes Region Joint Venture. He is currently a member of the MOU Records Committee.*

## **New MOU Members**

- Thomas Annakala, *Brainerd, MN*
- Avery Blumenthaul, *Edina, MN*
- Frank Fabbro, *Edina, MN*
- Ian Ferguson, *Hastings, MN*
- Goethe University Central Library, *Frankfurt, Germany*
- Matthew Scott, *Albany, MN*
- Dena Sievert, *New Ulm, MN*
- James Stengel, *Minneapolis, MN*
- Joy Teigland, *Excelsior, MN*
- Tim Weatherhead, *Burnsville, MN*
- Angela Wyatt, *Minneapolis, MN*

# My Favorite Home Patch: The Carleton Arb

by *Gerald Hoekstra*

*Note from the editor: Do you have a favorite local spot for birding? Tell us about it. This is the first of what I hope will be a regular, or at least semi-regular, series in Minnesota Birding. The idea came to me from Ben Douglas's piece in the September 2017 issue on his Washington County Big Year, in which he refers to Lake Elmo Regional Park as his "favorite home patch." I thought, Yes, most of us have a favorite home patch. There's a certain satisfaction in birding the same spot frequently and in all seasons and really getting to know it well. So I thought I'd start by describing my own favorite local birding spot. Or rather, one of them (if one can have several favorites). I'd like to hear about yours, and I think other birders would too. Please send me a note (newsletter@moumn.org) if you would like to write a piece on your favorite local birding patch. Or patches.*

Few birders are so fortunate as to have a great birding spot within a mile of their house. But that's what I have in the Carleton Arb here in Northfield—a prime birding spot with a variety of habitats and an extensive network of trails, all within a mile of my front door—and I find myself birding there frequently in all seasons.

Actually, the Carleton Arb (it's full name is Carleton College Cowling Arboretum) is not just one, but two—or if you're a county birder or eBirder, three—spots. There's the Upper Arb, the area south of Hwy 19, and the Lower Arb, the area north of Hwy 19; and the Lower Arb is divided by the Rice/Dakota county line. The Arb not really an arboretum in the proper sense, though it began its life that way. It might better be referred to as restored natural lands. The total area is about 800 acres, and diligent efforts have been made over the years to restore the floodplain and upland forests, oak savannah, and prairie that once characterized the land. The Arb had its beginnings in the 1920s under the leadership of President Donald J. Cowling, Professor Harvey E. Stork, and Superintendent of Grounds D. Blake Stewart. The plantings of upland forest trees and native wildflowers in the Upper Arb began a process of restoration that continues to this day. The Arb has a full-time director, Nancy Braker, several additional staff members, numerous student workers, and a host of volunteers that Nancy can call on for seed gathering, tree planting, removal of invasives, and other projects. Many of these volunteers are "graduates" of Nancy's Minnesota Master Naturalist classes.

Many Minnesota birders discovered the Upper Arb in early May of this year when they came to see a Kentucky Warbler that stopped over here for a few days. The forested area along Spring Creek, where this bird was foraging, is an excellent spot for warblers, kinglets, and other migrating songbirds, both during spring and fall. A trail runs along the creek from the south end at Wall Street Rd. to the north end, where the creek spills into a series of small



*Golden-winged Warbler, Upper Arb, by Gerald Hoekstra*

lakes called Lyman Lakes and eventually into the Cannon River. I have regularly seen Cackling Geese, Hooded Mergansers, and Red-breasted Mergansers, as well as many other waterfowl species on these small lakes during migration. Resident Barred Owls can usually be seen, or heard, in the forested area along the creek, and more than one visitor coming for the Kentucky Warbler took photos of these very cooperative birds, sometimes sitting on limbs right over the path. (One year, when the bridge across the creek was being rebuilt and the commotion apparently caused too much disturbance to suit them, the pair actually nested in a large old Silver Maple on a residential lot at the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Oak Streets.)

In addition to the forested areas, the Upper Arb also has a fairly extensive meadow area, which hosts nesting Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and Clay-colored, Field, and Song Sparrows. (Forested and prairie areas can be easily distinguished on Google maps, satellite view.) The grassy area around the Hill of Three Oaks is often good for migrating sparrows. The northeast part of this area is cur-

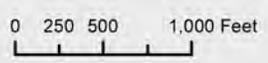
# Trail Map

## Cowling Arboretum

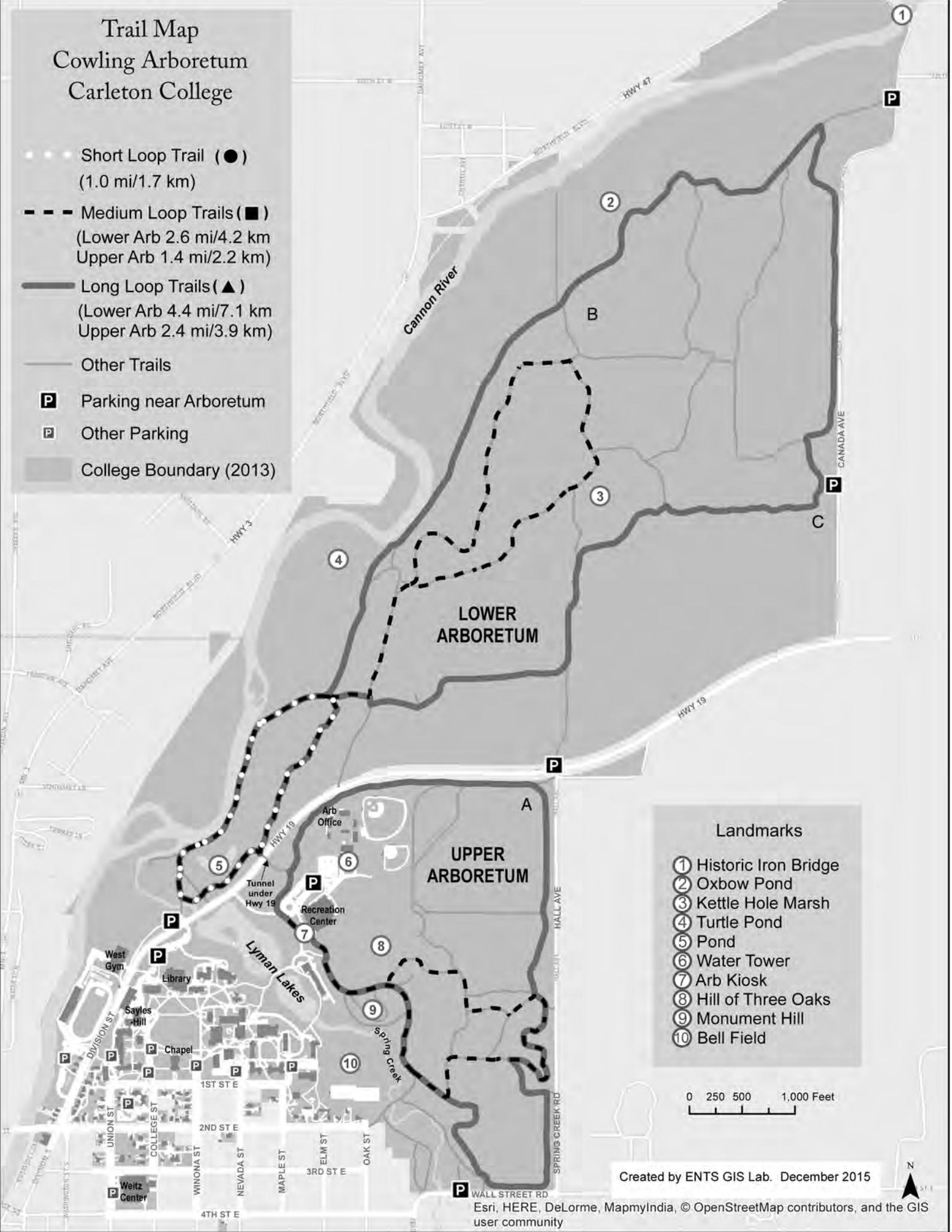
### Carleton College

- Short Loop Trail (●)  
(1.0 mi/1.7 km)
- Medium Loop Trails (■)  
(Lower Arb 2.6 mi/4.2 km  
Upper Arb 1.4 mi/2.2 km)
- Long Loop Trails (▲)  
(Lower Arb 4.4 mi/7.1 km  
Upper Arb 2.4 mi/3.9 km)
- Other Trails
- P** Parking near Arboretum
- P** Other Parking
- ▭ College Boundary (2013)

- #### Landmarks
- ① Historic Iron Bridge
  - ② Oxbow Pond
  - ③ Kettle Hole Marsh
  - ④ Turtle Pond
  - ⑤ Pond
  - ⑥ Water Tower
  - ⑦ Arb Kiosk
  - ⑧ Hill of Three Oaks
  - ⑨ Monument Hill
  - ⑩ Bell Field



Created by ENTS GIS Lab. December 2015





*Henslow's Sparrow, Lower Arb, by Gerald Hoekstra*

rently in agricultural use, though one can spot birds foraging there. If you come here in the fall, be sure to check out the huge brush pile at the corner of Hall St. and Hwy 19 for sparrows (A on the map).

Much more extensive is the Lower Arb, which runs for about three miles along the Cannon River from the college campus on the southwest to Canada Ave on the east. The trail in the flood plain forest here offers great birding during migration, particularly the quarter-mile stretch running northeast from the parking lot at Hwy 19 along the river. I've had some of my best warbler waves here. One can often find a Belted Kingfisher patrolling this stretch of the river, even in the winter. (In 2016 I had one there through December, including on the 31<sup>st</sup>. I headed over the next morning, hoping to get it on my 2017 list, but that night, to my frustration, it apparently had moved on!) Hooded Mergansers, Common Mergansers, and the occasional Common Goldeneye can often be found on the river here during the winter too, along with the regulars—Canada Geese and Mallards.

Much of the upland area of the Lower Arb consists of restored prairie and oak savannah. In summers the prairie is good for nesting sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks. If you're a county lister, it's a good place for "two-fers," since the Rice/Dakota county line runs right through it. Look at a map and draw a straight line across the Arb from Hwy 19 east of Northfield to 19 west of Northfield; that's the county line (the highway dips south as it runs through the town). Or look at the detailed color map on the Arb's web

site, which shows the county division with a dotted line.

Some good spots in the Lower Arb to check:

- The retention pond near the parking lot at the south end, for herons and waterfowl in spring and fall. This year there were Northern Shovelers, Lesser Scaup, Wood Ducks, and Blue-winged Teal.

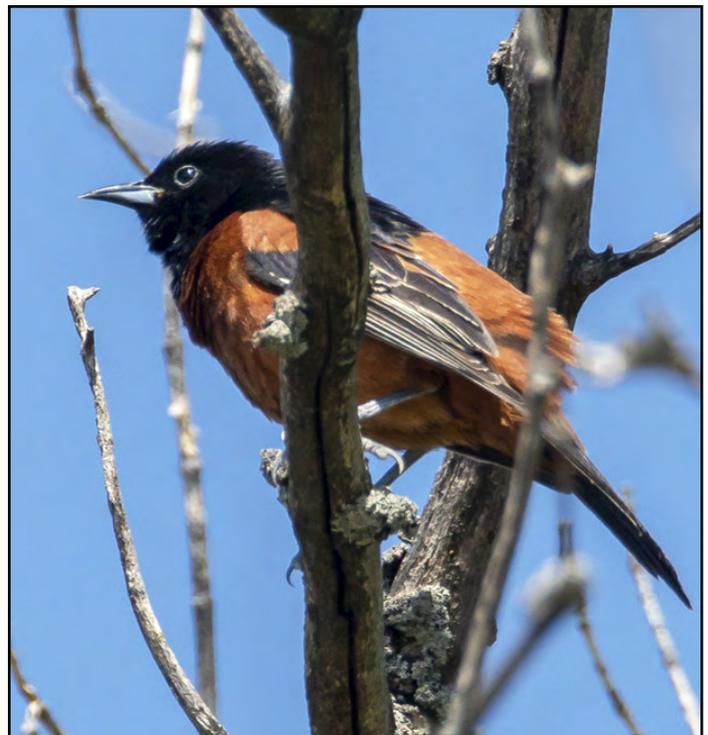
- Both sides of the main trail along the river at the south end. As noted above, this is good for warblers during migration. When the river is low, shorebirds can sometimes be found foraging along its banks too. Most common are Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers.

- Turtle Pond, which is just off the main trail and just south of the sharp bend in the river, for waterfowl and shorebirds in the spring and fall.

- The trail that runs east from the farm house driveway through the prairie, paralleling Hwy 19. I found Orchard Orioles in the trees here both this year and last. In the prairie along the trail that parallels Hwy 19 you can hear Eastern Meadowlarks, Sedge Wrens, Henslow's Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Savannah Sparrows. Also, of course, Clay-colored and Song Sparrows. Some years, including this year, Dickcissels and Bobolinks as well.

- The wooded area on the west side of Kettle Hole Marsh. This is great for migrating sparrows in the spring and fall. I regularly have White-crowned, White-throated, Fox, Harris's, Tree, and Lincoln's Sparrows here, and an occasional LeConte's (as well as the usual Song, Savannah, Field, and Clay-colored). Once I had a Nelson's.

- The prairie just south of Kettle Marsh, again for sparrows. One year I had a flock of a least eight LeConte's here in early October.



*Orchard Oriole, Lower Arb, by Gerald Hoekstra*

– The wooded edge of the prairie along the path running north and west from Kettle Hole Marsh. Red-headed Woodpeckers nested here a few years ago, but it can also be good for other species during migration.

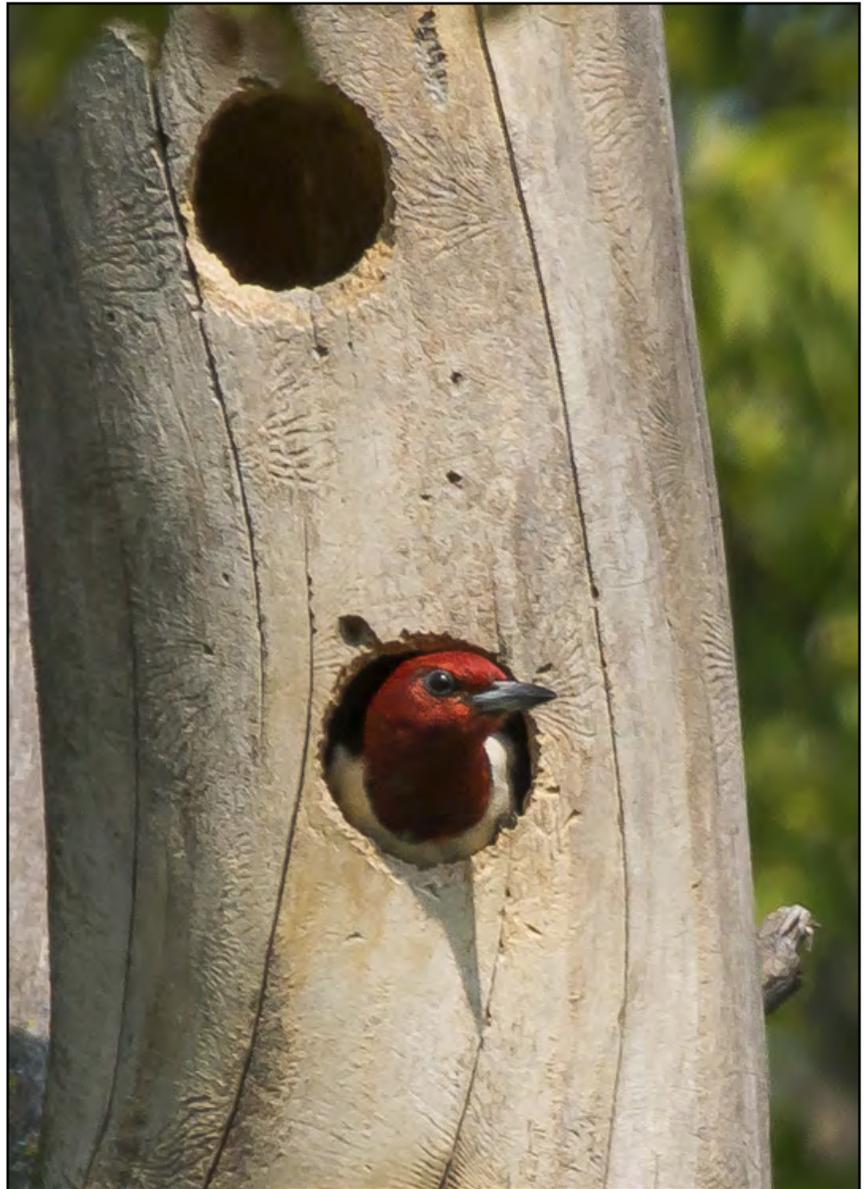
– The perimeter of a large fenced-in research area right in the middle of the Lower Arb (B on the map), to the southeast of the main trail. I get migrating warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in the woods along the edge, and migrating sparrows along the fence and inside the enclosure in spring and fall.

– The brush pile near Canada Ave at the north edge of the cultivated field (C on the map), great for fall sparrows.

There are also several oxbow ponds in the woods between the main trail and the river, but these are harder to access. There is also a large prairie-like area on the west side of Canada Ave. I have never found this to be as productive as the prairie along Hwy 19. When I asked Nancy Braker about this, she informed me that it is not really restored prairie, but simply former agricultural land that was just allowed to be vegetated with whatever came in. As she noted, maybe that is why there are fewer bird species there than in the more diverse planted prairie.

If you walk the trails, be sure to take a map with you. You can download a black-and-white trail map from the Arb web site. The network of trails is fairly extensive, and if you venture off the Long Loop Trail you can easily get disoriented. I remember going for what I intended to be a 45-minute cross-country ski in the Lower Arb one winter when I first moved to Northfield and wandering the trails for an hour and a half before finding my way out. (In my defense, it was snowing heavily, so the sun wasn't visible, and it was hard to differentiate one trail from another.)

Over the years, the Arb has racked up a substantial list of bird species. The eBird count for the Upper Arb is 174 (my list 108), the Lower Arb–Rice is 212 (my list 153), the Lower Arb–Dakota is 165 (my list 131). (I need to get out birding more!) Comparing numbers for the two Lower Arb hotspots might be misleading, though: birders may not realize when they are crossing the county line, or they simply may not care to make separate lists. I suspect that many of the lists started in Rice include Dakota birds as well. I note that at least one of the early eBirders who racked up substantial numbers in Lower Arb–Rice has none for Lower Arb–Dakota. Some of the more interesting visitors to the Arb over the years: a Black-backed Woodpecker found by



*Red-headed Woodpecker, Lower Arb, by Gerald Hoekstra*

Carleton student Owen McMurtrey in the Lower Arb–Dakota in November 2008; a White-winged Crossbill found by Ethan Gyllenhaal in the Lower Arb–Dakota in November 2012; the Kentucky Warbler that I found in the Upper Arb on April 30 of this year. A Carleton student who was a very good birder swore that he had a flyover Little Blue Heron in the Lower Arb a few years ago as well.

Whether you come here to bird or not, check out the informative Arb web site. Among other things, it offers a detailed color map: <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/arb/assets/2016ArbMap.pdf>.

There is also a historical map from 2012 with the dates of restoration for each section and an inset of the area as it appeared in 1931, when it included the Carleton poultry, hog, and dairy farm: <https://apps.carleton.edu/campus/arb/assets/2012arbmapColor.pdf>

*Gerald Hoekstra is a retired St. Olaf College music professor living in Northfield and is editor of MN Birding.*

# Blue Mounds State Park: Is It Always this Good?

by Ben Douglas



Author Ben Douglas at the Blue Mounds State Park Quarry

This year I've been working on an ambitious goal to hike all 73 Minnesota state parks in a single year. Having an ambitious goal like this helps ensure that I don't come to the end of a year and realize I haven't really done anything exciting. As of this writing I'm up to 53. This is the story of just one of those parks, where I spent six hours hiking 10 miles on a rainy overcast spring day completely alone.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, after wrapping up a day of work, I drove to Luverne, MN from the metro area to begin a 10-day 20-state-park tour. I planned a sunrise effort at Blue Mounds State Park, but rains were coming, and I was worried about not getting much accomplished. Storms raged all night, but they seemed to break just as I got up that morning. The sky was low with thick cloud cover and threatened further rain as I headed north to the main park entrance. I recall telling myself to relax and just take what the weather gave me. I had to remind myself that I couldn't control most factors beyond how I embraced the situation. As it turned out, on this less-than-ideal-weather day I had the most amazing six hours of birding I can remember and one that will go on my top 10 list for years to come.

Not surprisingly, when I arrived at 6:00 a.m. mine was the only car in the parking lot. A light mist coated the windshield. I love finding that I'm the only one in the parking lot of a state park; it fills me with a sense of importance about my visit. Not so much that I myself am important, but that my being present somehow registers things that would be missed otherwise. There is something powerful in be-

ing present for even the most average of bird watching days when you know you are the only one recording those moments.

I had waffled on which boots to wear, as I typically like to avoid larger heavier boots for long hikes. Though they are 100% sealed from the elements, in size 14 they also add plenty of weight, so I went with the lighter, less weather-sealed pair. The temperature was in the low 40s, with little hope of getting past 50, and the wind was pushing 15 mph. I donned my wind breaker over double layers of shirts and wore thermal long johns under my hiking pants.

Having no prior knowledge of the park, I figured the lower cliff line trail would be less windy. It was as good a place as any other to start.

Dividends began to pay quickly as I heard a chorus of song all around me. Sedge Wrens chattered constantly, accompanied by the chips of Henslow's Sparrows. A short way farther up the trail a sparrow jumped from the path and retreated to the brush line. I quickly moved up to get a better look and discovered a LeConte's Sparrow looking back at me. Moments later I heard another LeConte's begin to call. Then Lincoln's Sparrows littered the trail ahead of me. A few Turkey Vultures had gotten up and soared in the winds along the rocky ridgeline. I was deep in my element. As I tuned into the natural soundscape around me, soaking up every new sound and straining to hear what might be hiding deep within the wetland, I no longer even noticed the weather. On this stretch I logged seven Henslow's Sparrows and five LeConte's, along with a number of other sparrow species.

Eventually my path led back to a paved trail, and I was happy to step off the wet grass, if only for a short time. The adjacent farm fields were as wet as they could be, holding lakes of water from the storms. I noticed a hawk perched in a tree in the distance, attempting to dry off. After training my long range camera on the bird and studying a couple of shots on the screen, I realized I had a Swainson's Hawk.

Soon I had to arc back to the cliff line on a shortcut trail in order to hike part of the upper cliff trail. Along the way I was treated to outstanding views of the rock outcroppings, capped off by the amazing rock quarry, which was scarcely believable considering the grassy expanses and farm fields of the lower area. These red rocks form a scar of sorts running along the park and dividing the habitat in dramatic ways.



*Harris's Sparrow, Blue Mounds State Park by Ben Douglas*

Walking the upper cliff trail, still heading southwest, I quickly discovered my error in boot selection: an inch or more of water covered the path, and there was no way around. The rocky ground held the water from the storms on the surface. Within moments my feet were soaked. I eventually embraced the situation, though, and headed on.

Western Meadowlarks began joining the chorus of birds in this area. A Wilson's Snipe flew overhead, circling my location and moving off to the east. My path switched back to the Mound Trail that follows the Buffalo enclosure fence line back to the parking lot. A half a mile along this trail an American Bittern rose up from the edge of the trail and after a short flight set back down inside the fenced area. My expectations for this park, with its expansive prairie, rocky outcroppings, and buffalo, were being rewritten with every step.

When I returned to my car after four hours, I just couldn't bring myself to leave. I had plans for additional parks on this day, but I changed my shoes and socks and headed towards the campground forest and Upper Mound Lake. Along the way I spotted a pair of Common Mergansers in late migration floating along Mound Creek. Moments later I spotted a couple of large birds moving to a new perch and found them to be young Great Horned Owls testing their wings and perhaps their hunting skills. During the next two hours I wrapped around on the Mound Creek Trail and picked up

Red-headed Woodpecker, Savannah Sparrows, and a bounty of Harris's Sparrows. At one point I watched three Black Terns bouncing up and down on the winds as they headed north over the park.

After six hours I was back on the entrance road. It was starting to rain harder. Just past the entrance station I noticed a strip of burned land that was alive with movement. Hungry birds hopped about on the ground everywhere: Harris's Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, a Swainson's Thrush, a Lark Sparrow, Palm Warblers, and eventually a flock of American Pipits. I stood hunched over my camera with the wind driving rain into my face, hoping to capture a few more pictures of the 86 species I saw on this amazing day.

I was contacted later by the eBird moderator regarding the insanely high count of 36 Lincoln's Sparrows that I had recorded. The number would be a new state record, so I promptly added details to my report describing the distance covered and the duration of my visit, along with weather conditions.

Not only would I recommend to any birder who has not been there already a visit to Blue Mounds State Park. I recommend considering doing so in the early to middle stages of migration, even at the risk of being there before the signature Blue Grosbeaks arrive. And don't let challenging weather put you off, unless it looks dangerous. The birds can't go inside and wait it out. This may be your chance for some amazing birding.

*Ben Douglas is a contributor to the MOU's Social Media Committee, posting content for the Facebook page. He volunteers for birding events as a guide and presenter on technology in birding.*



*American Pipit, Blue Mounds State Park, by Ben Douglas*

## July

Sun 1	Mon 2	Tues 3	Wed 4	Thur 5	Fri 6	Sat 7
MVNWR Birding Trek at Bass Ponds	MVNWR Birding Trek at Bass Ponds					MN Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr. Bird Walk, Quarry Hill Nat. Ctr., ZVAS Bird Language, MVNWR Peregrine Falcons, Whitewater SP, DNR
8	9	10 xxx	11	12	13	14 MOU Field Trip, Stearns County Birding Owl Prowl, Whitewater SP, DNR WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr.
15	16	17 Banding Osprey Babies, Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nature Ctr., 3RPD	18 Birding the Wisconsin Prairie, Carpenter Nat. Ctr., WI campus	19	20	21 Bird Banding, Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nat. Ctr., 3RPD MVNWR Birding Trek at Bass Ponds
22	23 MVNWR Birding Trek at Bass Ponds Birding South Africa, Global Birders Group	24	25	26 SW Minnesota Birding Days, MRVAC	27 Bird Banding, Carpenter Nat. Ctr. SW Minnesota Birding Days, MRVAC	28 MOU Field Trip: Blue Grosbeaks in West-Central MN
29	30	31				

## August

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed 1	Thur 2	Fri 3	Sat 4
						Bird Walk, Quarry Hill Nat. Ctr., ZVAS Bird Banding, Elm Creek Park Reserve, Eastman Nat. Ctr, 3RPD Bird Language, MVNWR MN Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter Nat. Ctr.
5	6	7	8	9	10	11 Owls of Minnesota, Minneopa SP, DNR
12	13	14	15	16	17	18 Bird Banding, Carver Park Reserve, Lowry Nat. Ctr., 3RPD Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah, MRVAC
19 Miesville Ravine Bird Walk, MRVAC	20	21	22	23 Western Minnesota Birding Days, MRVAC	24 Western Minnesota Birding Days, MRVAC	25
26	27	28	29	30 Birding by Boat, Wargo Nature Ctr.	31	Sept 1 MOU Field Trip: Western Minnesota Shorebirds

# MOU Calendar

## July / August 2018

### MOU FIELD TRIPS

#### July 14: Stearns County Birding Day

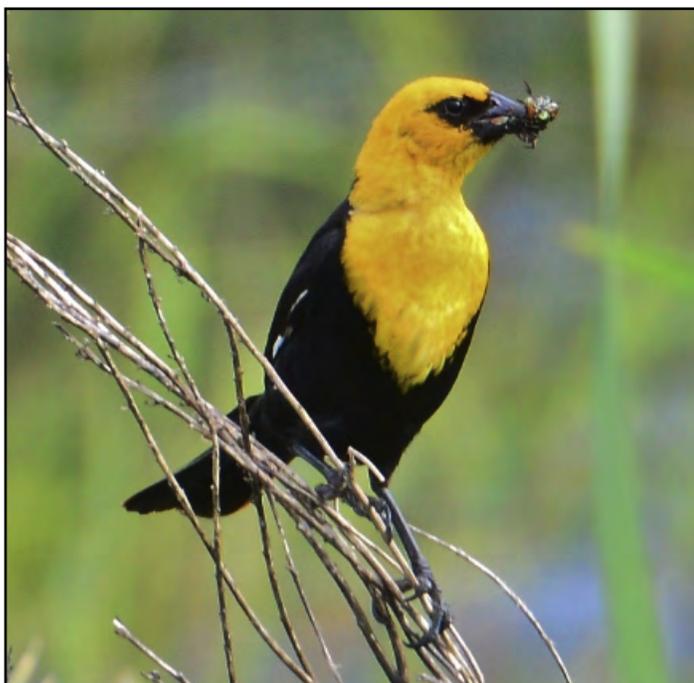
led by **Aaron Ludwig**

Participants will tour Stearns County with a local expert, going through county parks and other great locales such as St. John's Arboretum and the Albany WTP. Meet Aaron at 7:00 a.m. in the A&W parking lot in Albany. There will be a stop for lunch, but this will be a full day of birding. There will be a fair amount of hiking, so plan accordingly.

#### July 28: Hunting for Blue Grosbeaks in West-Central Minnesota

led by **Josh Wallestad**

Gone are the days that Blue Grosbeaks could be found regularly only in the extreme southwest corner of the state; they now occur with regularity much further north and east. Participants in this trip will check out historical Blue Grosbeak sites in Chippewa and Renville Counties to ascertain reoccurrence at some of these sites. We will also visit new sites that have Blue Grosbeak potential, possibly even in Meeker and/or McLeod Counties. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the Hardee's parking lot in Granite Falls. The trip will last 4-6 hours and will involve a fair amount of driving as we travel between sites and stop for a short time at each to look and listen for Blue Grosbeaks.



*Yellow-headed Blackbird, by Pete Nichols*

#### September 1: Western Minnesota Shorebirds Excursion led by **Jason Frank**

This trip will primarily focus on finding shorebirds and waterfowl at a variety of well known locations in western Minnesota, but the trip will also make stops to look for other species too. This would be like a fall version of the Salt Lake weekend. Locations include, but are not limited to, Salt Lake, Big Stone NWR, Lac qui Parle State Park, Lac qui Parle WMA, Marsh Lake, Thiekle Lake, and Plover Prairie. Meet Jason and the other guides at 8:00 a.m. in the McDonald's parking lot in Montevideo. We plan to spend all day in the field, so pack your own lunch and any other provisions you need.

### CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

Minnesota Campus: 12805 St. Croix Trail S., Hastings, MN  
Wisconsin Campus: 300 East Cove Road, Hudson, WI

#### July 7: MN Campus Bird Hike

*Details:* 8 am–10 am. Join bird expert Kevin Smith on a morning hike around the nature center. Learn to identify birds by sight and sound. Field guides and binoculars available to use or bring your own. Program fee: \$6.00 or free for Friends of CNC, Hastings Environmental Protectors, and St. Croix Valley Bird Club members. Please RSVP at 651-437-4359 and let us know you are coming. Location: Minnesota Campus

#### July 14: WI Campus Bird Hike

*Details:* 8 am–10 am.

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

#### July 18: Birding in the Wisconsin Prairie

*Details:* 7 pm–8 pm.

Join Missy Sparrow of the Wisconsin DNR and CNC Director Jen Vieth for a hike through the prairie. Look for blooming forbs and grasses and listen for birds. Binoculars available or bring your own. Space is limited and registration is required, so call 651-437-4359 to reserve your spot. Program fee: \$6 per participant or \$4 for Friends of CNC. Location: Wisconsin Campus



*Hooded Merganser, by Richard Gotz*

### **July 27: Bird Banding**

*Details:* 8:30 am–12 pm.

Bird Banding records help us learn how long birds live, where they travel, when they migrate and many other interesting facts. CNC has been banding birds for over 30 years. Our bird banders welcome you to see songbirds up close and learn about the birds who share our ecosystem. Banding runs continuously for the full 3 ½ hours but visitors may come and go at any time. Please call ahead so we know you are coming. Donations of bird seed or suet will be greatly appreciated in lieu of a program fee. Location: Minnesota campus.

### **DNR**

(See [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us) for directions to locations)

### **July 7, 2018: Return of the Peregrine Falcons, Whitewater State Park**

*Details:* 9 am–10 am.

In 2009, after nearly a half century absence, Peregrine Falcons returned to nest on the cliffs of Whitewater State Park! This was a long awaited event. Meet at the Nature Store parking lot for a short walk to observe the nest site. With spotting scopes and binoculars it is likely we will see adults and young.

### **July 14: Owl Prowl, Whitewater State Park**

*Details:* 8:30 pm–10 pm.

At this program you will learn how to identify the owls of Whitewater State Park by their calls as well as by their appearance and habitat needs. After a presentation, we'll go call to the owls.

### **August 11: Owls of Minnesota, Minneopa State Park**

*Details:* 7 pm–8 pm.

Owls come in all different shapes and sizes. We will talk about 12 owls found here in Minnesota, including the Great Horned Owl, Bared Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl, along with some of their unique characteristics. Meet at the Group Campground on the campground side of Minneopa State Park.

### **MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS GROUP**

#### **July 23: Birding South Africa**

*Details:* 6–7:30 pm.

What better time to be birding South Africa than in January? Not only is that the depth of a Minnesota winter; it is middle of South Africa's summer, when many of the resident birds flaunt amazing breeding plumages. This past January seven Minnesota birders traveled for 18 days throughout South Africa, birding from St. Lucia on the Indian Ocean to the Cape of Good Hope on the southwest tip. Gerald Hoekstra, one of those seven birders, will offer an account of the trip and share some photos of the birds, other wildlife, and scenery along the way.

Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Ave., Minneapolis.

### **MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER**

#### **July 26-27: SW Minnesota Birding Days**

**On this trip we will be birding in Watonwan and Cottonwood Counties.** Some of the locations we may explore include Kansas Lake, Pat's Grove & Eagles Nest County Parks, Bergdahl & Delft WMAs and a couple of sewage ponds. Shorebirds should be migrating, and we should get some of the late nesting species as well. \$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members. Please contact Craig Mandel to register for this trip: 952-240-7647

#### **August 18: Henderson Hummingbird Hurrah**

*Details:* 9 am–4 pm.

For schedule of events, see [www.hendersonhummingbirdhurrah.com](http://www.hendersonhummingbirdhurrah.com)

#### **August 19: Miesville Ravine Bird Walk**

*Details:* 8 am. We will be hike some of the trails of this rarely visited Dakota County Park, including some new trails. Birds that have been seen in the park include Cerulean Warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Scarlet Tanager, and Louisiana Waterthrush.

Contact Steve Weston for more information: (612) 978-3993.

### **August 23-24: Western Minnesota Birding Days**

On this trip we will be birding in Otter Tail & Wilkin or Grant Counties. Some of the locations we may explore include Maplewood State Park, Ottertail Prairie, Rothsay & Manston Marsh WMAs and the North Ottawa Impoundment. \$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members.

Please contact Craig Mandel to register for this trip: 952-240-7647

## **MINNESOTA VALLEY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

### **July 7: Bird Language**

*Details:* 9 am–1 pm.

Join us as we gather on the slopes of the Minnesota River Valley to explore what the birds are telling us about our surroundings. We will split the time between the classroom and outdoors. Bring a notebook, pencils, and something to sit on outdoors. To register, visit [www.mntracking.org](http://www.mntracking.org). Led by Jonathon Poppele and Donnie Phyllaier, Volunteer Refuge Naturalists. Location: MVNWR Visitor Center (Classroom A), 3815 American Blvd. E, Bloomington, MN

### **July 1, 2, 21, 23 (4 dates in July): Bird Watching Treks at Bass Ponds**

*Details:* 8 am–10 am.

Join refuge naturalist Craig Mandel for a bird walk around the Bass Ponds to learn about the birds that nest on the refuge. Learn about the different types of habitats at the refuge that support over 100 species of nesting birds. Bird watchers of all skill levels are welcome join. Bring along your binoculars, favorite field guide and dress appropriately for the weather. Location: Bass Ponds Trailhead, 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington, MN

### **August 4: Bird Language**

*Details:* 9 am–1 pm.

See description for the July 7 event above.

### **Aug. 5, 7, 18, 26 (4 dates in August): Bird Watching Treks at Bass Ponds**

*Details:* 8 am–10 am.

See description above for July dates. \

## **THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT**

### **July 21: Bird Banding**

*Details:* 9 am–12 pm.

See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and tagged with numbered rings. Groups of 10 or more, please call 763-694-7700 to reserve a time slot. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Carver Park Reserve – Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria, MN

### **July 17: Banding Osprey Babies**

*Details:* 6 pm–7:30 pm.

Learn about the Osprey restoration and research project that began over 30 years ago. Drive to an active Osprey nest and watch as the babies are banded. Bring binoculars and a camera. Reservations recommended. This program has been moved from its original date of June 28. Location: Carver Park Reserve – Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria, MN

### **August 4: Bird Banding**

*Details:* 9 am–12 pm.

See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and tagged with numbered rings. Groups of ten or more, please call 763-694-7700 to reserve a time slot. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Elm Creek Park Reserve – Eastman Nature Center, 13351 Elm Creek Rd., Osseo, MN

### **August 18: Bird Banding**

*Details:* 9 am–12 pm.

See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and tagged with numbered rings. Groups of ten or more, please call 763-694-7700 to reserve a time slot. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Carver Park Reserve – Lowry Nature Center, 7025 Victoria Dr, Victoria, MN

## **WARGO NATURE CENTER**

### **August 30: Birding by Boat**

*Details:* 9 am–12 pm.

Anoka County has many great waterways and great birding opportunities! We'll access areas most other birders can't get to and see a variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and upland bird species. No experience in boats or birding is required. Binoculars are available for use. Pre-registration is required. \$10/adult (+tax), Kids 17 and under are free, all equipment provided. For more information visit [www.anoka-countyparks.com](http://www.anoka-countyparks.com) or call the nature center at 763-324-3350.

## **ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY**

### **July 7: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk**

*Details:* 9–10 am.

Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk through Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public—no registration required. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester, MN

### **August 4: ZVAS Monthly Bird Walk**

*Details:* 9–10 am.

Join Terry and Joyce Grier on a casual walk through Quarry Hill Park. Free and open to the public—no registration required. Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester, MN

# Birder Bio: Judd Brink

## **Tell us about yourself.**

Born in Minnesota, now 42 years old. I'm the owner of MN Backyard Birds. The business in Brainerd is now ten years old. I help folks attract and enjoy more colorful songbirds to their homes with birdscaping. I also offer bird guiding tours.

## **When did you start birding?**

I grew up along the Mississippi River in Brooklyn Park and at the age of 12 I saw my first Bald Eagles on my birthday! I was hooked ever since and kept a river journal for many years listing all the birds along the river and in the backyard.

## **How did your interest expand after that first experience?**

I had some great mentors along the way, including Walter Breckenridge (first Bell Museum Curator). I watched him paint and draw in his studio along the river growing up. I also had a great opportunity to go to Costa Rica in 1991 with Springbrook Nature Center.

## **What is the main attraction of birding for you.**

I enjoy observing birds and watching their behaviors.

## **How did you originally become acquainted with the MOU?**

I believe it was my first year as a natural resources student in Brainerd when my ornithology teacher mentioned the conference. This past paper session was my 20th in a row.

## **Favorite places to bird inside or outside Minnesota?**

Just about anywhere that I can find birds. Some favorite spots include Sax-Zim Bog, the North Shore, Tamarac NWR, and Costa Rica.

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

I often bird alone but I also guide small groups.

## **Favorite bird of bird family?**

Love owls and warblers.

## **Any advice on how to be a better birder?**

Lots of patience, practice and some luck helps along the way.

## **Ever had an unusual experience while birding?**

Many experiences over the years, but the most recent was my group watching a Peregrine Falcon chase Sharp-tailed Grouse from a blind this spring in Aitkin County. This past winter on February 13, 2018 I had a Boreal Owl in my backyard in Crow Wing County!

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

I enjoy landscaping for wildlife around my home trying to make it more inviting and attractive for birds.

## **What new bird would you most like to see most?**

Still looking for a Long-eared Owl in the state.





# Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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

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**Designer:** Thomas Benjamin Hertzell  
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## The Mission of the M.O.U.

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

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual                 | \$25.00      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign (including Canada) | U.S. \$35.00 |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate                  | \$100.00     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life, single               | \$500.00     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Life, joint                | \$750.00     |

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Hastings MN 55033-9354

### Please make a contribution to the Savaloja Grants

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.

Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_