



# Minnesota BIRDING

November  
December  
2019  
Volume 56  
Number 6

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## Conservation Column: The MOU and the MEP

*by Tom Bell*

The Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP) is a state-wide coalition of environmental and conservation nonprofits, and as a member of MOU you belong. In fact, because you probably belong to other environmental organizations, you may have multiple memberships, because at least 60 state organizations make up the MEP.

What a wonderful idea it was for like-minded people to construct such an organization back in 1998. Although there are a few MOU members that feel we should only be about birds and not be involved in political actions that affect birds, most members realize that biopolitics is critical for protecting the environment that all living things require. The Minnesota Environmental Partnership is a coalition that strengthens member organizations' effectiveness and builds collective power to secure a healthy environment for all Minnesotans.

MEP has a 13-member Board of Directors, an Executive Director, an Advocacy Director, an Operations Coordinator, a Great Lakes Program Director, and an office. The structure is composed of two membership levels with different fees and responsibilities: Partner Members and Associ-

ate Members. The seventeen Partner Members are mostly organizations that have some paid staff, like Audubon, Sierra Club, and Isaac Walton League. Most Associate Members are like MOU, in that they have only volunteer officers. Each organization has a contact person that reports for the organization and attends meetings. I am that person for MOU.

A member organization with an environmental concern can create a letter to the person or body that has control over that area. The letter is sent to all member organizations through the MEP, and the contact person for each has the option of signing his or her organization onto the letter or not. So far this year MOU has signed onto 12 such communications. Examples include a letter to the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Finance Committee disagreeing with a rollback of endangered species protections (3/25/2019); a letter to Administrator Wheeler and Assistant Secretary James from Clean Water Action opposing the "Dirty Water Rule" (4/4/2019); a letter opposing the Senate Environmental Bill (4/23/2019); a letter supporting the House version of the Environmental Omnibus Bill (4/30/2019); and a peti-

tion to the DNR to adopt rules requiring non-toxic tackle and ammunition (7/28/2019). The decision whether or not MOU will sign onto a letter or petition is based on whether the cause supports the Purpose of MOU (you can find this on the back of any issue of *The Loon*).

Very few environmental actions do not either directly or indirectly affect birds. There also exists no shortage of proposals presented that are in conflict with our purpose. On some occasions there is sufficient time to solicit opinions from members of the MOU Conservation Committee, which is helpful when I am in doubt. Thanks to the work MEP staff and supporters, we are able to monitor and respond to actions being considered by our governing bodies that affect the environment.

Each year the MEP Board makes a list of legislative priorities, and member organizations are asked to support them. Organizations have the option to not support any they do not wish to work for. This year the board decided to designate a “Marquee” issue or issues. Member organizations were asked to poll their members regarding priorities. MOU members who subscribe to MOU-NET may recall

being asked to vote on their top two issues from the list. Many of you did, as did members of other member organizations. The office staff tabulated the results, and organization representatives met to discuss them in a meeting at the MEP office. We listened to supporting comments for the various issues and together arrived at a consensus for the Marquee Issue. The choice will not surprise anyone: “The Climate Crisis is Minnesota’s Greatest Threat, and Solving it is Minnesota’s Greatest Opportunity.”

I have served as MOU’s representative to MEP for a number of years now, and with my advancing age I have decided to cut back on some of my commitments. Therefore I have asked the MOU Board to find a replacement. If this position interests you, please contact Bob Dunlap, president of MOU at [president@moumn.org](mailto:president@moumn.org). If you would like more information on what this involves, feel free to contact me either by email or phone: [bell.tom32@gmail.com](mailto:bell.tom32@gmail.com) or 651-214-5274. Meetings are infrequent, and most business is conducted via email. To learn more about the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, visit their web page at [www.mepartnership.org](http://www.mepartnership.org).



*Black-crowned Night-Heron, by Tom Glide*

## MOU Book Sale

If you have bird books that you no longer use, please consider donating them to the MOU for the annual MOU Book Sale. The sale will be held at the Paper Session on December 7. All proceeds from the Book Sale go toward the MOU’s Savaloja Grants Program, which provides funding to bird research, conservation, and education in Minnesota. To donate, you may either bring your books directly to the Paper Session or email Alex Sundvall ([asgreenplanet4077@gmail.com](mailto:asgreenplanet4077@gmail.com)) to schedule a pickup prior to the event.

NB: Due to quantity, we are only accepting books about birds. We cannot accept journals or magazines.



# Message from the President

Wow, has it really been two years already? I suppose the older you get, the faster it seems that time passes. If that's true, to me the past couple years have passed about as quickly as a Parasitic Jaeger darting through my scope's field of view while I'm scanning Lake Superior from Park Point in late September.

As my term as MOU President comes to an end in early December, I am humbled both to see the changes that the organization has made thus far and to know that there are changes yet to be made by our dedicated membership. Some of these changes have been and will be easy to make, some less so, and some rather difficult and contentious. Yet in my role of directing the organization as we approach a new decade, I firmly believe that these changes are necessary in order for the MOU to continue its mission now and into the future.

In light of the above, I have very much been an active president. Over the past two years, not a day has gone by in which I haven't thought about the well-being of the MOU, the Minnesota birding community, the birds we love, and how in my privileged role it is my responsibility to connect them all. In any given week, I've spent much of my "free time" communicating with other MOU directors and committee chairs in phone conversations and countless email chains or texting various members over my lunch hour to develop new ideas for MOU endeavors. Every few weeks I've met in person to further discuss MOU business or to meet with our partner organizations, often during workdays in which I have to take time off from my day job (or sometimes on weekends, when I'd rather be out birding). While meeting these obligations has not always been easy, I am happy to have volunteered my time on behalf of the MOU.

My time spent working alongside talented MOU directors, committee chairs, and members has resulted in some successes that deserve attention. Among these are our renewed partnership with the Bell Museum. As the museum and its staff continue to engage with the public the MOU has been increasingly involved in their efforts (and there is more excitement on the horizon in 2020!). If you haven't attended a Paper Session in recent years, I encourage you to attend this year's event on Saturday, December 7 in the North Star Ballroom on the University of Minnesota – St. Paul Campus. The venue is excellent, as is our lineup of speakers presenting some of the latest research on our birds and the data we collect. And last but not least, our membership, which has been steadily declining for many of the past recent years (an unfortunate reality for many non-profit member organizations and certainly not limited to the MOU), appears poised to increase again. Although it's

unclear exactly why the decline in membership has ceased, perhaps it can be attributed to the above changes, in addition to our increased presence in the realm of social media and our efforts spent in engaging more with the increasingly relevant online birding community.

I would be remiss in neglecting to mention the many skilled MOU directors, committee chairs, and other members that have made these successes possible. This was always too much to take on for any one person, and thankfully I've benefitted from like-minded MOU members who enjoy spending their time furthering the goals of the organization. I especially want to thank Jen Vieth and Susan Elliott for sharing with me many hours of planning over the past few years; if you've ever been to the MOU Spring Primer (which is looking ahead to its fourth year running in 2020), this increasingly popular event was developed by the three of us over dinner and drinks. Many thanks also to current MOU Vice President and my successor, Dick King, both for sharing his vast experience in leadership with me and for putting countless hours into organizing the Paper Session this year and last. It is my honor to say that the MOU is in the best of hands as we enter the new decade.

It has been the pleasure of a lifetime to lead the organization that I joined some 20 years ago as a teenager who hadn't yet seen his first Common Yellowthroat but was star-struck after reading all the bird reports printed in *The Loon* and *Minnesota Birding*. Since I'm only 34 years old, I plan to be around for a while yet and continue my involvement with the organization that has very much been a part of my life for so long already.

Thank you, MOU members, and good birding as always.

– Bob Dunlap

## New MOU Members

Julie Anderson, *Minneapolis, MN*  
Leslie Chudnoff, *Eagan, MN*  
Deanne Evertz, *Coon Rapids, MN*  
Kris Grangaard, *Falcon Heights, MN*  
Jon Hallberg, *Minneapolis, MN*  
Diane Hoese, *Mayer, MN*  
Scott Klaehn, *South St. Paul, MN*  
Lisa Vertelney, *Plymouth, MN*  
Paul Wannarka, *Bemidji, MN*

# Is the Chestnut-collared Longspur Extirpated as a Breeding Species in Minnesota?

by Jan Green

This question is not an easy one to answer: first records for the state are celebrated, but last observations are hard to pin down. The Chestnut-collared Longspur is a prairie endemic species of the northern Great Plains (along with Sprague's Pipit and Baird's Sparrow, both extirpated from Minnesota). These prairie species were on the eastern margin of their range in Minnesota; they are still patchily common farther west. Roberts in *The Birds of Minnesota* (1932) described the longspur in the nineteenth century as "an abundant summer resident throughout the prairie region of Minnesota from Heron Lake, Jackson County on the south to the Canadian boundary on the north." In the early decades of the twentieth century it was again described by Roberts as having "entirely disappeared in recent years from this range except a few small isolated colonies."

One of these is the Felton prairie complex in Clay County, which has been the "usual spot" for records since the MOU began publishing a regular seasonal report in *The Loon* in 1961. In the summer season this longspur has been reported at Felton every year for 56 years (1961-2018) with three exceptions (1965 and 1975, vagaries of the early seasonal reports network, and in 2018). During these six decades it was found in the summer breeding season (June and July) in seven other counties: Marshall, Polk, Norman, Traverse, Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, and Pipestone. There have been extended field surveys only at Felton: in 1980, 65 pairs (*The Loon* 52: 170-176), and in 1985 territories of 131 males (Wyckoff, *The Loon* 58:3-11). Only one other breeding area has been found: on the TNC remnant prairies in Clinton township, Traverse County a pair was discovered in 1980 during an extended prairie survey, and in 1984 a colony of over 30 individuals, including a nest with eggs, was seen there (*The Loon* 58:51).

Using the yearly Seasonal Reports in *The Loon*, one can trace the decline of the population at the Felton prairie complex in the latter years of the twentieth century. The Chestnut-collared Longspur was estimated in 1963 as ten pair and in 1966 as hundreds of birds in less than half a square mile. In the 1980s more high counts were made: 65 pair in 1980, 52 males and females in 1981, and an estimated 234-262 birds in 1985. By the 2000s, though, counts at Felton were much smaller: only 5-6 birds. And by the 2010s, only



*Chestnut-collared Longspur, by Gerald Hoekstra*

2-3 birds. According to the *Breeding Bird Atlas* (2009-2013; [mnbirdatlas.org](http://mnbirdatlas.org)), the last breeding evidence was at Felton, where a nest with eggs was found in 2009 and a female seen carrying food in 2010. Additionally, there is a verbal report of a nest with eggs in 2015 by K. R. Eckert. The 2018 spring and summer reports of single birds in spring and none in summer certainly justified the spring seasonal report compilers' note of "the species' demise in the state."

Whether the bird is extirpated in Minnesota is another matter. Because the "usual spot" at Felton has preempted most searching for longspurs in other prairie remnants, there may yet be birds elsewhere. The likelihood is small,

since intensive agriculture has taken over much of the prairie landscape. The memory of what the prairie habitat was like in the last century will have to suffice. Following is an account from the Bell Museum archives by Mabel Densmore, from Grant and Traverse counties:

“On June 22, 1937, we drove out in the early evening to a place of virgin prairie about three miles northwest of Norcross. The line between two counties runs directly through this prairie and we followed a grassy road along this line till we came to a dry creek-bed now entirely overgrown with heavy grass. . . . [O]n the sloping side of the ‘draw’ we saw a bird drop into the grass, carrying food. When we tried to locate a nest a second bird flew over, hovered, sang and lighted on a weed stalk near. We had bird glasses and there was no trouble in identifying it as a male Chestnut-collared Longspur, - chestnut collar, black underparts, and much white on the tail. For the next hour we watched the female drop into the grass carrying food, but couldn’t locate the nest though we knew we were very close. Finally by separating, watching where she lighted and where she flew up from, we did at last find it, with four young, well-feathered. The nest was at the base of an overhanging weed, level with the ground, shallow. The growth of grass all over the prairie is very heavy this year, and tall.

“The next evening, June 23, we went again to this prairie to see if other of this species could be located. Before we reached that particular spot and before we left Grant County we saw a male and a female flying over the eastern

end of this prairie. Going to our first location we walked in a wide circle north and west and found that there must be a considerable colony scattered over that country. It was hard to count individuals, because they circled and overlapped so. But we flushed at least seven different females, males were singing, hovering, and perching in every direction, and at times we could see three and four birds in the air at a time.

“Last year at this same location we saw what we now know to have been a bird of this species, but couldn’t identify it then as it was almost dark. But this bird had the same large expanses of white in the tail, and flew with the same short undulating flight.

“We had many chances to closely examine these birds, both male and female, and to watch them as the female brought food and the male stood guard and gave warning. Several of the females were carrying food and I think some of the males also.” (Quoted from letter in the Bell Museum files.)

*Jan Green has been involved with many conservation and environmental organizations since 1960, both at the local and the national level. She is a long-time birder, conservationist, biologist, and author of several books, including Minnesota Birds: Where, When, and How Many, which she co-authored with Bob Janssen, and she was one of the co-authors of the 2017 Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas (published online: [mnbirdatlas.org](http://mnbirdatlas.org)).*



*Chestnut-collared Longspur, by Gerald Hoekstra*

# Birding by the Numbers, 5: Mission Accomplished

by Ben Douglas

I don't want to bury the lead, so I'm just going to say it right from the start: I reached my goal of chalking up 10,000 county ticks in one year. Thanks to continued help from many other birders and a wellspring of vigor, I was able to power through the birding doldrums to wrap things up on September 15, when the final and most diminutive of our Minnesota birds, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, revealed itself near the parking area of Crosby Farm Park in Ramsey County. The youthful eyes of Ezra Hosch and Nolan Meyer spotted the bird heading into a large tree and subsequently found it perched before it quickly flew out of view. I confess that once it happened I didn't really know what to do with myself. How do you react or celebrate such a thing in the company of friends for a hobby that is typically centered on self-restraint and quiet contemplation?

Thankfully, Liz Harper saved the day. She had printed off a fun certificate of achievement. We took some pictures of the group, which also included Erik Collins and Dana Sterner, as I cracked a joke that I could finally sleep now. Being birders, of course we set out to enjoy the outdoors, each others' company and the thrill of hunting for our feathered friends for several more hours that day.

In this final article of my Birding by the Numbers series, I want to recount three efforts from August that I think illustrate well how a diverse approach to birding with an eye on the past can enrich our experiences and inform our future.

In 2013 I went on my first MOU trip to Miesville Ravine. It was led by Kevin Smith. This positive experience with Kevin moved me to throw myself deeply into birding, and within a year Kevin generously gave me his old 3<sup>rd</sup>-edition copy of Kim Eckert's book, *A Birders Guide to Minnesota*. To a fresh birder used to navigating via Google maps, Kim's book can be intimidating, to say the least. It took me a few more years before I felt comfortable extracting bits of knowledge from this compendium of birding in the state.



*Selfie with Erik Collins, Ezra Hosch, Nolan Meyer, Liz Harper, and Dana Sterner on the day I hit 10,000*

As I scoured Kim's guide late last year for locations, I happened upon one in Fillmore County noted as Kapper's Iron Ponds. The location is mentioned as the best in the county for water birds, but it is private, and gaining permission is a must. I honestly had little interest in going to any lengths to bird a private patch like this, so I put it out of my mind. I visited Fillmore County on four separate trips prior to August and had even swung by the northern edge of the ponds, only to see that the last few decades had wrapped the ponds in a tight woodland scrub barrier, making visibility from the road all but impossible. Predictably, my water bird list in Fillmore was about as small as you can get. I had struggled to find even a Mallard; I finally got one on a farm pond on May 11. In fact, Canada Goose and American Coot rounded out the only three water species seen on those four trips, leaving my year total for Fillmore at just 91 species.

Now in late August I was getting desperate as I realized I would need the vast majority of the counties to be at or above 100 before it was all done, so I planned a trip to the area again. I reached out to a couple of long-time Minnesota birders to find out whether they knew how a person could get permission to visit Kapper's Ponds. I was

able to come up with a phone number to contact via text message, as well as details to provide in that message for my prospective visit. To my amazement, I was texted back less than ten minutes later by the new property owner indicating a visit was acceptable but that the property was now called McHale Ponds and if anyone asked me about my presence to say that I had contacted Pat for access. I drove out first thing the next morning and arrived at 7:00 a.m. sharp on August 31. Within minutes Liz Harper and I added Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, and Pied-billed Grebe. With a list of 53 species, we easily added the birds needed for 100 in the county, plus a few extras. Kapper's, now McHale, Ponds, quickly jumped up to the best location in the county for me with its unique ponds among trees and brushy edges. Without the challenge of this year I would have never stretched my comfort zone to the point of contacting a private land owner. Additionally, it helped illustrate for me that all the technology in the world will not eliminate the value of books and knowledge passed between generations.

My second story comes from Cook County and is an experience I'll never forget. I planned a far-too-late second trip up the North Shore for August 11. My first visit, in May, was at the end of a three-week effort, and I had notched just 52 species in the county, since I needed to be fresh and ready the next day for a Friends of Sax-Zim Bog guided trip.

This second visit, though, would be different, as dedicated county listers Andy Nyhus and Liz Harper would be along. And Andy had an ace up his sleeve. He eventually navigated us to a farm several miles off the main highway outside of Grand Marais late in the afternoon. Hard to be-

lieve, but we were on the hunt for House Sparrow, a species that can be tough to track down in Cook if you don't know what you are doing. We drove winding dirt roads just off of the Gunflint Trail toward a farm perched high on the hills. I had assumed it was like any other farm, and that we would drive by the edge of the property on a public road and look for birds from the shoulder. Instead, Andy had me pull into the driveway and veer left. There was a small parking area next to an old farm house that appeared to be little used. On the other side of the parking area was a corrugated aluminum building painted white and green with a sign that simply said 'Milkhouse.' It finally dawned on me that this was a self-service sales point for the dairy. Just then a young boy in his early teens popped out of a barn and jumped on a dirt bike, paying little attention to us until Andy flagged him down and asked if we might roam around the farm a bit. Without hesitating, he said, "Feel free," and then kicked the bike into gear and zoomed off down the driveway, no doubt eager to finish his chores. We wandered down the main drive toward several barns, easily picking up my 86<sup>th</sup> House Sparrow tick of the year. A chicken pen came into view, and a young girl was inside feeding the birds. Her mother was near as well, and Andy again made contact, letting her know we had talked to her son out front about looking for birds. She smiled and stated that they had many birds around the property and that we were welcome to look around. I was truly mystified, being so used to city life and the constant drive to stake out one's own spaces.

We had truly entered another world. We just showed up unannounced and were immediately invited to wander around looking for birds. As ravens called from all around, we arrived at the back of the property to find three shorebird species picking around the wet base of a manure pile along, with a Brewer's Blackbird walking across the crest. A Peregrine Falcon coursed along the ridge line heading south, and we began to pick through a swallow flock to find four in total. This location, no doubt passed between birding generations, found a new fan as I learned what those most passionate about county listing will engage in to notch that last tick for a species as banal as a House Sparrow.

On August 24 I put together an effort to hopefully push my year lists for Mille Lacs, Morrison, and Crow Wing Counties over 100. Crow Wing was my most under-visited county of the year. It had never really seemed to be on the way to or from anywhere else, so I had made only a single visit



*Stilt Sandpiper at Ironton WTP, by Ben Douglas*



*Semipalmated Sandpiper, by Ben Douglas*

spanning four hours back in late April. I silently hoped for a bounty of birds at Crow Wing State Park, even though experience had told me not to be too hopeful.

A great morning start gave way to a bogged-down effort in Morrison, where I was hoping to grind out ten final species. This left me arriving in Crow Wing at around noon and sitting at just 71 species for the year. The state park predictably added a mere six new birds, and a stop for lunch had me wondering how on earth we could get Crow Wing to 100 on this visit. I had penciled in two possible wastewater treatment plants that I had found online. Liz said that the Ironton WTP would be tricky, since it was elevated well above the road and no views were possible without trespassing. She then remembered that Butch Ukura lived in the area and regularly posted pictures from this location. It was a long shot, but Liz sent a message to Butch hoping for access on short notice. As we jumped in the car about to head toward Breezy Point, a response came that Butch could meet us at the ponds anytime! We figured to be about 30 minutes away and set a direct route for the ponds. Sure enough, when we drove up the gated incline, there was Butch in his Toyota Rav4 waiting to drive us around the complex to look for waterfowl and shorebirds. Butch's knowledge of the ponds was so complete that he was able to note the exact species we should expect and which pond corners they preferred to hang out in depending upon the wind direction. It was uncanny. We snagged numerous shorebird species like Stilt, Baird's,

and Least Sandpiper, as well as a pair of Merlin making attack runs in the area. Butch patiently drove us around as we hung our cameras out the window zooming in on wary shorebirds that seemed willing to tolerate us sitting inside the vehicle. We pulled in a boon of nine new species for Crow Wing County and found renewed energy, thanks to Butch and his generous nature.

I never would have guessed years ago walking around Meisville Ravine with Kevin Smith that birding would take me to private pit ponds in Fillmore County, a dairy farm in Cook, or a gated WTP near the city of Ironton. Here I was, though, digging deep at every opportunity and trying to push another county above 100 while nudging my cumulative total ever closer to 10,000. I learned to rely upon others and engage with them on how they were getting to such lofty county totals in the most challenging spaces in the state. I found that in the digital age it pays to read about the past, understand where knowledge comes from, and how it can be passed to the next generation.

From the start I wanted my goal this year to be different by finding as many people as I could to share this effort with both in the field and at home. In doing so I enjoyed time with every generation, from the Silent Generation (1925–45) to the current Gen Z / Centennials (1990–today). It became clear that, regardless of age, we all share a great passion for bird watching.

I find it now of the greatest importance that we all come together to do what we can to preserve natural spaces for birds, educate others, and forge alliances across the generations. We must seek out the wisdom of the most experienced, yes, but we also need to make an effort to broaden the birding community beyond its largely white, older, and middle class makeup by sharing our love of birding with young people and with people of all demographics that do not currently figure prominently in the Minnesota birding community. Societal norms are changing, and we need to ask how we can cultivate inclusive opportunities that help kindle the fire in others. MOU as an organization is making efforts in that direction with our Savaloja Grant program. But we all need to think of ways that we, both collectively and individually, can introduce others to the joy of birding and inspire engagement in conservation.

Thank you to all who made this year possible, and to you, the members of the MOU, for reading this series. I look forward to taking on the next leg in this journey by writing a book about these last few years spent searching for adventure and excitement. I plan to write not only about my experiences but also about how I perceive birders fitting into a hyper-connected world that is changing more rapidly every year.

*Ben Douglas is a member of the MOU Social Media Committee and MOU Awards Committee and is an MOU Field Trip Guide.*

# Savaloja Grant Applications and Donations Sought

*by Steve Wilson, Chair, MOU Savaloja Committee*

MOU seeks applications for grants for bird-related projects to be funded from the Savaloja Memorial Fund in 2020. Grants may 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 to as much as \$4000. In 2019 ten grants, totaling \$19,000, were awarded for education, research, and habitat management (further details on these and past projects can be found at <https://moumn.org/grants.php>). If your organization has an idea for a great project, please consider applying.

Application information may be obtained at the link given above. The deadline for receipt of grant applications

is **January 20, 2020**. Grant recipients will be notified by April 1, 2020.

Thanks to you, MOU was able to support a diverse array of worthy projects last year. Still, only three of the ten projects we supported received full funding, and six more, all worthy of support, didn't receive a Savaloja grant because there wasn't enough money to go around. That meant we had to pass on supporting research and monitoring for two increasingly rare species, habitat restorations, and bird appreciation projects for children and adults. You can help make sure fewer worthy projects are left unfunded next year by upgrading your membership when you next renew, or by donating right now to the Savaloja fund. Just go to the Donate link at <https://moumn.org/signup.html>. Follow the instructions, and be sure to click on "Add a Note" and enter "Savaloja Donation." Minnesota's birds will appreciate it!

## 3rd Annual Carpenter/MOU Hawk Watch

*by Pete Nichols*

On Sunday, Sept. 30, about 15 birders gathered at the Carpenter Nature Center on the bluff overlooking the St. Croix River for the third annual Carpenter/MOU Hawk Watch (Washington Co). The weather that morning was misty, drizzling, and cold—not ideal conditions for raptor migration. The precipitation finally ended in the late morning, permitting light raptor movement down the river despite east winds of 10+ mph.

We observed nine raptor species, mostly between 11:30 and 2:00 (after the rain lifted). The most numerous was Turkey Vulture, with a conservative count of 108. The most unexpected was a lone Red-shouldered Hawk, somewhat on the late side. We also counted four Peregrine Falcons, with one person observing a fifth and sixth after the count officially ended. Other raptors included a lone Osprey, several Bald Eagles, and a few each of Sharp-shinned, Red-tailed, and Cooper's Hawks.

The bird of the day, though, was not a raptor but a Tufted Titmouse, seen in the early afternoon from the count site. Other highlights, from both the count site and savannah trail, included four Winter Wrens, one Hermit Thrush, nine warbler species, nine sparrow species, six woodpecker species (including at least 16 Northern Flickers), and a flock

of Franklin's Gulls.

This year's count compares with a 2018 count of 12 raptor species and 87 total species (not to mention scores of human visitors). In 2017 we had 10 raptor species and 65 total species, but we had much higher numbers of individual raptors than in 2018 or 2019.

A big thanks to Jen Vieth and all of the volunteers: Ben Douglas, Bob Dunlap, Ezra Hosch, Dana Sterner, and Kevin Smith. A special thanks goes out to Tristan Mann for spending hours on the trails and contributing several difficult birds to the count. And finally, thanks to everyone else who attended and helped out with the count.



# We Need You... for the Christmas Bird Count

by Cindy Smith, MOU Membership Secretary

This is the 120<sup>th</sup> year of the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, with well over a century of citizens reporting on bird populations. All Christmas Bird Counts are scheduled between December 14 and January 5. The CBC welcomes you whether you are a beginning birder or an experienced lister. You can choose to record observations out in the field or in the comfort of your home as feeder watch observer.

What exactly is the Christmas Bird Count? And when did this tradition start? It's an early winter census of the birds in your area, and it started in 1900 as an alternative to the Christmas bird hunt. The counts take place in established 15-mile-diameter circles, and count volunteers search assigned areas within each circle. Participation is free, but all participants must make arrangements to participate in advance. You don't need to be an expert birder. If you are uncertain of your skills, you can be paired with an experienced counter. Also, you don't have to bird all day.

This isn't merely a tally of *species*. Participants try to count every single *bird* that they see or hear. They report their numbers for each species to the local count compiler, who then assembles the results and sends them to Audubon. This gives an indication of the total number of birds encountered in the circle that day.

Minnesota has more than 80 count circles, including two that are new this year. In the 2018 count there were 1900 participants, of which 500 were Feeder Watch observers. While the average number of participants for each circle is 24, more than two dozen of Minnesota's counts that have fewer than ten. Fewer birders obviously results in lower counts. So the CBCs need you. If you think you would like to participate, visit [www.moumn.org/cbc/locations](http://www.moumn.org/cbc/locations), which gives the locations of count circles and contact information for count leaders.

Sometimes even though an area may already have a count circle, additional circles may be added nearby over the years. This was the case with the Cottonwood CBC, which Paul Egeland started over 50 years ago. Now there are circles in Lac Qui Parle, Marshall, Lamberton, and Mountain Lake/Windom as well. Some counts present specific challenges, such as few roads, and some years present bone-chilling cold. Besides birding by car, counters have used snowshoes, cross country skis, snowmobiles, and even dog sleds.

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count relies entirely on donations to provide support to compilers and volunteers on



count day, to manage the historic database, and to fund the technology to make historic data available to researchers. The data collected by CBC participants over the past 120 years have become one of only two large pools of data for ornithologists and conservation biologists studying how the birds of the Americas are faring over time. If you can help, even for a few hours, our birds will benefit.

Note: The 2020-21 Minnesota Birding Weeks and Weekends schedule, normally published in the November issue of the newsletter, is tentatively being rescheduled for the January-February 2020 issue.

# 2019 Minnesota Ornithologists' Union Annual Paper Session Program December 7, 2019

8:00-9:00	AM	Registration
9:00-9:05	AM	Welcome <i>Clinton Nienhaus, MS, Head Naturalist, Friends of Sax-Zim Bog</i>
9:05-9:55	AM	eBird <i>Ian Davies, eBird Project Coordinator, Cornell Lab of Ornithology</i>
9:55-10:25	AM	Conserving Minnesota's Birds: Current Status and Future Directions <i>Alexis Grinde, PhD, Wildlife Ecologist, Natural Resources Research Institute, UMD</i>
10:25-10:50	AM	Red-headed Woodpecker Project, Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve <i>Elena West, PhD, Fisheries, Wildlife &amp; Conservation Biology, UMN</i>
10:50-11:05	AM	BREAK
11:05-11:30	AM	Habitat Use of Threatened Birds During Vulnerable Periods of Annual Cycle <i>Steve Kolbe, PhD, Avian Ecologist, Nature Resources Research Institute, UMD</i>
11:30-Noon	AM	Neurologic Abnormalities after Oral Imidacloprid Exposure in Domestic Chickens <i>Dana Franzen-Klein, DVM, MS, Staff Veterinary, The Raptor Center, UMN</i>
Noon-12:40	PM	LUNCH BREAK
12:40-12:45	PM	MOU Business Meeting
12:45-1:00	PM	MOU Awards: Thomas S Roberts Award, Brother Theodore Voelker Award, Young Birder Award Volunteer of the Year (new award)
1:00-1:30	PM	The Bell Museum and Natural History Collections in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century <i>Sushma Reddy, PhD, Breckenridge Chair of Ornithology, Bell Museum Curator of Birds, FWCB, UMN</i>
1:30-2:00	PM	Global Diversification of Passerine Birds <i>Keith Barker, PhD, Ecology, Evolution &amp; Behavior, UMN</i>
2:00-2:30	PM	Avian Radar Project – Migration in the Great Lakes <i>Michael Wells, PhD, Fish and Wildlife Biologist, USFWS Region 3</i>
2:30-3:00	PM	Project BirdSafe: Outcomes and Opportunities <i>Joanna Eckles, MS, Curator of Birds, The Raptor Center, UMN</i>
3:00-3:15	PM	BREAK
3:15-3:40	PM	Binesi-dibajimowinan (Ojibwe Bird Stories) – new book with Savaloja Grant support <i>Charles Grolla (Ogimaagizhig), Bois Forte band of Ojibwe, High School teacher</i>
3:40-4:05	PM	Henslow's Sparrow Management in Great River Bluffs State Park <i>Raymond Faber, PhD, Professor of Biology, St Mary's University of Minnesota</i>
4:05-4:30	PM	Great Lakes Piping Plover Population: History and Recovery <i>Francesca Cuthbert, PhD, Fisheries, Wildlife &amp; Conservation Biology, UMN</i>
4:30	PM	Closing Remarks

## November / December

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					<b>NOVEMBER</b> 1	2 Bird Banding, Eastman Ntr Ctr, 3RPD  Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
3 Tundra Swan Field Trip, ZVAS	4	5	6 Owl Banding, Carpenter NC	7 Carver Co. Birding Day, MRVAC	8	9 WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter NC  Wilkie Unit Bird Walk, MRVAC  "Alaska," MN Global Birders
10	11 Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC	12	13	14	15	16 Tundra Swan Field Trip, Whiewater SP, DNR  Owl Prowl, Intl. Owl Center  Chisago Co. Sea Ducks, MOU Field Trips
17 Wilkie Unit Bird Walk, MRVAC	18	19	20	21	22 Bird Banding, Carpenter NC	23 Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC
24 Mississippi River Gulls Field Trip, MOU Field Trips	25	26 "Story of the Wood Duck," ZVAS	27	28	29	30
<b>DECEMBER</b> 1 Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC	2	3	4	5 Hennepin Co. Birding Day, MRVAC	6	7 <b>MOU PAPER SESSION</b>  Bass Ponds Bird Walk, MRVAC  Monthly Bird Walk, ZVAS
8	9 Wilkie Unit Bird Walk, MRVAC  MN Global Birders (Program TBD)	10	11	12	13	14 WI Campus Bird Hike, Carpenter NC  Rochester CBC, ZVAS
15	16 24 <sup>th</sup> Annual Winter Bird Count, Itasca SP, DNR	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27 Bird Banding, Carpenter NC	28 10 <sup>th</sup> Annual Winter Bird Count, Lake Carlos SP, DNR  Metro Saw-Whet Search, MOU Field Trips
29	30	31 Owl Prowl, Intl. Owl Center				



# MOU Calendar

## November / December 2019



### CARPENTER NATURE CENTER

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

#### Nov 6. Owl Banding

*Details:* 8–10 pm. Learn about the migration patterns of Saw-whet Owls. Join our naturalists as they venture out to band some of our native owls on the MN Campus. Free, but space is limited, so please call 651-437-4359 early to reserve your spot. Program will be weather dependent.

#### Nov 9. WI Campus Bird Hike

*Details:* 9–11 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

#### Nov 22. Bird Banding

*Details:* 8:30 am–12 pm. Join CNC’s expert bird banders every month as they catch, band, and release songbirds on our Minnesota campus. Banding runs continuously, and visitors may come and go at any time. Donations of bird seed or suet are greatly appreciated in lieu of a program fee. Location: Minnesota Campus

#### Dec 14. WI Campus Bird Hike

*Details:* 9–11 am. See description above.

#### Dec 27. Bird Banding

*Details:* 8:30 am–12 pm. See description above.

### DNR

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

#### Nov 16. Tundra Swan Field Trip

*Details:* 10 am–12 pm. Each November thousands of migrating Tundra Swans stop at the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge on their way to Chesapeake Bay. Join a naturalist for a short presentation at the Visitor Center, after which we will caravan through

the Whitewater WMA to Weaver Bottoms on the Mississippi River to observe Tundra Swans. Binoculars, spotting scopes, and hand-outs will be available. Bring your own transportation. For more information, call 507-312-2300. Location: Whitewater State Park

#### Dec 16. 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Winter Bird Count, Itasca State Park

*Details:* 8 am–3:30 pm. This holiday season take part in the annual winter bird count at Itasca State Park. Location: Meet at the Jacob V. Brower Visitor Center Lobby between 7:30 and 8 a.m. for assignment of count areas. For more information call 218-699-7251.

#### Dec 28. 10th Annual Christmas Bird Count Lake Carlos State Park

*Details:* 8 am–4:30 pm. Meet at the Visitor Center between 7:30 and 8 a.m. for assignment of count areas and a quick refresher lesson on bird identification and counting techniques. You do not have to be an expert birder to participate in this exciting and rewarding event, as we will place experienced birders with less experienced ones, so come enjoy the day. For questions, further details, or to sign up to participate in either the count or the feeder counts, call 320-852-7471.



*Indigo Bunting, by Pete Hoeger*

## INTERNATIONAL OWL CENTER

### Nov. 16 and Dec. 31. Expert-led Owl Prowls

*Details:* 6 pm. Owls live all around us but are very good at evading detection. Come learn how to identify local owls by size, shape, silhouette, and sound with the Owl Center's human and owl staff. Following the indoor portion of the program, participants will carpool to known owl territories in and around Houston to call and listen for Eastern Screech-Owls, Barred Owls, and Great Horned Owls.

Dress for the weather and try to wear clothes that don't make noise when you move. Calling will be done from the side of the road, so very little walking is required. Children are welcome but must be able to stand quietly for at least ten minutes at a time.

Meet at the International Owl Center at 6:00 pm and expect to return roughly 2.5–3 hours later. Plan to spend the first 45 minutes indoors learning to identify owls by sound before going outdoors.

You must RSVP for the program if you plan to attend (send an email to [karla@internationalowlcenter.org](mailto:karla@internationalowlcenter.org)) but pay when you arrive. Group size is limited. Cost is \$7 for members and \$10 for non-members.

Programs will be canceled in case of significant wind, rain, severe road conditions, or low enrollment. Participants who have reserved a space will be notified of cancellations. Location: International Owl Center, 126 E. Cedar St., Houston, MN

## MINNESOTA GLOBAL BIRDERS

This informal group meets monthly at the Walker Library in Minneapolis. Anyone interested is welcome. We like to monitor the number of attendees, so please RSVP via email to Gregg Severson at [Gregg.Severson@gmail.com](mailto:Gregg.Severson@gmail.com). Cost: Free.

### Nov. 9. "Alaska" – Alex Sundvall

*Details:* 3–5 pm. Alex Sundvall, recent MOU Young Birder of the Year, will give a presentation on Alaska, including a pelagic trip and a visit to the most remote Aleutian island, Attu.

For details and to register (so we can monitor attendance for our 50 seats), go to [tinyurl.com/globalbirding24](http://tinyurl.com/globalbirding24). Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Avenue S (at Lagoon), Minneapolis

### Dec. 9. Topic and presenter TBD

*Details:* 6–8 pm. For details and to register, go to [tinyurl.com/globalbirding25](http://tinyurl.com/globalbirding25). Information regarding topic and presenter will be available in November. Location: Walker Library, 2880 Hennepin Avenue S (at Lagoon), Minneapolis

## MOU

### Saturday, Dec. 7. Annual MOU Paper Session

*Details:* 8:45 am–3:30 pm. Location: University of Minnesota, St. Paul Campus Student Center, Northstar Ballroom, 2017 Buford Ave. For more information see <http://moumn.org>

## MOU FIELD TRIPS

### November 16, 2019. Chisago County— Sea Ducks and More

*Details:* 9 am–3 pm. Led by Erik Collins. Participants will start the day by looking for sea ducks on several area lakes. All three scoters were found in the county in 2017, and Long-tailed Duck was found in 2018. Later, the group will bird different habitats elsewhere in the county to look for winter birds, and because he can't help myself, Erik will probably make a stop or two and look for owls! Restroom stops will be made along the way. Participants should pack a lunch.

Location: Meet at the Park & Ride in Wyoming at 9:00 a.m. From the I-35 exit to Wyoming, go west on Viking Blvd. and then immediately south on Kettle River Blvd.

### Nov. 24: Mississippi River Gulls Field Trip

*Details:* Join Ezra Hosch and Alex Sundvall as they look for rare gulls at Lake City Marina. Expect to learn valuable tips in gull identification as well. This trip is limited to eight participants. RSVP to [fieldtrips@moumn.org](mailto:fieldtrips@moumn.org) by Nov. 16 to save your spot. The trip begins at 2:00 p.m.

### December 28: Metro Saw-whet Owl Search

*Details:* Led by Erik Collins. This exciting expedition will be led by one of the best when it comes to finding Northern Saw-whet Owls. This trip is limited to just seven participants who will join Erik in looking for Saw-whets in Dakota and Ramsey Counties.

While it is not guaranteed that a Saw-whet Owl will be found on the trip, expect to learn valuable tips from Erik on how he looks for them. Due to the limited number of spots, this trip requires prior registration: send an email to [fieldtrips@moumn.org](mailto:fieldtrips@moumn.org).

The trip will begin at 8:30 a.m. and last approximately four hours. Participants will be contacted by Erik with meet-up location and any other pertinent details. Two of the seven spots are reserved for non-MOU members. Non-members will be asked to pay a \$25 charge that will automatically be applied to an MOU membership.

## MINNESOTA RIVER VALLEY AUDUBON CHAPTER

### MRVAC Bird Watching Treks:

#### MN Valley Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Bird Watching

*Details:* Join us for a winter season bird walk. Trumpeter Swans, a mix of Ducks, Rough-legged Hawks, Bald Eagles, and Northern Shrikes are a few of the species that have overwintered on the Refuge. Bring your binoculars and favorite field guide, and dress appropriately for the weather as we search for these and other overwintering species of birds on the Refuge. Registration is not required for these refuge tours. All hikes are from 8:00-10:30 am and led by Craig Mandel: 952-240-7647.

**Bass Ponds, Trailhead.** 2501 86th Street E., Bloomington  
Monday, November 11, 8:00 - 10:30 am  
Saturday, November 23, 8:00 - 10:30 am  
Sunday, December 1, 8 am – 10:30 am  
Saturday, December 7, 8 am – 10:30 am

**Wilkie Unit, Trailhead.** 7701 County Rd 101 E, Shakopee  
Saturday, November 9, 8:00–10:30 am  
Sunday, November 17, 8:00 - 10:30 am  
Monday, December 9, 8 am – 10:30 am

### MRVAC Field Trips:

#### Nov 7. Carver County Birding Day

*Details:* 7 am. Led by Craig Mandel. Lake Waconia, Goose Lake, Lippert Lake and Swede Lake are a few of the lakes we will check for Waterfowl and we should also have time for some birding at Carver Park Reserve, Baylor County Park maybe a stop at the Rapids Lake Unit of the MVNWR. Please contact Craig to register: 952-240-7647.

#### Dec. 5. Hennepin County Birding Day

*Details:* 8 am. Led by Craig Mandel. Theodore Worth Park, French Lake Regional Park, Minnesota Valley NWR—Bass Ponds, Old Cedar Ave Bridge, and the Bloomington Visitor Center, and Lake Harriet are a few of the locations we may search for waterfowl, owls and other winter species of birds. Please contact Craig for more information: 952-240-7647.

## THREE RIVERS PARK DISTRICT

#### Nov 2. Bird Banding

*Details:* 9 am–12 pm. See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied, and tagged with numbered rings. Bring a camera. Drop in anytime. Free. Location: Eastman Nature Center, 13341 Elm Creek Rd, Osseo

## ZUMBRO VALLEY AUDUBON

#### Nov 2: 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

#### Nov 3: Tundra Swan Field Trip

*Details:* 8 am. Led by Terry and Joyce Grier. We'll travel through La Crescent and down the Mississippi to Brownsville to hopefully see thousands of Tundra Swans and other waterfowl. We will return early afternoon. Bring your own lunch or eat at a Subway sandwich shop before returning to Rochester. Location: Meet in the east parking lot at Heintz Center at 8:00 am to car pool.

#### Nov 26: ZVAS Monthly Program. "With Wings Extended: A Story of the Wood Duck"

*Details:* 7 pm–8 pm. Presenter: Greg Hoch, Prairie Habitat Supervisor/MN DNR. This spectacular duck was almost given up for extinction. It is one of the few birds specifically named in the 1916 Migratory Bird Treaty, and its hunting season was closed from 1918 to 1941. Since then the Wood Duck has become one of the most commonly harvested ducks in Minnesota. And, in a very indirect way, it could be argued that the Wood Duck helped the British survive during World War I. Come find out how! Location: Quarry Hill Nature Center, Rochester

#### Dec 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

#### Dec 14. Annual Christmas Bird Count

*Details:* 7:30 am. Led by Clifford Hansen. Each year teams of interested birdwatchers search designated sections of the Rochester area to see what birds can be found. We'll meet at 7:15 a.m. at the west Silver Lake parking lot (near the former fire station), then take a break from noon to 1:00 p.m. at Quarry Hill Nature Center for a quick lunch and tally. More counting is done in the afternoon, with a final tally held at 4:45 at Quarry Hill. You're invited to participate with one of our teams for part or all of the day's count. Be prepared for the weather. Bring your own binoculars, lunch, and beverages.

# Birder Bio: Mathew Zappa



## **Tell us about yourself.**

I grew up in Edina, Minnesota, with a twin brother Michael and my parents, but I currently reside in Northfield. I am a sophomore at Carleton College, and I plan to major in Biology. My interests revolve around the study of nature—plants, insects, fish, and birds, among other things. This past summer I spent six weeks in northern Mongolia on a conservation field research program that included conducting breeding waterbird surveys.

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

I've been interested in nature my whole life, but my birding career really began in 2013, when I discovered eBird. I thought that the idea of providing data that scientists could use was intriguing and I wanted to contribute. No one else in my family was a birder, so I had to mostly figure it out by myself. I do thank my parents for supporting my birding, including being willing to be my birding transportation before I could drive.

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

As I started going farther afield from my house and seeing more and more birds, my interest grew. I also started paying

attention to the birds that were present in the places where I would go on trips, for school or with my family. Whenever we would plan a vacation, I would look for a park to visit so I could find new birds. As I gained more experience and knowledge, my interest and desire to know more about how to study and identify birds grew immensely.

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

Getting out into nature is definitely one of the main attractions for me. There is always something new happening: if the birds aren't showing themselves, there is usually an interesting plant, insect, or animal to observe. And I simply enjoy being outdoors.

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

One of my favorite birding locations is Crow-Hassan Park Reserve. There is usually a good variety of birds, and it has a large area of restored prairie, which is hard to find in the metro area.

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

I don't really have a preference either way. I usually bird by myself, but I also enjoy birding with other people.

## **Favorite bird or bird family?**

It is hard to pick, but Harris's Sparrow and Yellow-billed Loon are definitely at the top of the list.

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

Practice. The more times you see and identify a bird, the easier it becomes to recognize it. Also, reading field guides helps to become more familiar with the most useful identification features.

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

I'm interested in just about everything in nature—plants, birds, insects, etc. Whenever I go "birding," I'm paying attention to all of those groups as well. In the summer, when the birding can slow down a bit, my focus usually shifts towards dragonflies and butterflies, for which one can also keep life lists.





# Minnesota Ornithologists' Union

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

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*MN Birding* is published bi-monthly  
**Editor:** Gerald Hoekstra  
**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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Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

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