



The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Trumpeter

Volume 52 Issue 5—Bloomington MN
www.MRVAC.org

March & April 2019

Anne Hanley, articles editor
Greg Burnes, field trips editor

Special Presentations March and April - Free & Open to the Public

*** March ***

Bird Migration

Thursday March 28 @ 7:30 pm

Presented by Jim Egge, Past President ACM

Bird migration is a subject that has always been poorly understood, but modern techniques of research have given us the tools to gather information about bird flights. Knowledge about what drives birds to move as they do and how they manage to navigate with precision has exploded with new technologies.

This program will review recent studies and bird patterns to better understand bird populations in North and South America. Some of our favorite birds will be mapped as they migrate out of their breeding grounds to suitable wintering habitat. We think of the birds that breed here as "our birds", even though we see them for such a short time.

Jim Egge is a retired chemistry and biology teacher in Roseville, and a past president of Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis.

*** April ***

Finding the World's Rarest Bird, Our Latest 'Coal Mine Canary'

Thursday, April 25 @ 7:30 pm

Presented by Nick Minor, University of Minnesota

The Stresemann's Bristlefront is one of the hardest-to-find birds in the world. So when a small team finally discovered a lone female last December, a flurry of media coverage spread the news around the world. Can this skulking, nondescript bird—whose population size may be just one individual—serve as the poster child Brazil's Atlantic Forest so desperately needs?

This is the story of finding the Stresemann's Bristlefront, presented by Nick Minor, an early career biologist and science writer. A Chicago area native, he's currently wrapping up a B.S. in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior at the University of Minnesota. As part of his passion for science stories, he co-edits the "News & Notes" column in *Birding Magazine*, is a regular contributing writer to the National Audubon Society, and does a variety of science communication and multimedia storytelling work.

Youth Birding Club

Meetings at the Ney Nature Center
28238 Nature Center Lane, Henderson, MN 56044

Tuesday, April 30th 4-6pm
Tuesday, May 7th 4-6pm
Tuesday, May 14th 4-6pm

Learn bird identification techniques and search for different bird species with binoculars and a spotting scope. Made possible by the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter. All equipment provided. Open to anyone ages 8-18. Register online at neycenter.org

Location details and start times for both March & April meetings

When: Please join us from **7:00-7:30 pm** to socialize over cookies. A brief business meeting and the featured speaker begin at **7:30 pm**. The meeting will conclude before 9:00 pm.

Where: Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center 3815 American Blvd E, Bloomington. Enter through the staff door in the middle of the building. From Hwy 494 exit on 34th Ave, go south to American Blvd; turn left on American and go 3 blocks. Visitor Center will be on your right. Also accessible via the Hiawatha Light Rail line; exit at the American Blvd. stop.

MRVAC News

Bird-a-Thon Challenge

Submitted by Walt Stull, Treasurer

2019 marks the 52st Anniversary of the incorporation of our chapter. Last year we raised over \$2,000 – it would be great to top that.

Those of you who plan to go birding to raise money should choose a day between May 1st and May 15th. You can go birding anywhere in the world on that day. Sponsors usually make their pledges as a flat amount or on a per bird basis, so the more species you identify, the more money you can raise.

You don't have to go birding alone. The more eyes and ears you have the better. You can start at 12:01am and bird until 11:59pm if you have the stamina. The funds that we raise with our Birdathon will be used to fund grant requests that are submitted to us. In the past these have included grants to local nature centers and schools, to the MN Arboretum, the Audubon Center of the North Woods and the MN Valley NWR. Most of our grants support educational efforts directed at children.

Here are a few simple tips:

1. Don't be afraid to ask! Most people are reluctant to ask for donations, but I am always surprised at how many people are willing to help, especially when they understand what the money will be used for. Be sure to tell them that it is our 51th anniversary.
2. Plan out your route! Pay attention to the weather and the latest reports on MOU, e-bird and Facebook. The best results are achieved if you can visit a variety of habitats on a nice day.
3. Tell your sponsors what you did! Most sponsors have some interest in what you are doing and will want to know what the highlights of your day were. This will help you in upcoming years to ask for repeat sponsorship.
4. Use a sponsorship form! Forms can be obtained from MRVAC.ORG or Walt Stull (see below for his contact info). This helps you keep track of who your donors are and how much they have pledged.

All donations that you collect should be submitted to Walt Stull by June 1, 2019. You can contact him at 612-889-3550 or at mathemagicland@Q.com. It is best to give the donations directly to Walt at the general meeting, (4th Thursday – May 23) but they also can be mailed to MRVAC at PO Box 20400, Bloomington, MN 55420.

You don't need to sponsor a birder to donate; direct donations are welcomed as well!

Salt Lake Birding Weekend 2019

Saturday April 27 - Sponsored by MOU and MRVAC
Submitted by Ken Larson

If you're dreaming about spring and wanting to find migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, why not join the 44th annual Salt Lake Birding Weekend? On Saturday April 27, 2019, volunteers will guide birders around Salt Lake, Big Stone Refuge, the lakes, wetlands and native prairies in Lac qui Parle, Yellow Medicine and Big Stone counties. This event is free and open to all who are interested. No pre-registration is required. Friday and Sunday birding is on your own. Info at <https://moumn.org/saltlake/>

On Saturday April 27 at 7 a.m. meet at the Marietta American Legion, located one block west of the intersection of County Road 7 and State Highway 40, 11 miles west of Madison. Coffee, sweet rolls, juice and milk will be available for purchase. Guided car caravans will leave between 7 and 8 am. At noon stop back at the Legion for barbecue sandwiches (available at a modest cost), to compare notes and continue afternoon birding. A Saturday chicken dinner for \$12, will be served at 7:30 pm at the Sons of Norway Hall on Highway 75 in Madison. Reservations are necessary for dinner; please email Camey Maland at oe1ma1@farmerstel.net. After dinner there will be a short program and then the species count for the day will be recorded.

Local lodging is available at Lou's Lodge in Madison 320-598-7518, the Vali Vu Motel in Ortonville 320-839-2558, Prairie Waters Inn in Appleton 320-289-2500, and the Country Inn by Carlson in Montevideo 320-269-8000. Free camping is available at Prairie Marsh Farm, 1770 151st Ave, Marietta, located 7 miles west of US 75 and 1.5 miles south of 212. Contact Ken Larson for more information or to reserve a camping site - cell 612-210-8486 or email to prairiemarshfarm@comcast.net.

Last year cold weather late into April resulted in ice not leaving Salt Lake until April 25. On Saturday the 28th with warm temperatures the ice was gone and over 130 birders found 139 different species of birds. We found a number of late winter birds such as two Snowy Owls, Common Redpoll, one Evening Grosbeak and Lapland and Chestnut-collared Longspurs. Early arriving migrants included Grey-cheeked Thrush, Western Kingbird and Bobolink. Two of the best sightings of the weekend were in Yellow Medicine County, a Northern Goshawk and 12 Sharp-tailed Grouse on a lek. All of the species mentioned are uncommon for the 43 years of this birding event. A big thank you to the Marietta American Legion Auxiliary and the Madison Sons of Norway for hosting this event. Once again a good time was had by all.

Conservation and Habitat

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

By Jim Stengel, Red-Headed Woodpeckery Recovery

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery project (RhWR) is now in its twelfth year of working to halt the decline and promote the recovery of Red-Headed Woodpeckers (RHWOs) in Minnesota through habitat preservation and restoration, research, and public education. Volunteers have done surveys of RHWOs from the project's beginning.

At the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in East Bethel, trained citizen science volunteers locate breeding pairs of RHWOs and their nest trees, and many continue to monitor the birds through their breeding season. Since 2017, we have also sponsored collaborative research there. Our lead researcher, Dr. Elena West, is currently planning this year's field work, procuring tracking devices for the birds and hiring field assistants, while we are also welcoming new members, engaging new volunteers, and raising money to fund this research. We hope that you can join us in this exciting endeavor!

You Can Help

You can help by reporting RHWO sightings on eBird. If you find one or more active nests outside of Cedar Creek, let us know. If you own or manage oak savanna or property with dead or decaying trees of any kind, save the snags wherever safety and health permit, and limit understory growth in support of RHWO habitat.

If you'd like to join us as a trained citizen scientist to survey and monitor RHWOs at Cedar Creek, plan to attend an **orientation** there on **Saturday, April 13**. Or sign up for a guided tour of Cedar Creek's RHWO nesting territory. For more on these and other opportunities, visit www.cedarcreek.umn.edu

You can also help us and the birds by joining Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery project for just \$20/year.

Contributions of \$150 and \$210 will purchase radio-transmitters and geolocator devices that we attach to birds to study their habitat use and incubation in cavities. Contributors get to name and follow the bird wearing their device. Any amount you donate would help us match a current pledge of \$2500. For updates and more information please see www.rhworesearch.org.

Donate online or make checks payable to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (RHWR on the memo line) and mail to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis P.O. Box 3801, Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801.

International Festival of Owls

March 1-3 in Houston, MN

Immerse yourself in owls at the only annual, full-weekend, all-owl festival in North America. Highlights include 6-7 species of live owls (including a Snowy Owl), owl prowls to call in wild owls, a birding and natural history bus trip, owl-themed food, owl crafts, owl merchandise, and more.

Dr. Paula Enriquez from Mexico will be the featured banquet speaker and is receiving the World Owl Hall of Fame's highest award. Dr. Richard Raid from Florida is receiving a Special Achievement Award for his work using Barn Owls as natural rodent control on farms, and will speak on Saturday during the day.

The international children's owl art contest received an astounding 4,000 entries from 35 different countries, with many entrants already at the professional level although all are 18 or younger. Hundreds will be on display around Houston during the Festival.

For more information or to register go to www.FestivalOfOwls.com.

Fix-It Clinics

Free clinics to help you learn how to fix your broken household items; learn valuable repair skills, and keep usable stuff out of the trash at an upcoming Fix-It Clinic.

At Fix-It Clinics, residents bring in small household appliances, clothing, electronics, mobile devices and more and receive free guided assistance from volunteers with repair skills to disassemble, troubleshoot and fix their items.

Upcoming Fix-It Clinics are scheduled for

- Saturday, March 9 - noon to 4 p.m.
Armatage Recreation Center,
2500 W 57th Street in Minneapolis
- Sunday, April 14 - noon to 4 p.m.
Eden Prairie Senior Center,
8950 Eden Prairie Road in Eden Prairie

Sponsored by Hennepin County

Christmas Bird Count & Golden Eagle Survey Reports

Excelsior Christmas Bird Count Report

Submitted by Howard Towle, Excelsior compiler

Nearly ideal weather conditions with bright sunshine, temperatures reaching into the low 40's, and very little wind led to an excellent day of birding on Saturday, December 15, for the 67th Excelsior Christmas Bird Count. Through the efforts of a record number of participants, 76 field observers and 14 feeder watchers, a total of 59 species and 7,554 individuals were counted.

The 59 species were the most seen since 2007, when 62 species were recorded, and was slightly above our 20-year average of 57 species. The total number of individuals was also slightly above average for years in which Lake Minnetonka is frozen over and not hosting 100's to 1000's of Common Mergansers.

A few of the more unusual sightings from this year's endeavors:

- A Carolina Wren visited the feeders of Barb & Denny Martin in Shorewood long enough to allow a photo, only the third observation in the last 58 years and the first in 15 years; the Martins also hosted the count's only Fox Sparrow, a species seen in about half of our counts.
- Renner, Martha and Abigail Anderson and Michael Manning counting in the Blue Lake area south of the Minnesota River scared up a couple of hardy Wilson's Snipe, the first since 2012 and a species found only four times in the past 20 years. This group also found 14 waterfowl species at Blue Lake WTP and Blue Lake, including a couple of Mute Swans that have only been recorded twice before on the count.
- Joel Claus, Joe Lindell and Alan Branhagen covering the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum found a single Eastern Bluebird, a species found only ten times in 58 years. This group also contributed the count's only Sharp-shinned Hawks and one of two Song Sparrows found.
- Paula O'Keefe and her family found two Red-shouldered Hawks in Bloomington, a species found only three previous times in the past ten years.
- Bill Marengo heard and then located a Northern Saw-Whet Owl in the cedars at R.T. Anderson Conservation Area, the first since 2008 and only the third in the past 20 years. Bill and Esther Gesick located the other Song Sparrow for the count.
- Bob Heise, counting in the southwestern corner of our circle, came up with our count's only Northern Shrikes and Rough-legged Hawks.

- Paula O'Keefe and her family found two Red-shouldered Hawks in Bloomington, a species found only three previous times in the past ten years.
- Steve and Maria Duane found a late Hermit Thrush for the second time in four years. This was only the sixth Hermit Thrush in the past 58 years.
- The Carver Park crew found the count's only Common Redpoll, a single bird, and also the count's only Ring-necked Pheasants.

Several species were found in record numbers this year. The most notable was Northern Flicker. Seventeen Flickers were observed in six different territories and at three feeder stations, far surpassing the previous high of nine. Not surprisingly, Wild Turkeys also reached a record high number of 155 individuals.

Record high counts were also found for Red-bellied Woodpeckers (123) and Black-capped Chickadees (1,111), likely due to the excellent coverage of the area that we had this year. Pine Siskins were found in good numbers (114), the most since 2008, and 16 Red-breasted Nuthatches was the most since way back in 1995. Bald Eagles were seen in all but three territories and the total of 56 was the second highest, a great recovery for this once endangered species.

Ring-necked Pheasants continue to decline in our circle. Only two birds were observed this year at Carver Park, the lowest total in our history. By contrast, 300 pheasants were counted in 1978. We also struck out on Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles, which are found more often than not. And only 14 Canada Geese were found compared to over 3,000 last year.

Cedar Creek Bog CBC Report

by James Howitz, Cedar Creek Compiler

The Cedar Creek Bog Christmas Count was held on Sunday December 16, 2018. The weather was perfect, with clear skies and a high of 44F. Snow cover was negligible.

We found 24 Red-headed Woodpeckers, down from the record 83 in 2017, but above the long-term average of about 8. The bur oaks at Cedar Creek had a bumper crop of acorns the past summer, but the woodpeckers did not store them for retrieval in the winter. The northern pin oak acorn crop was moderate, and these were the acorns stored by the birds that remained for the winter. The Red-headed Woodpeckers at Cedar Creek in winter generally are near their acorn storage sites and we knew within a hundred feet or so of where each would be, so finding all 24 was easy.

Continued on page 5

Cedar Creek Bog CBC report, continued from page 5

The highlight of the count had to be the three bluebirds along Isanti County Road 56 east of Highway 65. Two of the birds were male Eastern Bluebirds, but the third was a male Mountain Bluebird. Six other Eastern Bluebirds were found, the most ever for the Count. The Mountain Bluebird was new for the Count and for Cedar Creek and was the first ever reported in Isanti County. The other new bird for the Count was an Eastern Phoebe near Highway 65 and Sims Road.

The few open water sites produced the usual Canada Geese, Trumpeter Swans and Mallards, but also 8 Wood Ducks, 2 Northern Pintails, and 1 Blue-winged Teal. It was a good year for owls with the expected Great Horned and Barred Owls being recorded. The 2 Northern Saw-whet Owls eclipsed the old record of just one. As on other Minnesota Christmas Counts, it was a good year for Red-breasted Nuthatches, Pine Siskins, and White-throated Sparrows.

Other notable birds include Great Blue Heron, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Belted Kingfisher. The total of 50 species broke the old record of 48. The total of 2619 individual birds was not a record, but was above the 72-year average of 1672 birds.

Bloomington CBC 2018

By Greg Burnes, Bloomington Compiler

We had a beautiful day (sunny sky with temps in the 30's) for our 2018 CBC. 73 volunteers spent hundreds of hours walking, driving and feeder-watching the Bloomington CBC area. The group counted 8,236 actual birds and 59 species. This year's results paralleled the 2017 count with a few notable exceptions. The Snowy Owls had not yet returned to MSP, so they did not make the count this year. We had a greater number of common species such as Mallards, Bald Eagles, American Robins and European Starlings. We will post the full 2018 results on the MRVAC website; they can also be found on the MOU website.

There were a number of new volunteers this year due to some new reach-out campaigns. The LL Bean store in the Mall of American posted the CBC on their events page and Steve Weston hosted an informational session. From this outreach we had a group of 11 new participants assist with the count at the refuge. We also did some additional communication to past participants seeking new volunteers. Both of these efforts, as well as feedback from 2018 participants will help us drive increased participation in this important event next year.

Thanks to everyone that participated and supported this important project.

**Golden Eagle Survey Jan 19, 2019
Sponsored by National Eagle Center**

In mid-January, more than 200 citizen scientist volunteers from the National Eagle Center spread out across the blufflands of southeast Minnesota, western Wisconsin and eastern Iowa during the 15th annual Wintering Golden Eagle Survey, January 19, 2019. They were seeking Golden Eagles that winter in the hills and valleys of the region.

The National Eagle Center greatly appreciates all the time and energy that these citizen scientists dedicate to this survey. This year they observed 145 Golden Eagles, the third most ever recorded for the survey.

The last two years were poor weather years, including 2017 with all day fog, which then produced lower sightings of Golden Eagles. Before those poor weather years the number had been increasing over the years, it is likely that the increase is a result of more observers covering a larger area, and more experience on the part of the observers in picking out these hard to spot Golden Eagles. Several more years of data will be needed to show any kind of trends.

Observers also recorded other birds, especially raptors, seen during the survey, including 583 red-tail hawks and 1,391 Bald Eagles. That's an amazing number of Bald Eagles for survey areas that are away from the "Mississippi River", says Golden Eagle Project coordinator and National Eagle Center Education Director, Scott Mehus. By comparison, the 2018 survey counted 1,202 Bald Eagles in the same areas.

In the blufflands, Golden Eagles can be observed in the dense forested bluffs, often utilizing the upland prairies, sometime called goat prairies, as hunting grounds. In the upper Midwest, common prey items are squirrels, rabbits and wild turkeys. Golden Eagles are not typically seen near water as they do not feed on fish.

Now in its 15th year, the Golden Eagle Survey has expanded to include survey areas from Stillwater, MN to Dubuque in southern Iowa, and across numerous counties in western Wisconsin. The survey gathers important data to document a regular wintering population of Golden Eagles in the Upper Midwest. The Wintering Golden Eagle Survey is part of an ongoing project to learn more about the Golden Eagle population in the blufflands region, including their migration patterns and habitat needs.



FIELD TRIPS – join us. All trips are free unless otherwise noted.

Beginning birders are welcome on all field trips:

MN Valley Nat'l Wildlife Refuge Bird Watching

Join us for a bird walk on one of the many refuge units and learn about the birds that migrate to and through Minnesota. Birders of all skill levels are welcome on these walks. Bring your binoculars, favorite field guide and dress appropriately for the weather. Craig Mandel 952-240-7647, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist

Bass Ponds Trailhead

2501 86th St. E., Bloomington

- Sunday, March 3, 8:00 am, Bass Ponds
- Saturday, March 16, 8:00 am, Bass Ponds
- Monday, March 18, 8:00 am, Bass Ponds
- Saturday, March 23, 8:00am, Bass Ponds
- Sunday, March 31, 8:00am, Bass Ponds
- Monday, April 1, 8:00am, Bass Ponds
- Monday, April 29, 8:00am, Bass Ponds

Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center

15865 Rapids Lake Road, Carver
Sunday, April 28, 8:00am

Waterfowl Workshop

MVNWR, Bloomington Visitor Center

Saturday, March 9, 2019 from 9:00 - 11:30 am

During this workshop, we will explore the 45 species of ducks, geese & swans that been observed in Minnesota. We will study the field marks needed to identify these birds in the field and go over some of the better locations and times of the year to view waterfowl in Minnesota. Craig Mandel, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist

Salt Lake Weekend 2019

Saturday, April 27, 2019

More information on page 2 or at

<http://moumn.org/saltlake/>

Bird Banding Programs at Lowry-Mar & April

Saturday, March 16, April 13 & 27, 9:00-noon, free
Lowry Nature Center in Carver Park Reserve
7025 Victoria Drive, Victoria, MN 55386

See banders working with live songbirds. You will have an opportunity to see these wonderful birds up close and may even get the opportunity to release one. Drop in any time between 9 and noon.

Southern Minnesota Birding Days

Thursday, Friday, May 2, 3, 2019, 7:00 am
Craig Mandel - 952-240-7647

\$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members
We will likely bird Geneva Lake, Myre Big Island State Park, White Woods & Phi's County Parks, Walnut Lake and other WMA's. These locations will give of a variety of habitats to search in Faribault and Freeborn Counties. Please contact Craig for more information and to register.

Western Minnesota Birding Days

Thursday, Friday, April 4-5, 2019, 7:00 am
Craig Mandel - 952-240-7647

\$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC member
Gneiss Outcrops SNA, Lac Qui Parle WMA, Upper Sioux Agency State Park and a few County Parks will make up the itinerary for this trip to Chippewa and Yellow Medicine Counties. With luck there will be some lingering waterfowl and early shorebirds to observe. Please contact Craig for more information and to register.

Reserve Minnesota Prairie Chicken Blinds

<https://www.prairiechickens.org/how-to-view> will give you a list of phone numbers to reserve blinds in different parts of the state. Be sure to get reservations early, since many blinds are booked in advance, especially during the weekends of late April and early May.