



The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Trumpeter

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www.MRVAC.org

March – April 2021

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MRVAC Awards More Grants

by Lee Ann Landstrom, Board Member

At our January virtual Board meeting, we awarded two funding requests.

The first is from Nicole “Nikki” Pyle who is working on her Gold Medal Award, the highest award within Girl Scouts. She requested \$490 for materials. She is working with the City of Burnsville to build 12 bluebird houses to install in Terrace Oaks Park. She and her troop will follow an adaptation of the Peterson style which includes cedar-plank straight sides and bottom while still keeping the angled roof. The houses will be installed in late March - early April when the ground thaws and the birds come back from migration. She will then monitor the houses until late July and collect data on the number of houses in use, how many eggs laid, number of fledglings, etc. She will also be in charge of cleaning the houses between uses.

This project is sustainable as after this summer volunteers provided by Burnsville will take over observation of the houses for years to come. This will provide credible information for birders in the Burnsville area as well as getting in contact with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to see if the data would be helpful to them. A successful project would have birds using the houses, bird watchers enjoying the bluebird activity, and researchers collecting lots of data during the summer months. Nikki will provide us with a report when her project is installed.

The other recipient is the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends group who requested \$1,500. Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends is the official citizen support group of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The Friends assist Refuge staff in its mission to “work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance the fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.” This mostly volunteer-run organization does this through managing the Nature Store at the Bloomington Education & Visitor Center in Bloomington, welcoming visitors at the information desks at the Bloomington and Carver visitor centers, and answering questions. They fundraise and promote Refuge programs, advocate for local environmental issues, and create opportunities for youth from under-resourced communities to engage with nature.

This entire donation will be used for birdseed to stock the bird feeders found at the visitor centers at the Refuge. The bird feeders are a popular draw (see photograph on page 2) for visitors at the Refuge which is on a migratory pathway for many species.

The Friends eagerly anticipate the reopening of the Refuge visitor centers in 2021 when it is safe. The bird feeders will be a welcome site for those who have been away. They measure success by visitor comments collected at the front desk as well as by observing how many visitors visit the feeders for bird watching and/or to take pictures of the birds.

Upcoming Virtual Meetings

Our next two MRVAC member meetings will feature special virtual presentations. A video link will be sent out in a MRVAC email closer to each meeting date. Feel free to share the link with others. All ages. Free.



“Wolves and Cheetahs”

Rob Schultz, Audubon Minnesota



Thursday, March 25, 2021, 7:30 PM
Virtual Presentation

Rob, the Executive Director of Audubon Minnesota, will talk about his research on cheetahs in Namibia. The presentation will focus on the approach to predator conservation in Africa and how this research has altered his perspective on conservation issues in Minnesota.



“Waterbird Use of the North Ottawa Impoundment”

Christine Herwig, Minnesota DNR



Thursday, April 22, 2021, 7:30 PM
Virtual Presentation

Christine Herwig, Assistant Regional Manager for Ecological and Water Resources in Minnesota’s northwest region, will discuss waterbird use at the North Ottawa Impoundment located in Grant County. This impoundment was created to reduce flooding along the Red River but has a secondary benefit of providing habitat to birds. Christine will talk about the monitoring efforts and some of the rare and unusual species that have been observed.



From the Refuge

Ranger's Report

by Joel Vos, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
Park Ranger, Visitor Center Manager

March may come in like a lion, but we're hoping to see it go out like a lamb this spring! Many refuge construction and maintenance projects that have closed multiple popular areas will soon be coming to a close. Long Meadow Lake Trail from the Bloomington Education and Visitor Center to Lyndale Landing has been closed over the winter for permitted maintenance work and is slated to reopen sometime late March to mid-April.

At the Wilkie Unit the Minnesota State Trail from the main Wilkie parking area (Shakopee, MN) to Bloomington Ferry trailhead has been closed for a significant wetland habitat restoration project. Water control structures are being installed that will provide the ability to adjust water levels to help plants grow and create quality feeding and resting habitat for waterfowl. That area should reopen to the public in early April.

Construction and maintenance project information is on the Refuge's web page. You can also check trail conditions before you set out to bird the 14,000+ acres of public land, and over 46 miles of trails at the refuge for this spring's migrations!

www.fws.gov/refuge/minnesota_valley

Questions about construction, maintenance, or trails? Email us at minnesotavalley@fws.gov.



Children enjoying bird watching at the bird feeders at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Bloomington. Photo Credit: Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends

Blue Lake Update

by Kara Zwickey, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
Visitor Services Manager

As many in the birding community know, a small number of dead fish and waterfowl were found in the Blue Lake area of the Wilkie Unit earlier this month. Wildlife were submitted for analyses and test results showed lead poisoning was the cause of death for waterfowl while fish deaths were caused by low oxygen levels.

We believe these birds may have been exposed to legacy lead shot on the bottom of the lake as lakes along the Minnesota River were popular waterfowl hunting spots before the refuge was established and lead shot was banned for waterfowl hunting in 1991.

The refuge is taking active steps to avoid additional fatalities of fish and waterfowl, and will be working to raise the water levels in the lake which will make the lead shot inaccessible to most ducks and swans. We will continue to work with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to monitor the situation, and encourage members of the public to continue to report unusual wildlife behavior with refuge staff directly at minnesotavalley@fws.gov.

For more information, send an email to refuge Manager Sarena Selbo at serena_selbo@fws.gov.

Refuge Field Trips & Salt Lake Festival

by several MRVAC Trumpeter contributors

Due to the current social distancing guidelines in place, there are no field trips sponsored by MRVAC scheduled for the months of March and April at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge or at other birding locations.

In addition, the Salt Lake Birding Weekend usually scheduled in April in western Minnesota, has been cancelled due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although on-site MRVAC field trips will not be taking place at the Refuge in March or April, the Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends will be hosting an online presentation focusing on Monarch Butterflies on March 11. More information is available on page 5.

Please direct any questions about MRVAC Field Trips to Field Trip Coordinator Craig Mandel over the phone at (952) 240 7647.



Christmas Bird Count Recap

CBC Results Are In

by Steve Weston, Minnesota CBC Coordinator

Covid had a significant impact on conducting the 120th Christmas Bird Count, but not to the level expected. Of Minnesota's 85 active counts only five were canceled and two of those are primarily Wisconsin counts. We added two new counts. Paul Egeland ran the Cottonwood count for the 54th year, and a crew of birders from Illinois drove some 12 hours to conduct two of Minnesota's most northerly counts. Laura Lara, a medical student, drove down from Duluth to Wabasha, about 3.5 hours and then back so she could make her appointment to give birth less three weeks later. She did ask if I could give the review of her count a high priority. Many of the counts reported greater levels of participation than in past counts.

Those counts that were held before Christmas reported balmy conditions although with somewhat lower species counts than last year. Species counts on count day in the Metro Area were some of the highest in the state with Excelsior 68 (1st), Bloomington 60 (2nd), St. Paul 56 (tied with Duluth 3rd), and Minneapolis 45. While I can't comment yet on overall results as several counts have not yet completed their data and I haven't started analyzing the results, rare birds reported this year (with number of count years reported): American Pipit, Excelsior (1); Broad-winged Hawk, Bloomington (2); King Eider, Grand Marais (2); Common Yellowthroat, Rochester (2); California Gull, Duluth (3); European Tree Sparrow, Mt. Lake/Windom (5); Mt. Bluebird, St. Paul (5); Turkey Vulture, Faribault & Fairmont (pending review) (6); and Black-crowned Night Heron, Winona (11).

The following articles are general summaries of the three counts with connections with MRVAC. The complete results from all reporting Minnesota CBC counts for current and previous years are available to view online at www.moumn.org/CBC/coordinator_yearend_table.php.

Cedar Creek Bog CBC

by Jim Howitz, Local CBC Coordinator

The 75th annual Cedar Creek Bog CBC was held on December 20, 2020. Due to the pandemic, the number of participants was restricted, but all of the count area was covered. The weather was perfect, with temperatures in the 20s and 30s and no snow on the ground. All streams were open, but waterfowl numbers were disappointing. We did not find the anticipated winter finch irruption.

Mourning Doves, Bald Eagles, and Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied, and Pileated Woodpeckers were above expected levels, as were both White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Rock Pigeons, European Starlings, and House Sparrows continued their declines.

The strong correlation between the number of Red-headed Woodpeckers and Blue Jays counted continued. Last year both counts were record highs. This year the woodpeckers

were absent and fewer than half as many jays were counted, probably reflecting a poor northern pin oak acorn crop.

The general impression of participants was that feeders were empty and birds were few. However, at the Zoom meeting the evening of the count, all expressed gratitude for the glorious weather and the birds we found.

Bloomington CBC

by Rick Magee, Local CBC Coordinator

It was a December day, Saturday the 19th. Overcast, cold, but not as cold as other years being between 25 and 30 degrees above zero with no precipitation and little wind. Snow cover was thin, bare in some places, as much as two inches elsewhere. Ponds were frozen, lakes and streams still had areas of open water. It was a good day to go birding. Except, it was 2020 and there was a world-wide pandemic. Participation was limited to people who had been part of previous Bloomington Counts. No carpooling was permitted, nor was gathering for breakfast before going out or for the traditional soup supper and compilation at the end of the day. Nevertheless, it was a successful count for the 62 people who were able to take part.

Each year, the Saturday before Christmas, the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter sponsors the Bloomington Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Our count is a circle with a 15 mile diameter centered on the National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center located near the MSP airport and the Mall of America. It is a suburban area with major rivers, many lakes, forested parks, open areas, and a variety of other habitats.

The 2020 CBC was not remarkable for the number of species seen, but it was a good year. Sixty species were identified. This year was a record for the number of trumpeter swans spotted at 463. Other species of interest were Red-Shouldered Hawk, Snowy Owl (at MSP), Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated Sparrow (5), Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Brown-headed Cowbird. Red Crossbills have been in the area this winter and two were found during the count, visitors from the north that are unusual for our CBC. Also of particular interest for our circle was the report of a Broad-winged Hawk late for its flight south to warmer weather. Another report was of 80 eagles in three convocations in Burnsville. One aerie was near the Burnsville dump and the other two were along the Minnesota River. With a spotting scope, about 40 were congregating at the active dumping zone of the landfill. There were eagles perched alone and flyovers throughout the circle. More than 12,200 individual birds of all species were tallied that day.

There were some misses of species we often get other years. They included American Kestrel, Sharp-shinned Hawk, bluebirds, Mourning Doves, and Common Redpoll. They represent our challenge for next year. The 2021 Bloomington CBC will be Saturday, December 18th. Have your optics ready!



Excelsior CBC

by Howard Towle, Local CBC Coordinator

The year 2020 will certainly go down as one of the more 'interesting' in our lifetimes, to say the least, and the 69th Excelsior Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 19, was no exception. A crew of 68 field observers and 10 feeder watchers managed to tie the record for the highest number of species observed in count history. The final count for the day was 68 species, a total which was only matched once before in 1997. And there were two near-miss 'count week' birds – a Great Blue Heron seen on the Friday before the count and an American Pipit on the Monday after – that would have run the total even higher. For comparison, the twenty-year average for our count is 56 species and last year's count only tallied 51.

In addition to the efforts and skills of the many counters, the weather was undoubtedly a major factor in this year's success. The relatively mild conditions in the several weeks leading up to the count meant that several migrants were lingering past their usual departures. The warmer weather also led to more open water in lakes and streams than I can remember from any previous count. And on count day itself, the wind, the nemesis of all birders, was very light. I also wonder whether Covid-19 itself might have helped out, as several territories were split into smaller sections and likely got more intense coverage than would have otherwise happened. The strongly positive results of the count can also be seen from the total number of individual birds counted – 15,991. This number can vary wildly from year to year depending on whether Lake Minnetonka has open water and is hosting thousands of Common Mergansers. The total number of birds reported this year was the highest observed since 2015, when over 13,000 mergansers were counted (the total this year was a mere 2,810 mergansers). By comparison, last year's count had a grand total of one Common Merganser and 5,563 birds.

One of the main purposes of the CBC is to track bird populations over time to see changes occurring. The Excelsior count, which has a continuous history going back to 1951, can provide useful information on the effects of increasing urbanization, as well as climate change, on bird populations. When this count was started, places like Chanhassen, Eden Prairie, and other parts of the circle were largely undeveloped farmland. That certainly isn't the case anymore – if it weren't for protected areas like Carver Park, the Arboretum, Bryant Lake Park, the Minnesota Valley NWR, and many city parks and preserves, there would be little that wasn't housing development in the circle. Back in the 60's pheasants were abundant, often topping 100 per year; in the past few years we have been lucky to find one (in fact, this year there was just one, the all-time low for this species). In the 60's, House Sparrows counts were often over 2000; this year 213 were found. In the 60's and 70's, Evening

Grosbeaks were found about every other year; there hasn't been one on the count 1985. By contrast, the first House Finch observed on the count was in 1992, the first Trumpeter Swan in 1994, and the first Wild Turkey also in 1994. This year those three species numbers were 201, 122 and 109, respectively. As Bobby Dylan says, "the time's they are a-changing".

A few of the highlights from this year's count: White-winged Crossbills were found in three different territories, the last time they were seen on the count was 31 years ago. Tufted Titmouse were observed visiting feeders in two territories; the last time this species was observed was nearly 50 years ago in 1972. Unusual waterfowl among the 16 species observed this year included a Northern Pintail (first since 2007), a Wood Duck (only third time in past 10 years), and Ruddy Ducks at two different locations. Among marsh birds, the first Winter Wren since 2004 was observed and Wilson's Snipe were found in two different locations; a Swamp Sparrow was the first since 2011. Townsend's Solitaires were seen at two different locations, lingering from several weeks before the count. Several birds were represented by only a single individual: Merlin, Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Shrike and American Kestrel (another species that has declined dramatically in our count history). And that count-week American Pipit was the first ever recorded on any Minnesota CBC; too bad it just missed making the official list.

As expected from the results, there were only a few 'misses' in this year's count. Perhaps the most notable were Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, and Fox Sparrow, which are seen on about 50% of our counts. Here's to hoping that we can return to more normal ways in 2021, when the count will be held on Saturday, December 18.



Broad-winged Hawk located in Hennepin County during the Bloomington Christmas Bird Count.

Photo Credit: Greg Nelson



Upcoming Learning Opportunities



Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
Bloomington, Minnesota

Special Presentations over Zoom

Our next two MRVAC member meetings will feature two wonderful presentations over the GoToMeeting platform. More information on page 1 and on our website. www.mrvac.org

March 25, 2021: Rob Schultz, Audubon Minnesota
Wolves and Cheetahs

April 22, 2021: Christine Herwig, Minnesota DNR
Waterbird Use of the North Ottawa Impoundment



National Eagle Center
Wabasha, Minnesota

Adventures in Eagle Territory Online

Join the National Eagle Center each day at 1:00 PM on Facebook and YouTube as we lead you on short Adventures in Eagle Territory! Our education team will bring their extensive knowledge of eagles and nature to you through live Facebook sessions and pre-recorded mini-programs covering a wide range of topics including how our avian care team works, spring migration, facts about eagles, guided tours of the exhibits and much more! www.nationaleaglecenter.org



Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center
Sandstone, MN

Spectrum of the Sexes: Diversity in the Animal Kingdom Webinar

Wednesday, March 3, 7:00 – 8:00 PM

How do male seahorses give birth? What do chromosomes XXY, ZW, or XO mean? How do non-human animals decide who takes care of their babies? Sex and sexual behavior throughout the animal kingdom is highly diverse. Join us on a tour of the many ways animals define male, female, roles in a community, and more! www.ospreywilds.org

Virtual Book Club

Saturdays, March 6 & March 27, 7:00 – 8:30 PM

Meetings on the first Saturday of the month are for introductions and priming the conversation, and the last Saturday of the month, for review and discussion of the book. March's book is *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* by J. Drew Lanham. www.ospreywilds.org



International Owl Center
Houston, MN

Owls for Peace Online Presentation

Sunday, March 7, 2021 1:00 PM

Join us from the comfort of your home to learn more about owls from experts around the world. Once you register to attend you will automatically receive an email with a link to use to join the program via Zoom. This program is free and will be presented by Alexandre Roulin (Switzerland). www.internationalowlcenter.org



Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends
Bloomington, Minnesota

Monarch Hour with the USFWS

Thursday, March 11, 2021 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Interested in learning more about monarch butterflies? Come to Monarch Hour with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a Facebook Live event. Come learn about monarch butterfly biology, the recent ESA listing decision, and how the USFWS is working to conserve this species. Plus, learn how you and urban refuges like the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge play a crucial role in protecting important pollinators. Free. All ages. www.mnvalleyrefugefriends.org/events



Three Rivers Parks
Metro-wide

Young Birders Club Open House

Discover cool birds and make new friends in a free and exciting club. Learn how to get involved and about programs offered. Try out binoculars and meet a bird of prey. Stay for an hour or the entire time. Ages 9-12. Reservations required. www.threeriversparks.org

Richardson Nature Center – Bloomington, MN
Sunday, March 7, 2021, 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Mississippi Gateway Regional Park
Saturday, March 13, 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Eastman Nature Center – Maple Grove, MN
Saturday, March 27, 2021, 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Lowry Nature Center – Victoria, MN
Sunday, March 28, 1:00 – 3:00 PM

LNC Photography Club

Ongoing - This is an online club for participants who are interested in nature and photography near the Lowry Nature Center in Carver Park Reserve. Share your latest photos and learn and discuss photography techniques. All experience levels and kids with adults are welcome. www.facebook.com/lowrynaturecenter



Minnesota River Valley
 Audubon Chapter
 P.O. Box 20400
 Bloomington, MN 55420

**Minnesota River Valley
 Audubon Chapter**
Membership Form

To join the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter (MRVAC), please complete this form and mail it with a check, made payable to MRVAC, for at least \$15 to:

Membership Coordinator
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter
PO Box 20400
Bloomington, MN 55420

You can also join MRVAC online at www.mrvac.org.

Yes! Please enroll me as a member of the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter. I will receive the *Trumpeter*, MRVAC's newsletter, along with notifications of chapter meetings and field trips. (Memberships are renewable annually.)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Check one:

- I would like to receive the *Trumpeter* newsletter and other updates via email.
- I would like to receive a printed copy of the *Trumpeter* newsletter by USPS mail.

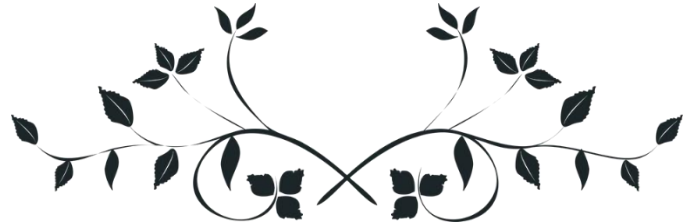
Volunteering (optional):

- I am interested in volunteering for MRVAC. Please contact me.

Areas of Interest:

- Field Trips
- Conservation and Environmental Action
- Habitat Restoration Work
- Activities with Children
- Chapter Administration
- Other: _____

The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Thank you for joining!



**New Inspiration Available for Your
 Native Plant Gardens**

by Anne Hanley

A sister organization to Audubon, Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, Ltd., recently introduced seven professionally-designed, native garden plans free for the public to use; one is specific to the Minneapolis ecoregion. The designs can be downloaded from Wild Ones' new website. www.nativegardendesigns.wildones.org

The designs were created with the premise that using native plants in landscaping can be beautiful, promote wildlife, and be achievable for gardeners of all skillsets in terms of scope and budget. Additionally, the garden designs allow you to take an incremental approach in developing your plan, adding new areas and native plant species as time and funds permit.

Each garden design includes a variety of beautiful, region-specific native plants which can be downloaded and easily printed for quick reference while selecting plants at a local nursery. The website also features a list of nationwide nurseries that are great sources for obtaining native plants.

In addition to the native garden designs, Wild Ones also recently published a "Native Garden Design Guide" both in print and in digital format full of useful planting information to help first time native gardeners in any region of the country get started.

Wild Ones Honorary Director Doug Tallamy, author of "Nature's Best Hope" shares that one of the big mistakes in our approach to conservation is the idea that "nature" is something set aside in preserves and parks, something separate from our daily lives that we go to visit. He stresses that "we can no longer leave conservation to the conservationists." Native plant gardens in our own backyards are our best hope for saving our environment including pollinators and other critical insects.