



The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

Trumpeter

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COVID-19 Update

by Josh Sweet, Trumpeter Editor

This edition of *The Trumpeter* finds us all at a very strange time, dealing with COVID-19. However, our shared passion for birding brings us together and makes us stronger even from our own homes. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with the information below so that you are aware of organizational changes as we attempt to adhere to the advice of health experts and our own leadership.

Programs, meetings and field trips are canceled through May 9. All MRVAC programs, meetings and field trips have been canceled through May 9. This includes the April meeting and the Hok-si-lah field trip on May 9. We will continue to follow the guidelines of health experts in regards to group gatherings. If those guidelines extend beyond May 9 in our state, we will listen to the advice of the doctors and scientists that are looking out for the health of our entire planet.

Things could change. This edition will outline programs and events that are currently planned for May and June on page 5. Although, the schedule of these events may change as we adapt to the new “normalcy.” We will publish another spring edition with updates on upcoming meetings and presentations as we learn more about what the health experts will recommend long term.

Spring migration is not canceled. The birds are still on their way and you should continue to appreciate them in a way that keeps you and those around you safe. Please practice the “6-foot rule” when birding in groups and refrain from sharing equipment. See page 2 for more information.

MRVAC Board Election Information

by Matthew Schaut, Board President

At this time we are seeking a candidate to fill a vacant Board position that will begin their term in June. Interested candidates and nominations can be sent via email to mschaut22@yahoo.com. It is still our intention to announce the new board member in May or June.

Bird-a-Thon Challenge Postponed

by Walt Stull, MRVAC Treasurer

The 2020 Bird-a-Thon Challenge has been postponed by one month and will now take place beginning on June 1 due to COVID-19. The event is open to all levels of birders and is a great opportunity to help fundraise for MRVAC. Not quite ready to enter the Bird-a-Thon Challenge? Seek out a participant and offer to sponsor her or him. Contact Walt Stull at (612) 889 3550 or mathemagicland@Q.com for more information.

What: Birding to raise money for MRVAC to fund grants.

When: Any day between June 1 and June 15, 2020.

Where: Anywhere in the world.

How: Sign up your sponsors. Choose a day. Bird any time or all the time between 12:01 AM and 11:59 PM. Bird alone, in a group, or both. Submit all donations to Walt Stull by Wednesday, July 1, 2020.

Minnesota Valley NWR

Closures & Cancelations

by Craig Mandel, Field Trip Leader

In an effort to follow the CDC health official guidelines, I have canceled all of the field trips that I am scheduled to lead until May 9. At that time, I will determine how to proceed with field trips that I am scheduled to lead after that date.

The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge has closed both visitor centers to the public, but all trails are open from sunrise to sunset. Please check the refuge website or Facebook page for updates on trail conditions, visitor center closures, and programs at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about these field trips or birding at the refuge. Thank you.

Craig Mandel – (952) 240 7647



National Audubon News

Birding is the Perfect Activity While Practicing Social Distancing

Republished from the National Audubon Society
by *Andy McGlashen*

This global pandemic has us all pretty freaked out. Handled responsibly, open space and wildlife observation might just be the balm you need.



Photo Credit: Camilla Cerea/Audubon

This is all so surreal, isn't it?

None of us has been through anything quite like COVID-19, the coronavirus outbreak that the World Health Organization this week labelled as a global pandemic. At this moment, more than 137,300 cases have been confirmed worldwide, and at least 5,073 people have died. Markets have tanked. Everything's canceled. Precautions that once might have seemed paranoid now feel like common sense.

Here at Audubon, we don't want to make light of a serious situation. We're also worried about our loved ones. We're scared, too.

But may we recommend something that, under the circumstances, might seem trivial?

If you can, go birding.

We know: It might seem exploitative for the Bird People to promote birds during a public health crisis. But there's an argument to be made that – as long as you don't put yourself or others at risk – birding is the perfect thing to do right now.

First, spending time in nature can serve as a form of social distancing, the strategy epidemiologists are recommending to limit spread of the virus. Of course, social distancing

doesn't work without the distance part, so this only counts for open spaces that you can reach while avoiding close contact with others.

For these reasons, don't go with a group of friends. Continue to avoid public transit if you can. And remember that those aged 60 and up or with chronic ailments may be at greater risk of serious illness. If that sounds like you, or if you live in an area with an outbreak, please be extra cautious and keep an eye on what your local health department advises.

We aren't suggesting an involved, all-day outing. Maybe it's just walking to an uncrowded neighborhood park, or driving yourself to some nearby woods. If those options aren't available to you, even just gazing out your window and closely observing and birds you see can help.

"I think this is a great way to relieve stress, and should present little or no threat of exposure," says Robyn Gershon, an epidemiology professor at New York University's School of Public Health. "We should encourage these healthy coping mechanisms, and also it's good for people to maintain their enjoyable pastimes to the extent possible."

As Gershon suggests, birding, like other outdoor pursuits, can also be great for mental health. There's a growing body of scientific evidence indicating that contact with nature can ease anxiety and provide an all-around mood boost. With rising fears and palpable tension in the air, we can all benefit from this calming influence.

If you're a seasoned birder, now's the time to take comfort in an activity you love. You might find that birding alone offers a distinct kind of pleasure. And if you're not yet into birds, this is actually a pretty great time to begin – spring migration is about to heat up, and you'll be so glad you started paying attention. Orient yourself with these common species, then download Audubon's free Bird Guide app to explore further and keep track of what you see out there. Or, if you're adjusting to a new work-from-home setup, take an afternoon break to sneak in a few minutes of on-the-clock, out-the-window birding. We won't tell.

Truth is, nobody knows what's next or how this is all going to shake out. The best we can do is follow the guidance of public health professionals, be good to ourselves, and look out for each other.

So: Wash your hands. Call your loved ones. And, if it's an option, look to the birds.





Nature Notes

Birding at the Rio Grande Valley

Birding Festival

by Dianne Rowse

Last November I flew to Harlingen, Texas, close to the border with Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. I met my two adult daughters there to attend the 26th Annual Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. It was our first birding festival. We had a great time seeing so many new species as well as some of “our” northern birds on their southward migration.

The extremely well organized festival offered an astounding number of field trips (about 44) over a period of five days (Wednesday through Sunday, November 6-10, 2019). We preregistered for most of our trips and we were able to add on a parrot trip. We had a rental car, which was essential to visit numerous birding hotspots when we weren't on festival field trips. We were there from Monday to Monday, in part due to the limited schedule of direct flights. Our field trip buses were prompt and the guides were excellent. An example of the great ratio was our trip that had 18 participants and four guides.

Some of our favorite trips included Estero Llano Grande State Park (great marsh bird viewing from the patio and trails), a King Ranch tour, Upper Rio Grande/Salineño (where we saw the “Oriole trifecta” at the feeders: Audubon's Oriole, Hooded Oriole, and Altamira Oriole), the South Padre Island Bird Sanctuary (Sheep's-Head), and the South Padre Island Nature Center (with its very long boardwalk over the estuary).

Memorable birds included the Green Jay, Vermillion Flycatcher, Roseate Spoonbill, Harris Hawk, Crested Caracara, White-tailed Hawk, Common Pauraque (tropical nightjar), Great Kiskadee, Pyrrhuloxia (Cardinal relative), Verdin, and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Our guides provided links to their eBird list for each location. One of my daughters went on the Big Day Van Tour and counted 140 species of birds!

Inspiring guest speakers included Pete Dunn and Ted Floyd among many others. The Birder's Bazaar Trade Show filled the convention center with all kinds of interesting things from binoculars to bird art.

I have a few recommendations if you plan to attend this birding festival in the future:

1) Don't overschedule. We had signed up for a star gazing evening after a long day of field tripping; it was cloudy, so we skipped the trip in favor of more sleep. Some trips started at 5:00 AM! It was nice to have a day in between field trip days to do some relaxed birding in the area.

2) Find a hotel close to the Convention Center. We spent a lot of time driving back and forth from our hotel (30 minutes round trip). It looked like they were building a new hotel

attached to the new Convention Center, which would be ideal.

3) Plan to buy groceries and have some meals in your room. The restaurants we tried did not offer healthy foods. Our room had a refrigerator and microwave, and we brought a few microwavable bowls with covers and some silverware.

4) Register for field trips months before the festival. Popular field trips like King Ranch will fill up. However, we were able to schedule our own tour directly through the King Ranch.

5) Bring along a Texas Road Map if you plan to drive to other birding places. The series of maps, “The Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail” (Lower Texas Coast), is available from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

I would definitely recommend the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival! It was fabulous! For more information about the festival please visit www.RGVBF.org. Registration opens around August 1st each year. You can also email me at dianne.rowse@gmail.com.



Common Pauraque at the Rio Grande Valley. Photo Credit: J. Sweet

SHORELINE

a poem by Warren Woessner
wwoessner@slwip.com

No one told old man heron
 he needed a timeshare
 to get the sea breeze
 or a reservation
 for his seafood supper.
 So he stalks the bait bucket
 slowly, dignified –
 like a retiree on social security
 refusing to rush the early-bird buffet.



Enhance Your Yard to Grow More Fledglings

by Anne Hanley

As your yard is coming to life, this is a perfect time to think about adding some additional pollinator and bird friendly native plants to your yard or patio. One aspect of “pollinator and bird friendly” is to find larval host plants (ones that little caterpillars want to eat). Those caterpillars either turn into pollinators or become food for baby birds; both are good! For example, oak, cherry and willow trees are larval host plants for lots of different species. If you don't have room for a big oak tree, look for woody shrubs like Choke Cherry, American Plum, Prairie Willow or Pussy Willow.

Resources:

Booklet: Attracting BIRDS to your Garden with Native Plants published by Wild Ones Minnesota; lots of great info in a small package. Pick up at a Wild Ones meeting or event, once we can gather again

Plants and Seeds: List of native plant nurseries in MN and western WI: download at <https://bit.ly/33zoWmC>. Their web sites and catalogs have great information including suggested plant groupings and seed germination instructions. If social distancing continues, many of the vendors offer seeds and plants by mail. Once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, there may be native plant sales which are an easy way to see several vendors in one place. You may also be able to get some plants from friends or neighbors. Do not dig up plants from parks or natural areas.

Web sites:

<https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>: The unique feature here is the list of birds attracted to each plant.

<https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/> plant photos, range, what amount of sun and moisture it needs, height and bloom season. Use the Advanced Search option to find all plants that bloom in a specific month(s) and are native to your county. This is especially helpful if you are trying to find plants to fill in specific bloom times. For example, we have lots of *Monarda fistulosa* - Wild Bergamot but need to add plants that bloom earlier. On this site I can see that Prairie Willow blossoms early and tolerates dry soils.

<https://extension.umn.edu/find-plants/native-plants>.

Limited to container gardening? You might want to try this booklet.

<http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/Portals/0/Gardening/Gardening%20Help/Visual%20Guides/Natives%20for%20Containers%20Grow%20Native.pdf>

Advice and Things to Consider

For each plant that appeals to you, read about each one in at least two places (book, booklet, website) because you may not get the whole story on that particular plant in any one place.

If you have a small yard, pay close attention to any comments about spreading or aggressiveness and avoid those plants or use them with caution. Plant a few and watch them closely. Also, what's aggressive in my yard may not be aggressive in yours. I find wild bergamot very aggressive but

it could be that the other plants in that section of the yard just didn't like the poor soil there.

Try a few plants of each kind that appeal to you and see how they do in your yard before you add more. Not all “part-sun” plants will like your “part-sun” location.

Refuge Update

by Nicole Menard, Refuge Biologist

Wildlife and habitat research at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is often a collaborative process. Not only do we participate in a number of bird-based citizen science research, but other wildlife is currently being studied at the Refuge.

The Refuge is partnering with the Twin Cities Coyote and Fox Project (www.tccfp.umn.edu/) to advance our ecological understanding of how coyotes, red foxes and gray foxes use our urban habitats. University of Minnesota researchers have been using community reported sightings from the iNaturalist app to locate and radio collar these species. MNVNR has supported this research on our urban refuge units, where two coyotes have been radio collared so far this past winter. The study focuses on the home ranges, diet, disease, and demographics of these urban carnivores and can provide information to reduce human-wildlife conflict and improve the management of coyotes and foxes in the Twin Cities metro area.

Want to help? You can also report coyote or fox sightings on the project's iNaturalist page at www.inaturalist.org/projects/tccfp. Questions about the project? Contact Nicole Menard by sending an email to Nicole_menard@fws.gov.

MOB SCENE

a poem by Warren Woessner
wwoessner@slwip.com

A murder of crows drives
a big owl out of the deep woods
to the edge of a frozen marsh.

Owl perches in the fork
of a bare elder and hoots
and hoots for reinforcements,
while crows circle in,
build up their nerve
for a last attack.

But the pale sun is falling
and the shadows are crawling
up the tree trunks.

Soon the snowy forest will blue,
fade to black,
and the Great Horned Owl will hit
an all-you-can-eat
all-night crow buffet.





MRVAC Field Trips

The field trips below will continue as planned unless cancelations occur. See page 1 for more information.



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

Beginning birders are welcome on all field trips.

All of the Refuge field trips are listed below, followed by Refuge addresses, and field trips to other locations in chronological order.

Refuge Bird Watching Treks (May - June)

Sunday, May 10, 8:00-10:30 AM, Bass Ponds
 Sunday, May 17, 8:00-10:30 AM, Bass Ponds
 Monday, June 1, 8:00-10:30 AM, Bass Ponds
 Monday, June 22, 8:00-10:30 AM, Bass Ponds
 Sunday, June 28, 8:00-10:30 AM, Bass Ponds

Join us for a bird walk on one of the many Refuge units. Learn which species of birds use the Refuge as a migratory stop and those that call the Refuge home for the summer nesting season. Birders of all skill levels are welcome. Bring binoculars, your favorite field guide and dress appropriately for the weather. Led by Craig Mandel, Volunteer Refuge Naturalist. Reservations are not required for Refuge Bird Walking Treks above.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Field Trip Locations & Addresses

MVNWR Bloomington Visitor Center
 3815 American Blvd. E., Bloomington, MN
 Bass Ponds Trailhead
 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington, MN
 Rapids Lake Education and Visitor Center
 15865 Rapids Lake Rd., Carver, MN

Carver Park Reserve
 Monday, May 11, 7:00 AM
 Craig Mandel – (952) 240 7647

Carver Park Reserve is an excellent birding location with a nice variety of habitats. Join us for this early morning walk at the peak of spring migration. On past spring trips to Carver Park Reserve we have observed over 140 species of birds including 14 species of sparrows and 23 species of warblers. Each year is a little different. Join us to find out what surprises are in store for this year's participants. Contact Craig to register.

Southern Minnesota Birding Days

Thursday, May 14 – Friday, May 15, 6:30 AM
 \$25/MRVAC members; \$35/non-MRVAC members
 Craig Mandel – (952) 240 7647

Some of the locations we will likely bird on this tour include the Hormel Nature Center, Lake Louise State Park, Tollefson Woods and a number of WMAs and Water Treatment Plants. These locations should give us a variety of habitats to search in Dodge and Mower counties. Contact Craig to register.

Northwest Minnesota Birding Days

Thursday, June 18 – Friday, June 19, 6:00 AM
 \$25/MRVAC members; \$35/non-MRVAC members
 Craig Mandel – (952) 240 7647

On this trip we will spend time birding in Hubbard County and the Clearwater County portion of Itasca State Park. In addition to a number of trails in Itasca State Park, we should also be able to check out the Lake Alice Bog and portions of the Paul Bunyan State Forest plus lots of backroads and a couple Water Treatment Plants. Please contact Craig to register.

✈ International Birding Excursions ✈

Our first international trip with Holbrook Tours was a great success! Our group observed close to 300 species of birds from a number of distinctive habitats in Costa Rica. Now it's time to start planning for the 2021 birding season and we would like to know if there is any interest in going on future tours to Costa Rica, Panama, or Columbia.

These tours would be offered in January or February 2021 and would cost between \$2600 and \$3600 per person. Other potential tour locations would include Tanzania (May-October 2021 timeframe for \$6500) or Peru (November 2021 for \$4500).

Please send an email to egretcman@msn.com if you are interested in any of these locations or have something else in mind that you would like to see the chapter do.

Additional Annual Field Trip Schedule Edits

August 6-7 Birding Days: Changed to SW Minnesota (meeting in Worthington).

August 13-14 Birding Days: New dates for the Redwood Falls-based trip.



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

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!



Website Changes Coming Soon

by Rob Daves, Board Member

Don't adjust your dial – it hasn't been your computer or internet provider.

Yes, the website has been static for a while now, but that's about to change. As *The Trumpeter* hits the press, board members have nearly completed a new website design that will make it easier to keep trips updated, inform everyone about our events and grants, and be a bit easier for everyone to use. We hope to have the new site up and running by mid-April at the same URL – www.MRVAC.org.

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