



The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter

# Trumpeter

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[www.MRVAC.org](http://www.MRVAC.org)

March - April 2024

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## MRVAC Program Information

The Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter meets most months on the fourth Thursday. Meetings are held in person at the refuge and simulcast via Zoom, unless otherwise noted. Zoom links will be posted about one week in advance on our website. The refuge visitor center is located at 3815 American Boulevard East in Bloomington and is accessible after a short walk from the METRO blue line. All meetings are free and open to the public.

### March 28, 2024

Presentation begins on **Zoom only**  
at 7:30 p.m.

**Tiffany Kersten:** Environmental educator and international bird guide



### *Birdie Big Year: Elevating Women Birders*

Tiffany Kersten didn't set out to do a big year, but after a series of unanticipated and serendipitous events, she suddenly found herself amidst one. As a sexual assault survivor, she spent 2021 traveling to all corners of the lower 48 states, tallying birds and gifting personal safety alarms to women she met along the way. She ended up surpassing her goal (700) and setting a new record of 726 species. In her presentation, Tiffany will lead us through the fear, empowerment, struggles, and healing that all played vital roles in the personal growth she experienced on this wild adventure.

### April 25, 2024

Social at 7 p.m. and presentation at 7:30 p.m.

**Simone Maddox:** Researcher and Ph.D. candidate in the Barker Lab at UMN

**David Wolfson:** Wildlife ecologist and Ph.D. candidate in the Fieberg Lab at UMN

### *Special Report on Ornithology Research at the University of Minnesota*

We'll get a look into ornithological research at the University of Minnesota (UMN) with two speakers! First, Simone Maddox will speak about her research investigating the ways that city living affects our local birds, especially their brains. Then, David Wolfson will report on his research on the annual movement and migration patterns of Trumpeter Swans in the Midwest.

## A Note From Our President

by Rob Daves, Board President

Serendipity strikes at the strangest time — or perhaps, like some say, luck and serendipity come to those who work for it.

Monica Rauchwarter was working hard. She'd contacted a number of places to donate tickets for MRVAC's holiday auction in November. (Yeah, yeah, we were auctioning birdy things, not holidays.) Science Museum? Check! Chanhassen Dinner Theater? Check!

Minnesota Loons major league soccer? Wait. What? Soccer? No tickets for the auction, but as the godfather said, the team made us an offer we couldn't refuse. Loons' fans are green, the team says. So, to promote its commitment to the conservation community, it offered to partner with MRVAC and donate a portion of the fans jersey purchases during the February kickoff month to the chapter.

After a bit of deliberation and due diligence, the MRVAC board unanimously said, "You bet!"

We hurried to get a memorandum of understanding nailed down and exchanged each other's digital logos. On a cold Saturday in February, Monica and Matthew Schaut, and Walt Stull and Bob Brereton and their spouses were scheduled to staff a table at the Loons' Boot Soccer tournament at Allianz Field in St. Paul to preview the Loons 2024 schedule and spread the good word about MRVAC. To tie in with the Loons team, we shared Get The Lead Out materials about non-lead fishing tackle and the Loon bird poisoning issue.

Thanks to the Loons, Monica, Dani Collier, Lee Ann Landstrom, other MRVAC and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources folk who worked hard to make this a success. They've helped spread the good word about MRVAC's conservation mission, helped the Loons reach its target market and collected a few bucks for MRVAC's grant program.



## Cedar Creek Bog CBC Summary

by Jim Howitz

On Dec. 17, 2023 we recorded 43 species and 4,304 individuals. The individual count was second only to the 1977 CBC which was a big year for Common Redpolls, Evening and Pine Grosbeaks.

The warm weather this year contributed to record counts of Trumpeter Swans, Cooper's Hawks, Bald Eagles, Downy, Hairy, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Blue Jays, Common Ravens, and Pine Siskins. The 86 Red-headed Woodpeckers were the second highest total, apparently due to a bumper crop of northern pin oak



Hermit Thrush by Joe Sausen

acorns. As expected, Red-headed Woodpecker and Blue Jay numbers both were high, reflecting a 91% correlation between their count totals. The 80 hours participants spent counting was also a record and doubtless contributed to the high counts for individual species. We added a new species for the CBC history: Hermit Thrush. We also shattered the old record count of 50 Bald Eagles with an astounding 90. Congratulations to the 35 contributors of our 78<sup>th</sup> count and a thank you to El Niño for the cooperating weather!

## Excelsior CBC Summary

by Howard Towle

The 72<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Excelsior Christmas Bird Count was held on Dec. 16, 2023 under temperatures ranging from 37 to 39 degrees, the warmest temps that we've had for a count in quite a while. The skies were gray, drizzly, and misty — pretty much yucky — but despite this our intrepid band of 81 field counters and 9 feeder watchers did a remarkable job of turning up some expected and unusual birds. The combined efforts of all resulted in 61 species and 13,126 individuals being observed. The 61 species was the highest total since the record-breaking year of 2020, when 68 species were observed, and above the 20-year average of 56 species for our count. This total was boosted by a few remarkable finds and, considering the almost complete absence of winter finches, was a quite respectable tally. The individuals counted varies tremendously from year-to-year depending on whether there is any open water on the bigger lakes. By comparison, last year's totals were 55 species and 7,562 individuals.

The highlight of the count was undoubtedly a White-winged Scoter at the Blue Lake Water Treatment Facility in Shakopee. Not only was this the first White-winged Scoter ever recorded in 72 years of our count, it was also the first scoter of any kind. Really a remarkable sighting and the bird stayed around for weeks afterwards to the delight of

many birders. Other highlights included a Double-crested Cormorant and two Common Ravens at Bryant Lake Regional Park, a pair of Northern Pintails at Rice Lake in the Minnesota Valley NWR, and a trio of Fox Sparrows at a suburban Shorewood yard. A record high number of Trumpeter Swans (531) were counted, smashing the previous high of 323 set in 2017. Other high marks were set for Eastern Bluebird (19) and Wild Turkey (173). Next year's count will be held on Saturday, Dec. 14, 2024.

## Bloomington CBC Summary

by Liz Stanley

The Bloomington Christmas Bird Count completed its 57<sup>th</sup> census on Dec. 16, 2023. We had 69 field observers and 8 feeder counters across 20 areas who collectively found 53 species and 11,685 individual birds, which was considerably higher than last year. The weather was much warmer than most years, with temperatures above freezing all day long.

Highlights of note include:

- Canada Geese were found in every area, for a total of 3141 and by far the most counted of all species.
- Hardly any Brown Creepers this year! Only two total.
- Only one White-throated Sparrow was seen in the entire area.
- The Lebanon Hills Red-headed Woodpecker made an appearance.
- Two Snow Buntings were reported near the MSP airport.
- Three Swamp Sparrows were found, each in a different area.
- A Red-shouldered Hawk was around Black Dog Road.
- A Wilson's Snipe was near the Minnesota River.
- More Eastern Bluebirds than usual- 21 total were found across different areas.

The 2024 count will bring a few changes: the species checklist will be updated and a few of the larger areas south of the Minnesota River will be split into smaller areas. Stay tuned and mark your calendars for Dec. 14, 2024.



White-throated Sparrow by Shari McCollough

## Habitat Fragmentation Is for the Birds— or Not?

by Chris-Ann Lauria

Nestled amongst Bloomington's city streets, multi-storied buildings, and bustling businesses is the heart of the city: Central Park and the Nine Mile Creek Corridor (NMCC). This green space is truly remarkable. It is designated as a Metro Conservation Corridor, a Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) area of biodiversity significance, and a Registered Natural Area. Migrating and resident birds thrive in this urban oasis — at least for now. The park is at risk, and depending on the City of Bloomington's Park Renewal Plan, its birds may be at risk, too.

Bloomington's Parks and Recreation Department is considering a project that could add more pavement, wider paths, boardwalks, and retaining walls. This development would fragment critical bird habitats and exacerbate problems the park already faces due to urbanization, exotic and invasive species, climate change, and an impaired water body. Carving up this park to accommodate bike paths would involve removing beautiful canopy trees and native vegetation, widening and straightening paths, and installing boardwalks and more hot pavement.

Maintaining a cool and shaded habitat for birds is essential. Bloomington already experiences significantly higher temperatures than surrounding rural areas. Birds have limited options for escaping the heat. Increased temperatures cause heat exhaustion, asphalt burns, decreased food sources, and bird deaths. Along with other wildlife, birds cannot afford park changes that would devastate the habitat they rely on for survival.

The park is critical to migratory and breeding birds. Every spring and fall, the skies above Bloomington are filled with the flight of beautiful neotropical birds. They fly all night, and when daylight breaks, they land in search of a safe place to rest, nest, and find food. Central Park and NMCC are perfect hosts, providing a haven for these feathered travelers during their long and arduous journey. Twice a year, bird watchers can see species such as Buffleheads, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Hooded Mergansers, Blue-winged Teal, American Redstarts, and Prothonotary Warblers. The floodplain forest is also home to resident Wood Ducks, Bald Eagles, Belted Kingfishers, and Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers, who can be heard year-round.

Yet, these birds are not just beautiful creatures; they are crucial for people and our planet. They act as pollinators, helping plants grow and reproduce. Birds also disperse seeds, promoting plant diversity and supporting ecosystems. They control disease-causing pests, such as insects and rodents. In addition, birds bring in tourists and contribute to the economy by providing opportunities for ecotourism, such as bird watching.

Loss of bird habitat is one of many concerns Bloomington residents and visitors have with the proposed park plan. For these reasons, a passionate group of locals formed a grassroots community organization known as Restore the Nine. They aim to promote and advocate for an alternative vision for the park and creek corridor.

Our vision is for Central Park and the Nine Mile Creek Corridor to become an environmentally sustainable urban oasis where protecting and restoring its land, water, and native plants and animals are top priorities. Our vision includes a tax-payer-funded renewal project to restore the nine. Our nine recommendations to prevent and repair habitat degradation are:

- Remove invasive species through mechanical and chemical methods and biological agents.
- Implement methods to hinder buckthorn and enhance the native habitat.
- Convert areas dominated by box elders to high-quality forest trees capable of a continuous canopy.
- Protect, plant, and facilitate the growth of oak trees and saplings on the ridges and savannah areas to improve the habitat for forest-nesting songbirds, stabilize the slopes, and prevent sediment erosion into the creek.
- Promote and restore high-quality forest canopies and the floodplain forest to support breeding populations of forest and canopy birds.
- Maintain large-diameter trees for wildlife habitat.
- Avoid unnecessary native tree removal.
- Avert widening trails, straightening trails, constructing boardwalks, and adding more pavement.
- Avoid removing and replacing expensive bridges that are not deemed obsolete.



Nine Mile Creek by Tim Rummelhoff

We envision maintaining the existing serene pedestrian trail for Bloomington residents and visitors to connect with nature, enhancing their well-being. Our broader vision is for the park to serve as a model of environmental stewardship for other urban communities, leaving a legacy of sustainable practices for future generations.

Protecting and restoring this habitat is the responsible and sensible thing to do for the planet, for humans, and for the birds. Carving up Central Park and the Nine Mile Creek Corridor would be detrimental and foolish for the environment. So yes, habitat fragmentation is (not) for the birds. Find more information at [www.restore-the-nine.mailchimpsites.com](http://www.restore-the-nine.mailchimpsites.com)

# MRVAC & REFUGE BIRDING TRIPS

## Refuge Bird Watching Treks

March 16 (Saturday) — Bass Ponds Trailhead  
 March 23 (Saturday) — Bass Ponds Trailhead  
 March 24 (Sunday) — Old Cedar Avenue Bridge Trailhead  
 April 6 (Saturday) — Bass Ponds Trailhead  
 April 7 (Sunday) — Old Cedar Avenue Bridge Trailhead  
 April 21 (Sunday) — Bass Ponds Trailhead  
*Each walk runs from 8 a.m.-10:30 a.m.*

Join us for a spring walk on one of the many refuge units. Each spring offers a chance to observe a variety of birds that stop at the refuge during their spring migration. The early spring walks will feature waterfowl and the later spring walks will see the first of the migrant sparrows and warblers of the season.

Registration for refuge walks is available on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge website. Please indicate in your registration if you would like to receive a birding summary and species list from the walk. Registration is required online at the following link:

[www.fws.gov/refuge/minnesota-valley/events](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/minnesota-valley/events)

## Refuge Field Trip Locations & Addresses

Bass Ponds Trailhead  
 2501 86th St. E., Bloomington, MN 55425

Old Cedar Avenue Trailhead  
 9551 Old Cedar Ave. S., Bloomington, MN

**Click here for refuge trail maps** or visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/minnesota-valley/visit-us](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/minnesota-valley/visit-us)



## Hubbard County Birding Days

Thursday — Friday, April 18 — 19, 2024, 6:30 a.m.  
 Craig Mandel — 952-240-7647  
 \$35/non-MRVAC members; \$25/MRVAC members

Our birding days in mid April in Hubbard County should be a great time to look for a variety of migrating birds in the county. With luck we'll find some open lakes! There is a large amount of state forest land to explore, several SNA's and the Lake Alice Bog which can also be interesting locations to bird in the spring. Please contact Craig to register for the Hubbard County Birding Days field trip.

## Nine Mile Creek Birding Walk

April 17, 2024, 9 a.m. — noon  
 Rob Daves — 612-710-2626

We'll walk the bluff and creek trails to see early spring ephemerals, visit one of the few prairie patches in Bloomington and look for early spring migrants. Limit of eight birders. Sign up by emailing Rob Daves at [rob\\_daves@yahoo.com](mailto:rob_daves@yahoo.com)

## 46th Salt Lake Birding Weekend

April 26 — 28, 2024  
 Jason Frank — [jmfrank84@gmail.com](mailto:jmfrank84@gmail.com)

The 46th Salt Lake Birding Weekend will take place in Lac qui Parle County over the last weekend in April, with the main count day being Saturday, April 27, 2024.

Last year's highlights included 67 White-faced Ibises in one location, Black-necked Stilt, Cattle Egret, American Goshawk, Short-eared Owl, and the grand slam of Grebes (five species together) on one wetland.

On Friday, April 26, beginning at 5:30 p.m., birders are invited to stop by Madison Mercantile (601 1st St., Madison) for a potluck dinner and live music. It is a coffee shop and art gallery with a wine and beer selection.

Birders will meet at the American Legion in Marietta at 7 a.m. on Saturday, April 27. There will be breakfast and coffee available for a modest fee. Then we will assemble with guides into caravans for the day. While most of the birding is centered around Lac qui Parle County, the group also birds at sites in Big Stone and Yellow Medicine counties.

Maps and checklists will be provided. After returning to the Legion around noon to buy lunch, birders will share their finds and then embark on the afternoon leg of the journey. At 7 p.m. we will meet at the Sons of Norway Lodge in Madison for supper and the final tally. Supper is roasted chicken, stuffing, mashed potatoes, corn, and pie for a \$15 fee. Reservations are necessary for dinner with prepayment preferred. For dinner reservations, please contact Bernice Oelien or Camey Maland via email at [oelmal@farmerstel.net](mailto:oelmal@farmerstel.net) or via phone at 507-829-0676 and 320-752-4757. Gluten-free and vegetarian options are available upon request. Payment at the door without a reservation will be \$20 per plate and is subject to availability.



The Salt Lake Birding Weekend is free and open to all, although advance registration is appreciated. To register, visit [www.signupgenius.com/go/10CoF48A9AC2FA5FFCE9-47207084-salt#](http://www.signupgenius.com/go/10CoF48A9AC2FA5FFCE9-47207084-salt#/)

Event venues, lodging options, and birding spots are provided on the linked map on MOU's Salt Lake Page at [www.moumn.org/saltlake/](http://www.moumn.org/saltlake/)

## REGIONAL PROGRAMS OF INTEREST



Three Rivers Park District  
Various Locations

### Bird Banding

Lowry Nature Center in Victoria  
March 16 | 9 a.m. – noon

See wild songbirds safely trapped, studied and banded with numbered rings. Discuss what scientists learn from these banded birds. Drop in anytime for this free program.

### Raptors Up Close

Lowry Nature Center in Victoria  
March 17 | 2:30 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Meet captive raptors, learn about these amazing birds of prey. Drop in anytime. All ages. Free.

### Planting For Pollinators

Lowry Nature Center in Victoria  
March 24 | 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

With the garden season fast approaching, learn how to plan, plant and enjoy your own pollinator garden. Take some native seeds home to help get you started. Ages 7+. \$6. Reservations required.

### Intro to Bird Photography

Lowry Nature Center in Victoria  
March 24 | 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Learn some tips and tricks for getting a sharp shot and see what migrators are back in the park. Join a naturalist and photographer on a morning bird photo hike. Perfect for beginner and experienced photographers. A camera with a zoom or telephoto lens recommended. Reservations required by two days prior. \$6 per person.

### Early Morning Bird Walk

Sochacki Park in Robbinsdale  
March 24 | 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Enjoy a gentle walk to seek out the birds that have returned from a long winter away from the park. All levels of interest are welcome! Binoculars provided. Dress for the weather and to walk on paved and unpaved paths. Registration required by two days prior. \$6 per person. Dress to be outside the entire time. Rustic restroom available. Park entrance at 3500 June Ave. N, Robbinsdale. Meet near the picnic shelter, south of the dog park. Register now at [www.robbinsdalemn.com](http://www.robbinsdalemn.com)



International Owl Center  
Houston, MN

### International Festival of Owls

International Owl Center, Houston, MN  
March 1 –3

Meet and learn from World Owl Hall of Fame award winners Dr. Martin Šálek from the Czechia on Saturday evening and Dr. Roar Solheim from Norway on Sunday afternoon. Conservation reporter Krishna Mani Baral will also show a short video of our sister owl festival in Nepal Saturday evening. There will also be live owl programs by the Illinois Raptor Center (including a live Snowy Owl), nest box building, pellet dissection, vendors, face-painting, and Saturday morning children’s book author Susan Richmond will do a presentation about her wonderful book “Night Owl Night” which is about a young girl who desperately wants to go banding Saw-whet Owls with her researcher mother. Her book will be for sale and you can get it autographed!

Pre-registration is required for the owl prowls, Sunday bus trip and keynote presentation. For more information and to register go to [www.FestivalOfOwls.com](http://www.FestivalOfOwls.com)



Boreal Chickadee by Shari McCollough



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[www.facebook.com/MRVAC.MN](http://www.facebook.com/MRVAC.MN)



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. Memberships are \$20 for individuals, \$15 for students, and \$100 for sustaining members.

### Membership Coordinator

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

You can also join MRVAC online at [www.mrvac.org](http://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
- Join the Board
- Other:

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

## Birder Lingo Fun: Group Names

Wouldn't it be something if you could remember all these charming and often informative names for groups of birds? A few really struck me. How about you? I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did researching them. Here are a few to amplify your birder conversations and have some fun.

Birds of prey: cast, cauldron, kettle.

Bobolinks: chain.

Buzzards: wake.

Cardinals: college, conclave, Vatican.

Catbirds: mewing.

Chickens: peep.

Chickadees: banditry.

Cormorants: flight, gulp, sunning, swim.

Coots: cover, raft.

Cowbirds: corral, herd.

Cranes: dance, swoop, sedge, siege.

Crossbills: crookedness, warp.

Crows: murder, congress, horde, muster, cauldron.

Ducks: raft, team, paddling.

Eagles: convocation, congregation, aerie.

Emus: mob.

Stay tuned in the next edition for more unique bird group names! *Thanks to Bob Brereton for this fun piece.*