

The Cardinal

AUGUST SEPTEMBER 2021

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President's Message

The Snag Tree

My wife and I bought a new home last winter and our large backyard includes seven mature sugar maple trees. This spring we found that one of the trees was dying and needed to be removed. The house's previous owner had wanted a level yard and, to accomplish this, covered the base of the tree with two feet of soil, killing most of its roots.

We decided that instead of removing the entire sugar maple we would leave much of the trunk and create a "snag" tree. In forest ecology a snag tree is a mature standing dead tree. Snags are an important component in a natural forest, typically making up as many as 10 percent of mature trees and providing both food and nesting. Today dead and dying trees are immediately cut down and snag trees are a rare forest resource, especially in a city.

Snag trees support a rich community of bacteria, fungi, insects and invertebrates while their cavities provide nesting places for bats, birds, and small mammals. Even loose bark supplies homes to many creatures, including bats, or is a place to store food. Birders have recognized the need for tree nesting cavities and tried to overcome its lack by building wood duck boxes, kestrel boxes, and even nest barrels for Blakiston's fish owls. In Minnesota, insulation provided by a tree trunk may also allow wildlife to survive tough winters.

Watching our snag tree slowly decay will be fascinating for us. We expect woodpeckers and creepers to visit and lots of unusual insect species. Our forester thinks we will have 10 years to observe this interesting slice of nature before we eventually must remove it. If you have a safe place and an appropriate tree (not ash trees, which could spread emerald ash borers) give it a try.

*-Donn Waage
President, Saint Paul Audubon Society*



Standing snags like this one offer habitat and resources for local wildlife, especially cavity-nesting birds.

In this issue

Late summer and early fall continue to be full of activities for Saint Paul Audubon Society members and friends. Look inside this issue of *The Cardinal* for details about:

- Late-summer birding highlights, by Chase Davies – page 2
- More bird walks, including a new trip in October to watch Pelicans on Pigs Eye Lake – pages 3-4
- Monthly meetings beginning September 9, with speakers and presentations you won't want to miss – page 5
- Winners of our first Facebook photography contest – page 7

SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

PO Box 7275, St Paul, MN 55107-7275

Welcome...

To the Saint Paul Audubon Society.

We're a chapter of the

National Audubon Society.

Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and Earth's biological diversity.

You will automatically become a member of the Saint Paul Audubon Society if you make a gift of \$30 or more to the National Audubon Society and reside in Saint Paul, Ramsey and Washington counties, and surrounding areas.

The Saint Paul Audubon Society welcomes everyone to become a member or participate in activities as a non-member regardless of their race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, age, or gender identity.

SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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ABOUT OUR CHAPTER

Founded in 1945 as the 'St. Paul Bird Club' with twelve members, the Saint Paul Audubon Society now serves the entire East Metro region of the Twin Cities, and has around 2,800 members. Our Member Meetings are held from Sept.-Dec. & Feb.-May on the second Thursday of the month. For more info please contact leaders at left, or visit www.saintpaulaudubon.org

ABOUT THE CARDINAL The Cardinal is published 6 times a year and posted on www.saintpaulaudubon.org at the beginning of February, April, June, August, and October. For information contact Martha Douglas, editor, or Jackie Bussjaeger, assistant editor. Copy is due to the editor on the 15th of the month preceding publication.

The Cardinal is available free to everyone on our website. If you would like to receive a notice when new issues are ready, go to www.saintpaulaudubon.org and go to the "Newsletter" tab to subscribe with your email address. Our Webmaster is Ben Wilson, ben@simpledesigns.biz or 651-332-1362.

**Next issue: October/November
2021**

Late summer seasonal notes

WHERE have all the familiar birds gone? Even now, a molt is underway, or recently has occurred, changing many species from spring, a.k.a. "nuptial" plumage to basic, a.k.a. "rest-of-the-year" appearance. Striking beauty is replaced with new duds. Identification of young in juvenile plumage, especially when separated from their attentive parents, adds more challenge to naming the bird more precisely than as a thrush, sparrow, sandpiper, or warbler.

Fall migration is more leisurely than the spring sprint. No breeding hormones drive hyperactivity, and no cold weather limits food availability requiring extended stays to bulk-up energy reserves before the next long-distance flight.

August and September, as the earth turns toward autumn in Minnesota, is for me the time to relax and enjoy the behaviors and antics of birds. Are young still needy or just beggars? Which are already stashing nuts and seeds, preparing to be life-long residents? How much can a goldenrod bend under the weight of a big bird? Was it/were they chasing, playing, being aggressive, scared by something...?

Now is when being a Bird Watcher becomes more satisfying than being a Birder and a Lister.

HOW? Consider dusting off or acquiring the *National*

Geographic Field Guide to Birds which shows a good number of the birds in various plumages in addition to their spring breeding appearance. And/or, poke around the web to find an app that shows more variations in plumage with clear identification aids. Merlin is popular for this.

Chase Davies

Guidelines for group birding

Please follow these guidelines for all Saint Paul Audubon Society outdoor events:

- Participants must be fully vaccinated for COVID-19
- Maintain social distancing and limit carpooling to one household per vehicle
- Masks are optional but welcome
- Attendees will provide their names and contact information at the start of each walk

FIELD TRIPS

Birding Summer Style at Bass Ponds on the Minnesota River

2400 E. 86th St., Bloomington

Sunday, August 8, 8-10:30 a.m.

Summer birding is more relaxed and presents possibilities for observing different behaviors once birds are settled on family territories. Birds tend to linger about, which gives birders more time to spend on identification in a group setting at a summertime relaxed pace. The slower pace is also ideal for beginning birders to learn and experience the basics to locate, describe and identify birds.

DIRECTIONS Take Cedar Avenue south from 494, exit onto Killebrew Dr, go to Old Shakopee Rd, turn right (south) onto East 86th St, at sign for Bass Ponds, bear left and come to the parking lot. If the lot is full, street park on the right as you enter or in the larger parking lot back near the corner of 86th and Old Shakopee.

SUGGESTIONS Dress for the weather and wear closed-toe shoes. Bring a brimmed hat, water, sunblock, and a field guide with maps or a smartphone with the app already installed. Chase will have some loaner binoculars available. Call leader if you want to borrow 8x35 binoculars.

DIFFICULTY Easy

LEADER Chase Davies 651-246-9754

RockyBirder@gmail.com



Pelican Migration at Pigs Eye Lake

2165 Pigs Eye Lake Rd, St. Paul

Saturday, October 16, 9-11 a.m.

Join us for birding at Pigs Eye Regional Park – North Unit. Each fall flocks of American White Pelicans gather in migration at the north end of Pigs Eye Lake. Here they rest up and refuel on minnows. Come wish them bon voyage as they travel to their wintering grounds in the Gulf of Mexico. Did you know? Pelican groups are called squadrons. We may also see grassland and woodland songbirds, swallows, Wild Turkeys, Bald Eagles, and more. If the timing is right, we may be able to watch the Corps of Engineers build dredge spoil islands in Pig's Eye Lake.

DIRECTIONS Meet in the public parking lot off Shepard Road at Chestnut Street in St Paul. There is a Caribou Coffee, 230 Spring Street, adjacent to the lot. We will car caravan from there to Pig's Eye. The Pig's Eye site is difficult to find the first time so car caravans can help us all get there safely. There are port-a-potties at the park. Better facilities can be used at Caribou Coffee where we first rendezvous.

DIFFICULTY We will be walking on unpaved field trails with gentle slopes. There are spots of uneven ground and ruts. We will walk at a leisurely pace, birding along the way. In about 20 minutes we will arrive at our observation point.

SUGGESTIONS We will still be quite a distance from the Pelicans, so we will use scopes to get closer views. Bring a scope if you can. But even with binoculars, we may be able to witness Pelican group maneuvers of herding fish into the shallows for the harvest.

LEADERS Kiki Sonnen 651-331-9560,
Kikisonnen@gmail.com and Chase Davies

Prairie Tuesdays (PT) Summer Walks

Prairie Tuesday evening walks are intended to highlight numerous bird/native plant interactions. These are easy walks unless noted. Bring your binoculars, a 10-power magnifier (or borrow one from Chase) and consider a camera and bug repellent. Wear closed-toe shoes with socks above the ankle. Usually no toilet facilities on site. No registration required. All trips led by Chase Davies 651-246-9754 Rocky-Birder@gmail.com

(PT #3) Valley View Park, Oak Park Heights – Late Summer Blooming Prairie

Tuesday, August 10, 6:30-8 p.m.

LOCATION 5575 Ozark Ave N, Oak Park Heights, MN 55082

TOPIC How do abundance and diversity of late summer native plants impact the local bird-life web?

DIRECTIONS Travel east on Hwy 36 to Osgood Avenue N, go south past 56th St N then turn left onto Valley View Park Road, meet in the first parking lot on the left.

(PT #4) Fish Creek Prairie at Sundown – What Fuels Migrant Birds

Tuesday, August 24, 6:30-8 p.m.

LOCATION Fish Creek Natural Area, 2465-2475 Carver Ave, Maplewood, MN 55119

TOPIC Autumnal falling temperatures with shortening days bring preparations for big changes to the local bird-life web. Sundown at 8:03 p.m.

DIRECTIONS From I-94 go south on McKnight Road about 3.5 miles where it T's at Carver Avenue. Then turn left (east) onto Carver. Just before the I-494 underpass, turn right (south) onto Henry Lane. Travel about 1/2 mile to the Fish Creek Natural Area; turn around and park on the street as directed.



Kathy Robbins leads a "Birds and Trees" themed walk in July.

Would you like more field trips?

Please consider selecting a familiar birding place and volunteering to lead there.

Be sure to check www.saintpaulaudubon.org throughout the summer for field trip additions and weather caused cancellations.



Plan Ahead—October Field Trip

Sandhill Cranes at Crex Meadows SWA

Tuesday, October 19, 4-8:15 p.m.

Details to come in October-November *Cardinal*



Monthly meeting speakers for 2021-22

Our monthly meetings will resume in September. These events, open and free for all members and friends, are held on the second Thursday of the month, September through May. We look forward to resuming in-person meetings later this fall but will continue making the presentations available via Zoom in September and October. Check the website, www.saintpaulaudubon.org, for up-to-date details and Zoom links. Meanwhile, here's the lineup.

September 9: Jay Watson, Sourcing Sustainability Engagement manager at General Mills, will talk about regenerative agriculture. *See the article below, by Donn Waage, with background about this important topic.*

October 14: "A Walk in the Woodson," featuring a tour of the renowned museum of bird art in Wausau, WI. Woodson Art Museum assistant director Matt Foss and curator of education Catie Anderson will share artworks, insights, and stories during a virtual visit to the 2021 *Birds in Art* exhibition.

November 11: Dr. Victoria Hall, new director of the U of M's Raptor Center, will introduce herself and give an update on plans for the Center.

December 9: Charles Grolla, a member of the Bois Forte band of Ojibwe, will give a presentation based on his book *Ojibwe Bird Stories*.

January 13: Speakers from the University of Belize migratory bird monitoring project will give an update on their work, which is supported with a grant from the Saint Paul Audubon Society.

The Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in Wausau, Wisconsin hosts the popular Birds in Art exhibition. Museum staff will give a presentation about the collection at the October member meeting.

February 10: Birders and photographers Tom and Terry Scheller will present "Birds of Peru."

March 10: David Remucal, curator of endangered plants at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, will present "Endangered Plants of Minnesota."

April 14: Lynette Anderson, Interpretive Naturalist and Restoration Assistant at Belwin Conservancy, will present "Belwin, Bison, and Birds."

May 12: Catherine Early, scientist with the MN Science Museum, will talk about her research into bird brain evolution.



The Promise of Regenerative Agriculture

More than half of Minnesota's land is devoted to agriculture, according to the 1990 Minnesota Survey of the Land. The largest portion of Minnesota cropland is planted in corn and soybeans. Yet, corn and soybean fields have been described as "biological deserts," because no plant or animal life can survive there except the crop itself. Most of this impact is due to the enormous use of chemicals on farmland. Current agricultural practices utilize chemicals for fertilizer, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and antibiotics — each of which exert a powerful impact far beyond the farm itself and collectively turn the soil into mere anchorages for crops. In the past, many plants and animals could coexist with crops, and with improved management, the same could be true today. In the U.S. the EPA has tracked pesticide usage of over 1.1 BILLION pounds in 2012 and chemical fertilizer use was at least 2.37 BILLION pounds. Unfortunately, most agricultural chemicals do not just melt away after use, they are "forever chemicals" that last, with their negative impacts, for hundreds of years. Although some of these excess chemicals are taken into the atmosphere, the typical way these chemicals are dispersed beyond the farm is through surface and ground water.

This intense land use on modern farms has eliminated almost all wildlife and has destroyed even favorable mammals, insects, birds, and pollinators. Its impact has extended beyond the farm and pollutes public waters and increases greenhouse gases. Agriculture does not have to be this way. Other modern farming systems have fewer negative impacts. A *New York Times* article in 2018 stated that European farmers used less than half of the chemical inputs of American farmers for greater food production.

Regenerative Agriculture: a new approach

In recent years, many progressive groups have adopted a new vision for agriculture, which sees farming as a means to restore biodiversity and positively impact global warming. This "Regenerative Agriculture" encourages agriculture to work with natural systems that are utilized by agricultural production. The most fundamental element of this concept is to enhance soil



quality. A major breakthrough came when General Mills developed a comprehensive regenerative agriculture strategy. General Mills appears to be the industry leader and has announced a goal of "advancing regenerative agriculture practices on 1 million acres by 2030." Its

program, which has clearly measured outcomes, seeks impacts in soil health, water conservation, biodiversity, and economic resilience of farming communities. In 2019 General Mills began its first regenerative agriculture pilot with 45 farmers in North Dakota and Canada. Early this year General Mills began a pilot regenerative agriculture wheat program in Kansas. General Mills also has developed a synthetic pesticide reduction program utilizing regenerative agriculture,

Integrated Pest Management, and organic acreage expansion.

Other major food companies are also taking action. On September 16, 2020 Cargill, Inc. announced an environmental quality goal seeking to convert 10 million acres of American row crop agriculture to regenerative agriculture practices. This follows by a week Tyson Foods' commitment of converting 5 million acres of cattle production to regenerative agriculture. It is not clear at this point if either initiative would require full regenerative agriculture practices, but it is clearly beyond simple sustainability. Smaller local companies such as Blue Nest Beef are using regenerative agricultural principles and have National Audubon's stamp of approval.

Clearly these food companies' actions show a trend toward regenerative agriculture and making a positive impact on the environment. Food companies' actions to buy products only from those farms and ranches which meet their regenerative standards will have much more impact than conservation groups subsidizing positive environmental practices on individual farms.

Audubon chapters can start working to build connections, expertise, and trust so that eventually they can have a credible voice in supporting regenerative agriculture in Minnesota. Rather than thinking of farming as an enemy of wildlife conservation, we should promote positive concepts such as regenerative agriculture.

--Donn Waage





Facebook contest winners

Our first-ever bird photography contest was held on the Saint Paul Audubon Society Facebook group site in June, with 11 people entering 30 photos. The winners were:

First place: **Jill Bauer** – “Great Gray Owl” (above)

Second place: **Terry Mortier** – Untitled photo of a Cape May Warbler (center)

Third place: **Neil Carlson** – “Heron Standing,” (far left)

Thank you to our judges, Monica Bryand, Dr. Jonathan Hicks, and Craig Fisk.

Join us on Facebook: if you like keeping touch via Facebook, consider joining the Saint Paul Audubon Society group. Go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/saintpaulaudubonsociety> and click on the “Join Group” button at the top of the page.