

The



Cardinal

DECEMBER 2024 - JANUARY 2025 • WWW.SAINTPAULBIRDALLIANCE.ORG • SAINT PAUL BIRD ALLIANCE

Two Special Birds Featured in December and January Presentations

Please join us for our December and January monthly meetings, when new findings about Red-headed Woodpeckers and Golden Eagles will be presented. Meetings are held the second Thursday of the month, September through May, at 7:00 p.m. These events, free and open to the public, are held in person (except January and February) in room 207 of the Anpétu Téča Education Center at 1910 County Road B West, Roseville. An option for watching via Zoom is also offered and the talks are taped. Visit our [events page](#) online to get the full schedule, last-minute updates, and zoom links. **Please note that the January meeting is zoom only.**

December 12, 7:00 p.m.: Dr. Elena West presents **“Red-headed Woodpecker Ecology and Conservation: New Insights and Future Directions.”** Dr. West, a U of M faculty member, leads research on the ecology of Red-headed Woodpeckers, with a particular focus on understanding habitat requirements in oak savanna ecosystems. Red-headed Woodpecker populations have declined by over 90% in Minnesota in the last 60 years. Dr. West’s work has practical applications for post-fire forest management and oak savanna restoration activities to benefit this species and other oak habitat specialists. Dr. West will share details on this research and discuss how community members can contribute to conservation efforts in Minnesota.

Dr. West works on topics ranging from natural history to behavioral ecology, and much of her research is driven by questions related to the conservation and



management of threatened species in human-influenced landscapes. Her work draws upon interdisciplinary approaches, including community science data, spatial analyses, landscape-scale acoustic monitoring, and quantitative tools to provide applied outcomes for pressing conservation and management issues.

January 9, 7:00 p.m., on Zoom: Scott Mehus presents **“The Golden Eagle Project: A Survey of Winter Populations in the Driftless Region and Beyond.”** Scott Mehus is co-director of the Golden Eagle Project, a partnership

studying wintering eagles in Minnesota, Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest. He has watched and studied Golden Eagles for over 26 years. He has degrees in Environmental Interpretation, Recreation and Leisure Studies. Come learn more about the two species of eagles in Minnesota and the best places to



Golden Eagle

photo by Sameer Srivastava

observe Golden Eagles. To the casual observer, being able to identify the difference between juvenile Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles can be difficult. This program will present useful field markers to help make that identification easier.

Scott will also share information on The Golden Eagle Project, a partnership of the National Eagle Center, Audubon Minnesota, Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, and Camp Ripley Military Installation. This partnership has released eight Golden Eagles wintering in Minnesota with satellite transmitters to determine where they go during the nesting season, and to better understand their winter habitat.

The January program is zoom only. Find the link [here](#).

SAINT PAUL BIRD ALLIANCE

Welcome!

To the Saint Paul Bird Alliance. We're a chapter of the National Audubon Society. **Our mission** is to engage a diverse community in enjoying, understanding, and protecting birds and the habitats all living beings need to thrive.

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

Get Involved

We are a volunteer organization that relies on people willing to donate their time to our shared mission. Please consider getting involved with volunteer opportunities involved with birding walks, conservation efforts, or other activities. Visit <https://www.saintpaulbirdalliance.org/volunteer/> for a full list of committees and committee chairs, or get in touch with us on our contact page at <https://www.saintpaulbirdalliance.org/contact/>.

Become a Chapter Member

You are invited to become a Saint Paul Bird Alliance Chapter Member by making a gift of \$25 or more. Your donation goes directly to our chapter's local efforts to educate about, advocate for, and protect our birds. Make a gift online at <https://www.saintpaulbirdalliance.org/get-involved/donate/>.

About our chapter

Founded in 1945 as the St. Paul Bird Club with 12 members, our chapter now serves the entire East Metro region of the Twin Cities. **Monthly chapter meetings** are held the second Thursday of the month, September-May, and are open to the public.

About the Cardinal

The *Cardinal* is published 6 times a year and posted on www.saintpaulbirdalliance.org at the beginning of February, April, June, August, October, and December. Martha Douglas is the editor and Laurie Wachter is the graphic designer. If you would like to receive an email when it is available, go to www.saintpaulbirdalliance.org, scroll down and click on "Join our email list."

Contact Us

If you have a comment or question for a board member or the Cardinal editor, please use the contact form on the website at <https://www.saintpaulbirdalliance.org/contact/>. Your message will be forwarded promptly to the appropriate person.

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Next issue: February / March 2025



Birding in the Snow, photo courtesy of Monica Bryand

Calendar

December 12 – Chapter meeting with presentation on Red-headed Woodpeckers. Page 1.

December 14 – Christmas Bird Count. Page 4.

January 9 – Zoom only chapter meeting with presentation on Golden Eagles. Page 1.

January 22, February 18 – Birds & Beers St. Paul. Back room of Sweeney's Saloon, 96 Dale Street, St. Paul. Please note that there is no Birds & Beers in December.

February 18 – Silverwood Park birding series begins. Page 5.



Chip Notes

As most of you have seen, we announced in October that we changed the name of our chapter to Saint Paul Bird Alliance. Our name has changed but our mission has not. It is still *engaging a diverse community in enjoying, understanding, and protecting birds and the habitats all living things need to thrive.*

We all know birds are in trouble. We see the large studies that show the decline of birds is accelerating, but we also see it every day at our local parks and in our backyards. To “bend the curve” in favor of birds, we must engage a much larger audience in our work to protect birds and the habitats all living things need to thrive.

To do this, we must build alliances with existing conservation organizations, more diverse communities,

and many people who don't consider themselves serious “birders.” After many months of discussion, gathering input, and exploring options, the board found that the Audubon name was one barrier to building these alliances. If you are interested in more details please review our [news release](#) and [FAQ](#) documents, and watch for more news about steps we are taking to make our chapter more welcoming to a larger community of bird lovers.

Thank you to all who shared their thoughts during this process. Your input helped us better understand what is important to you and how we can sharpen our focus on our mission.

Greg Burnes
President,
Saint Paul Bird Alliance



Photo by Kurt Moses

Volunteers Introduce Young Students to Birding

Thanks to Saint Paul Bird Alliance volunteers, almost 1600 students in grades 3-6 were introduced to birds and birding on 23 field trips along the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers in 2024. The Big River Journey, on the Mississippi, is run by the U.S. National Park Service and the Wild River Journey, on the St. Croix, is led by the Wild Rivers Conservancy. Both are conducted aboard historic river boats as they travel up and down the rivers.

On the field trips, students rotate among different learning stations, including one that focuses on birds and their habitats. Saint Paul Bird Alliance volunteers lead these sessions and then hand out binoculars and show the kids how to use them.

The field trips will start up again in the spring so watch for news about how to sign up as a volunteer. Seeing the students' excitement when they start to focus their binoculars and start spotting birds along the river is a wonderful way to share your passion for birds.

Grants Awarded to Nine Organizations

Twice a year the Saint Paul Bird Alliance (SPBA) awards grants that support our mission of engaging our community in enjoying, understanding, and protecting birds and the habitats all living beings need to thrive. Providing grants to community organizations that implement projects is a powerful way to increase SPBA's impact. We are grateful to donors who enable us to make these grants. In our latest round, more than \$19,000 was awarded to nine organizations as follows:

Urban Bird Collective (UBC)

Increase BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ people's participation in birding through projects and events. This includes recruiting new and diverse volunteers for the Winter Bird Count; monitoring Chimney Swift nests and roosts and hosting Swift Night Out community events; Pig's Eye Park conservation; and developing UBC leaders.

Frogtown Green

Support programming, including pollinator-friendly prairie garden planting for birds; tree planting; creating and maintaining bird-watching stations; delivering urban bird walks; and bird-related exhibits and activities at the Frogtown Green sustainability festival.

My Bird Club

Provide free youth and family-inclusive bird walks, including supporting nine youth and adult bird-watching adventures. Youths earn milestone rewards (charms) for participating. Provide after-school programming at the Frogtown Green “FrogLab,” focused on birds, bird watching, and bird conservation.

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Maplewood Nature Center

Support Phase 2 of a Maplewood Nature Center project as they conduct additional native plantings for the benefit of birds and pollinators.

St. Paul Creative Zone Enterprise

Fund the 100 Trees Initiative, a grassroots effort to plant and care for 100 street trees in a semi-industrial area, beyond what the city can provide. The purpose is to expand the urban tree canopy, improve air and water quality, increase wildlife habitat, and reduce the heat island effect.

Hamline Midway Coalition

Support the Bee Line wildlife data project to enhance native plant plantings along Pierce Butler Route in St. Paul. Set up three trail cameras to observe wildlife and generate awareness about urban wildlife.

Sustainable Stillwater Bird City

Establish a donated lot for ecosystem restoration and community education. Highlights include small group activities for all ages, rain gardening, wildlife feeding stations, and bird listening devices and cameras for data collection/citizen science.

Eleanor Graham Community Gardens

Provide funding to establish a new prairie plot along Hamline Avenue in St. Paul, plant insect- and song-bird-friendly trees; and partner with Great River Greening on prairie management.

University of Belize Environment Research Institute

Ongoing support for bird banding, research, and for developing Belizean scientists to help safeguard important wintering habitats for migratory birds from North America, including Minnesota.

Thank you to Our Donors

This is the time of year when we say thank you to the donors who make many Saint Paul Bird Alliance activities possible and support important projects through grants to organizations that are aligned with our mission. Our donors are recognized in our 2023-2024 Annual Report, now available [here](#) on our website. Thank you!

This is also the time of year when we reach out to members and friends to ask for an annual gift. A gift of \$25 or more makes you a Chapter Member of the Saint Paul Bird Alliance and directly supports our local activities. Click [here](#) to make a gift online, or mail a check made out to Saint Paul Bird Alliance, with your contact information, to: Kenyon Saylor, 2366 Tophill Circle, Roseville, MN 55113.

Christmas Bird Count is December 14

The Saint Paul Bird Alliance's Christmas Bird Count is Saturday, December 14, 2024.

Anyone can participate, even beginning birders!

Over the past century, volunteer observers, ranging from experienced ornithologists to casual nature enthusiasts, have collected data that allow researchers to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America.

This family-friendly activity is a great way to explore Saint Paul's natural areas while contributing to valuable scientific research. We encourage everyone to participate!

Contact us if you want to join, and we will match you with an experienced area leader. You must get in touch with us before Dec. 7 so we have time to link you to an area. [Contact Link](#)

You can conduct a yard bird count at your home. If interested, please [contact us](#) and provide your **name and address**. We will verify that your home is in our count circle and, if it is, send you information on how to participate in this important and fun event. You must get in touch with us before Dec. 7.

After the count, there is Pot Luck Dinner at Kiki Sonnen's home. The party begins at 6 pm. If possible, bring a dish to share and your own beverage. We will have fun sharing our sightings and adventures of the day. More details will be available from your count leader.

Last year's results. In 2023, the Saint Paul count saw 62 people observe 13,574 individual birds from 58 different species. Volunteers' time afield totaled 103 hours, and 478 miles were traveled afoot and by vehicles. The most common bird sighted was Mallard, with 2,790 recorded. Some of the rarest birds seen that day were Carolina Wren and a Wilson's Snipe.



Mallard, photo by Monica Bryand



White-breasted Nuthatch, photo by Steven Biegler



American Robin, photo by Brady Karg

FIELD TRIPS

Bird Winter into Spring! A great way to start the New Year for beginning birders - and everyone else.

Birding through the Months at Silverwood Park

Silverwood Park is a beautiful urban park on the shores of Silver Lake. The variety of habitats in the park--oak forest, marsh, grassland, and lakefront--make it a great birding destination, with over 180 different species sighted in the park.

Birding in a single location over several months can be a great way to get into birding. This series of four field trips will repeat popular excursions from last year, giving participants the chance to know the park and watch for different birds each month as the seasons change. In addition to getting to know the birds of Silverwood, participants will also be introduced to basic birding techniques and tools, including digital resources. Participants are encouraged to bring their own binoculars; a few extra pairs will be available.

LOCATION 2500 County Road E, Saint Anthony, MN 55421

DIRECTIONS Meet at the doors leading into the Visitor Center from the parking lot. Field trips will be conducted in most weather, with the exception of heavy rain. 45.046808, -93.224715

REGISTRATION No registration necessary. Come for any of the sessions--attending all is not required.

DIFFICULTY Most paths are paved, but may be icy in the winter. Walks will range from 1-1.5 miles.

LEADERS Jen Miller and Liz Richards; email birdingjen@gmail.com with any questions

••••• Be sure to check <https://saintpaulbirdalliance.org/up-coming-events/> for more details and field trip changes throughout the season.

Tuesday, February 18: 2-4 PM

Birding in the winter is a great way to get comfortable with the species who live in the park year-round--plus, there are no leaves on the trees to get in the way of seeing birds! This month, we'll look for common Minnesota winter birds like chickadees and nuthatches, along with several different woodpecker species. We might even get lucky and see the park's resident great horned owls as they start nesting.

Tuesday, March 18: 2-4 PM

During March, we will start to see some early migrants returning to the park--some waterfowl, and maybe even robins and red-winged blackbirds. We'll also notice an increase in bird songs that we will learn to identify.

Tuesday, April 15: 2-4 PM

April showers melt the ice on Silver Lake, which brings more waterfowl, along with sparrows, swallows, and maybe even some early warblers or phoebes. With some luck, we might catch a glimpse of a migrating shorebird along the lakeshore, or see the fluffy head of an owlet.

Tuesday, May 13: 2-4 PM

May brings warblers, warblers, and more warblers! We'll also begin to see some of the beautiful summer residents of the park, including orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and bluebirds. While the leaves returning to the trees makes seeing birds more challenging, the variety of species in the park in May makes this one of the most exciting times of year for birding.

Help Wanted: Field Trip Coordinator

Cathy Croghan will be retiring from field trip coordination in early 2025. Please send her an email if you would like to learn more about this great volunteer gig at croghancathy@gmail.com.



Steve Porter's legacy: Photographs Plus

By Allison Campbell Jensen

Steve Porter was so acclaimed for his photographs taken at Maplewood Nature Center that when John Zakelj, president of the center's Friends group, was walking there one day, a couple of people stopped him. "When they noticed my camera, they asked, with great anticipation, 'Are you Steve Porter?'" Zakelj remembers. "They were quite disappointed when I told them I was not Steve Porter. They said they came to the nature center specifically because they had seen Steve's photos."

Even after he died at age 71 in August 2024, Porter received an award for [a photograph of two darling does](#) from Woodbury Magazine. During his life, he posted his inspiring photos on the Facebook page for the [Maplewood Nature Camera Club](#) as well as on NextDoor. During his eulogy for Porter, Zakelj quoted a remembrance posted by Deborah Webster: "We are all blessed to have seen the natural world he shared with us through his unique perspective. He gave us beauty, humor, and grace with his reverence for nature."

Yet, stunning wildlife photographs are just one legacy of Porter. A gardener and a builder, he also worked on a pollinator garden at the Nature Center (funded by a grant from the St. Paul Bird Alliance), as well as houses he had acquired for Wood Ducks – but had not yet placed. When the Friends heard from his widow, Rona, that she would like someone to place them, they contacted several organizations, including the Conservation Committee of the St. Paul Bird Alliance. With the expert help of Mark Stewart, these two Wood Duck houses have been settled



in Pig's Eye Park in St. Paul. The Saint Paul Bird Alliance is grateful to Steve Porter and his family for sharing his legacy with us and, in the spring, our Wood Duck friends.

Mark Stewart installs the Wood Duck house at Pig's Eye Park.

A Wild Path, by Douglas Wood

© 2023, University of Minnesota Press

Book review by Holly Peirson

"As any traveler knows, humor is a balm and laughter a blessing on any trail, any cruise down a river, or any crossing of a lake." I agree. "In guiding others, I began to see and understand the therapy of wilderness. The psychology of green things. The counseling of rocks ... I began to really understand the healing and restorative power of nature." I totally agree.

My only problem with reviewing this wonderful new 'bible' on how to live a life of grace and beauty is – where to start?

At the beginning, where Mr. Wood talks about his lifelong struggle with ADHD and dyslexia? I teared up when reading that passage, as our family has similar issues.

In the middle? One day when out on our boat for a wonderful afternoon in the sun, I read the whole of "Dreams of the Lonely Land" aloud to our son. It's the very moving story of how Mr. Wood wrote an article for *Canoe Magazine*, about when he and friends went on the same journey that Sigurd Olson had taken many years before. I told our son about this book and how much he'd like it. "I'll send you a copy," I said. The next time we talked, he had *already found* a copy and was savoring it chapter by chapter, just like I was, re-reading many before finishing the whole. "I never want it to end," he said. My feeling exactly.

Or near the end, in the chapter "Slowing Down." I read passages aloud to my husband Paul on what is exactly, almost word for word (p. 214 if you're interested) our mantra for aging. To spend as much time in the outdoors as possible, "breathing pine-scented air, admiring wildflowers, listening to migrating geese and yodeling loons and scolding squirrels, and doing a number of at least moderately physical things."

So, Bible? Yes. I've finished this wonderful book now, but it will remain on my bedside table for many years, to be re-read whenever I need to remember that one should always be "Illuminated by Beauty."

