

Volunteer with Us at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve for the 2026 Field Season!

Are you a birder or naturalist looking to contribute to real ecological research this summer? We're recruiting volunteers for two field projects at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in east-central Minnesota, and we'd love to have you join us!

Cedar Creek is one of the most studied ecosystems in North America, and our research depends on having dedicated people on the landscape regularly — something a small academic team simply can't do alone. Whether you're an experienced birder or just getting started, there may be a role for you.

Red-Headed Woodpecker Nest Monitoring (May–August)

Join a small team to locate, tag, and monitor active woodpecker nest cavities in Cedar Creek's oak savanna. Volunteers visit a designated section of the reserve 1–2 times per week, with each visit lasting about 3–4 hours once on site.

Ideal volunteers can:

- Walk dirt/sand roads and navigate occasional downed trees and brush
- Use binoculars to identify color-banded woodpeckers
- Follow a standard data collection protocol

We welcome returning participants and new contributors!

Breeding Bird Survey (May, June & July — 3 visits total)

Help us track breeding bird communities across Cedar Creek's diverse habitats. Volunteers join a small team for three morning visits (one each in early May, June, and July), walking a fixed 1 km route and conducting 5-minute point counts at set locations.

Ideal volunteers can:

- Identify a wide variety of woodland and prairie birds by sight and sound
- Follow a standardized survey protocol
- Submit data promptly via Google Sheets

Not quite at that level yet? Let us know — we'll try to pair newer birders with experienced groups. We have 14 routes and typically run 8 teams of 2–4 people.

Interested? Fill out our [short interest form](#) and we'll follow up with details on timing, training, and team assignments.

Questions are welcome! Please email Dr. Elena West (elwest@umn.edu) or Dr. Caitlin Barale Potter (caitlin@umn.edu) to learn more.