

# The Cardinal



AUGUST SEPTEMBER 2020

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## Kestrel Nest Box Project Has Successful Year

The spring of 2020 marked the ninth year of the American Kestrel nest box project, initiated by the Saint Paul Audubon Conservation Committee in response to the alarming decline of kestrels in Minnesota. The Breeding Bird Survey, conducted annually since 1967 by the U.S. Geological Survey, has documented a 73% decline over this period in Minnesota.

The decline is probably due to a variety of factors including habitat loss, insecticides (kestrels eat a lot of insects), lack of nest cavities, and, possibly, predation by Cooper's Hawks, which are increasing in number. Cooper's Hawks are present in all of the parks where our kestrels have nested.

We had the same number of nest boxes in place this year as last (eight), but there were changes. We removed the box from Trout Brook Nature Sanctuary after four years with no kestrels, and we installed a new box at Tamarack Nature Center, in northern Ramsey County. In addition, we moved the two Belwin Conservancy boxes to new locations within Belwin (also after four years with no kestrels).

At Tamarack, we placed the box near several dead trees with woodpecker cavities where kestrels nested as late as



2018. A kestrel was seen several times in the vicinity of the box, but none nested in the box.

The big news this year was that moving the boxes at Belwin produced results: kestrels nested in both boxes. Unfortunately, one of those nests failed. The incubation period for kestrel eggs is about four weeks, but this box still contained five eggs seven weeks after the first egg was laid. Something must have happened to one of the kestrels.

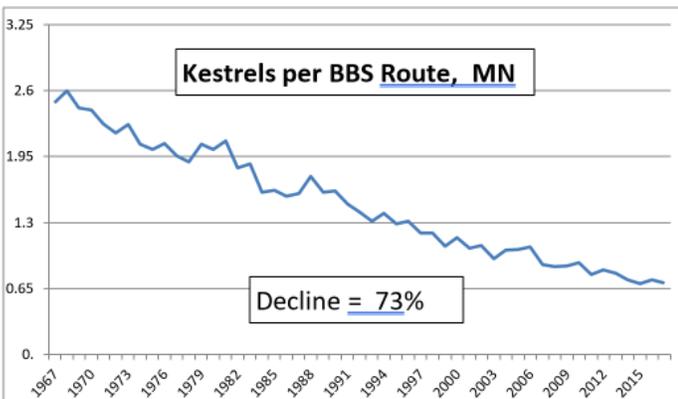
Despite that nest failure, we had more successful nestings (four) and more fledged young (16) than in any year thus far. First up were the kestrels in Afton State Park. They fledged five young on about June 10, a record early date for our project. They were followed by the two pairs in Lake Elmo Park Reserve (three and four fledged) and the pair in the box near the Bison Prairie at The

Belwin Conservancy (four fledged). The Belwin kestrels were three weeks later than the Afton pair. After their eggs hatched, Mom was especially attentive, and Dad kept the kids and Mom well fed with small rodents. Both parents mounted an impressive coordinated attack on a Cooper's Hawk that violated their air space as the chicks were fledging.

Thank you, once again, to our volunteer nest box monitors: Monica Bryand, Val Cunningham, Linda Kellar, Janet Kortuem, Kathy Sidles, Lynn and Mike Swift, and Elizabeth Wolf. Thanks also to my wife, Barbara, who guided the pole-mounted camera for nest box inspections, and to Gus Koutsouvas for his heavy labor installing and cleaning nest boxes. Gus was also ready and willing to man the pole-mounted camera, but was stymied by COVID-19 social distancing precautions.

Go to [tinyurl.com/kestrels2020](https://tinyurl.com/kestrels2020) for photos and videos from the 2020 season.

-Julian Sellers, Project Manager



## SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

PO Box 7275, St Paul, MN 55107-7275

Welcome...  
To the Saint Paul Audubon Society.

**Next issue: October/November  
2020**

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.

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](http://www.saintpaulaudubon.org)

**ABOUT THE CARDINAL** The Cardinal is published 6 times a year and posted on [www.saintpaulaudubon.org](http://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 10th 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](http://www.saintpaulaudubon.org) and go to the "Newsletter" tab to subscribe with your email address. Our Webmaster is Ben Wilson, [ben@simpledesigns.biz](mailto:ben@simpledesigns.biz) or 651-332-1362.

## President's Message

### Birding in 2020

2020 has been the craziest year of my experience and it is not over yet. In March I thought the year would be unique because of a disruption of perhaps a month due to the coronavirus. I underestimated the duration of that disruption. Then, in May we had the agony of the George Floyd murder. The ramifications of both events will continue for quite a while. As a society we must respond to both these social disruptions.

We have responded to the virus by cancelling our membership meetings and field trips until further notice. We are looking into ways to continue these activities in a safe manner and hope to have our monthly meetings resume in the fall using a video conferencing service such as Zoom. But who knew that coronavirus would be the easier issue to deal with this year?

The murder of George Floyd will be much tougher for our society to respond to. His killing has forced many of us to confront racism in ways that we had not before. Our society is not a social welfare organization; our aim is to work for birds and the environment. But the George Floyd killing, demonstrations and violence have forced us to look deeper at



our rapidly changing community. Clearly it is not enough for us to just put out a "welcome all birders" sign as Minnesota and the U.S. become more ethnically and socially diverse. To achieve our goal of helping birds we must involve more people from the whole broad range of our community. To protect birds we need to continue to build a constituency for their support. In the months and years ahead we

need to find ways to reach out to people and groups we haven't approached before. Do I know what those actions will be? Nope. But I am certain that we must do more to achieve our mission. If you have ideas how our society can effectively serve our entire community please contact me or other board members. We would appreciate your help.

In the meantime, we can take some lessons from birds. Birds don't know about our political boundaries; they just fly over them. Birds don't know about our social divisions; to them we are all just people. Perhaps thinking about birds can teach us something about our divisions in 2020.

*-Donn Waage, Saint Paul Audubon Society President*

## Butterflies, Birds, and Even Ghost Tiger Beetles?

The weather was perfect – sunny with clear blue skies, warm temperatures, and almost no wind – when the Arden Hills Army Training Site (AHATS) hosted St. Paul Audubon’s annual butterfly survey on Sunday, July 12, 2020. It was a very small group because of the COVID-19 pandemic, just five people total.

The most unusual sighting of the day occurred early in the morning. Dean Hansen, Chris Smith, and Mary Lee found the Ghost Tiger Beetle for the third year in a row. It was found in an area of the gravel pit that was typical habitat for the Ghost Tiger Beetle (*Ellipsoptera lepida*, formerly *Cicindela lepida*). The first sighting of this tiger beetle species was more than eighteen years ago in this gravel pit by Dean Hansen, PhD, renowned entomologist and AHATS’ most tenured volunteer. And then two years ago, they again located the elusive beetle there – not one, but over a dozen! This year’s find was another exciting rediscovery. The training site allows only limited access to this area and the specific location was primarily bare, sandy, flat conditions that favor the beetle’s feeding and breeding conditions. Throughout Minnesota, the Ghost Tiger Beetle has been on the decline, and, prior to the 2018 sighting, was thought to be extirpated here. While photographing the beetle, Dean set his net down on the sand, and a freshly-hatched monarch butterfly alighted on it, perhaps to see what this strange thing was doing in its territory.

In spite of the “perfect” weather, the number of butterflies was highly disappointing. Fred Waltz and I joined the group later in the morning. All five of us searched diligently in the prairies, the woodlands, and



the wetlands. One thing that may have contributed to the low count was the dryness. Most of the wetlands were dry with dead cattails. Can you imagine only seeing *one* Red-winged Blackbird in three-and-a-half hours of observation of numerous wetlands? Our butterfly count included one Great Spangled Fritillary plus seven unidentified *fritillary* species, nine Delaware Skippers, seventeen Common Wood Nymphs, fifteen Monarchs, plus a few other species.

We also counted the birds, which was a little more exciting. We saw or heard Mourning Doves, Common Loon, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel, Eastern Kingbird, Blue Jays, American Crows, Tree Swallows, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwings, American Goldfinch, Brown Thrasher, Henslow’s Sparrow, Baltimore Oriole, Red-winged Blackbird, and Common Yellowthroats. Especially exciting for Fred and me was watching a pair of Ospreys circling together high in the sky above us. And, just as we were driving out, we spotted an adult Bald Eagle perched in a tree.

We’ll send these counts to both the Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota’s National Guard at Camp Ripley. And our butterfly count will be sent to the North American Butterfly Association again this year. This will preserve our Ramsey count circle for 2020, and allow us to do the count in 2021, when we hope we can welcome many of our veteran observers as well as new participants. Many thanks to Dean Hansen, Christopher Smith, Mary Lee, and Fred Waltz for making it happen!

-Dorothy Waltz, Butterfly Count Volunteer





## Meet Saint Paul Audubon Field Trip Leaders —From a Distance

In this time of social distancing and canceled events, we know how much everyone misses coming together for walks, sharing bird stories, and catching up with friends. There is no substitution for these personal connections but to help bridge the gap, we are launching a series of profiles of the field trip leaders who would have led this year's walks. We start with Cathy Croghan, the society's coordinator for field trips and walks; and Paul Spreitzer, who leads walks at Old Cedar Bridge or Lebanon Hills, and at Warbler Weekend.

### Cathy Croghan

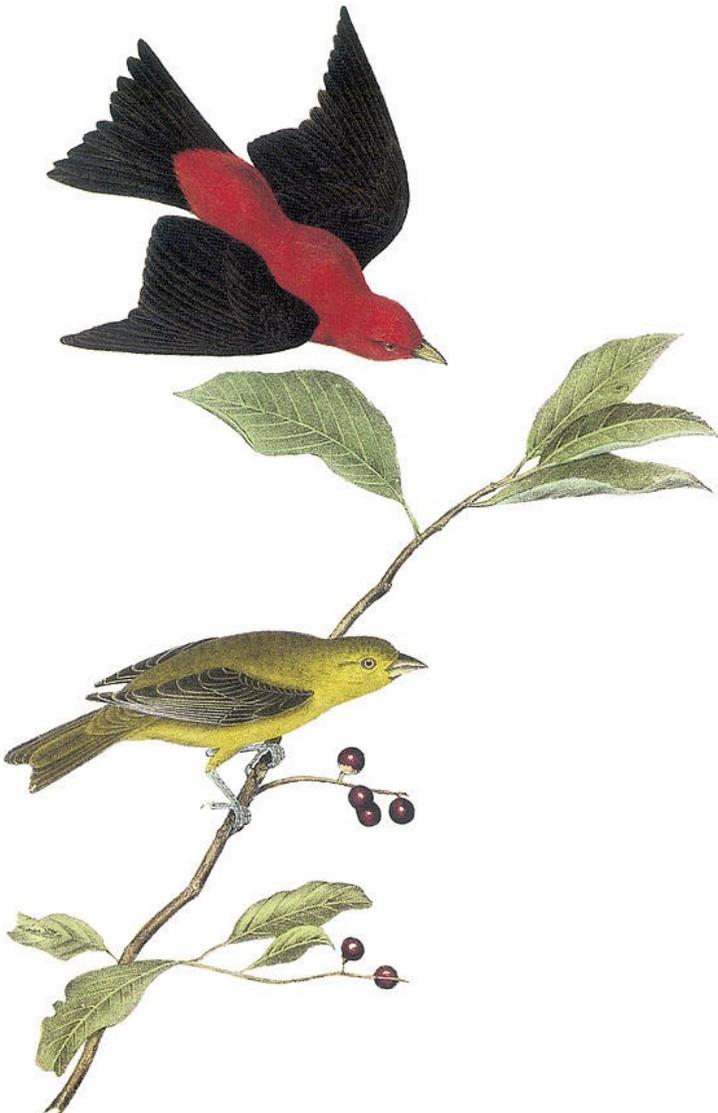
Growing up in Michigan, Cathy got started birding when she was a student at the U of Michigan – Ann Arbor and a friend invited her to go birding at Point Pelee, a Canadian national park on a Lake Erie peninsula. She was using borrowed binoculars and just beginning to learn birding when she saw a Scarlet Tanager. “This was the first bird I identified on my own, and I was hooked,” she said.

Cathy has a varied educational and work background. She has degrees in natural resource management and mycology, public health, and nursing. She has worked as a forest pathologist for the U.S. Forest Service, as an OSHA specialist for Control Data, as a geriatric nurse, and as a realtor. In the final phase of her career, Cathy started a nonprofit called “Training to Serve,” which trained providers of geriatric services how to create a welcoming experience for older LGBT people. “We trained 14,000 people across the country,” Cathy says.

Now retired, Cathy is focusing again on the natural world. She and her wife, Kathy Robbins, spend Februaries at the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center in Texas, where they volunteer leading bird walks. The center is along the Gulf Coast and the Rio Grande River Valley and has an extensive boardwalk. “Winter is their high season for birds,” says Cathy, “and it’s pretty spectacular. Over the years we’ve gotten to know the birds there very well and have become the experts for people who are visiting, even though I don’t consider myself an expert at all.” The couple also volunteer at the Gibbs Farm Museum and at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, where they give talks to visitors about the bison herd that is now there.

Cathy became the field trip coordinator for St. Paul Audubon two years ago. “My goal is to expand the types of trips we will offer and the number of people who are leading them.” For example, Cathy and her wife, who was also a forest pathologist, developed a walk called Trees and Birds, in which they identify trees and their relationship to birds.

“Becoming interested in birds is such a great way for people who care about the environment to become more involved,” says Cathy. “Caring about birds means you care about their habitats and how all parts of the natural world are interconnected.”



## Paul Spreitzer

Paul has an old family field guide with his ten-year-old handwriting noting a White-breasted Nuthatch in it, but it was years later when a White-throated Sparrow in the backyard of his house in St. Louis Park really sparked his interest in birds. He started going out on guided bird walks and began to notice more and more. "There are all these birds, right here," he realized. He knows this was 1993 because that's when he started keeping a list.

Paul teaches 6<sup>th</sup> grade in the Hopkins school system, a job that limits his field trip leading to summer and a few scheduled weekends in spring. One of these is Warbler Weekend, where he is part of the team that plans and takes groups out on walks. He says he's also become "unofficially in charge" of the Chimney Swift count every evening as the birds circle and then dive into the chimney at the Villa Maria Center. "One time a pair of Sandhill Cranes joined the circle for a few rounds and then flew off," he recounts.

That's one of Paul's many birding stories. Another is watching a flock of house sparrows at a feeder at a lake cabin, and realizing that there was something else in the flock. He saw its black cheek spot and identified it as a Eurasian Tree Sparrow, a bird typically found only in St. Louis. He contacted bird expert Anthony Hertz, who came to the cabin and confirmed the ID. Information about the sighting then went out and other visitors followed. There is now a plaque at the cabin



saying this was the location of the second sighting of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow in Minnesota, 1995.

Paul has been leading walks for Saint Paul Audubon since 2000. Like Cathy, he encourages people to learn more about trees – their names and their parts – which is important when helping other birders get a fix on a bird. "There are all different levels of birders out there," says Paul, "and many people besides the leader contribute to the trip's success. We are all learning together." And everyone has their own learning style and techniques. Paul, for example, makes up his own mnemonics for recognizing songs, such as "Blame it on the Bossa Nova" for the Black-throated Green Warbler's song.

Both Cathy and Paul agree that the best way for new birders to learn is to get outside, join a group, go out with people who know more than you, and ask questions. Birders are generally eager to share what they see and know. Paul emphasizes the importance of developing good binocular skills. "Once you get that ability to focus your binoculars where you intend to, that's when you get true joy from birding because you really see the bird. This is when a bird will 'grab' you and make you want to be a serious birder," he says.

*-Martha Douglas, Cardinal Editor*



## FIELD TRIPS

### Sandhill Cranes at Crex Meadows SWA Grantsburg, WI

**Tuesday, October 20, 4:00 – 8:15 PM**

Since historic times, Greater Sandhill Cranes have congregated by the thousands every autumn evening in the marshes and ponds now called Crex Meadows, located on the north side of Grantsburg, WI. People likewise gather to witness the sight of seemingly never-ending strands and haunting sounds as the birds seek and settle into shelter for the night. Perhaps this is your year to experience anew or again this enduring ritual. Meet at 4 PM in the parking lot of the Visitor Center at Crex Meadow State Wildlife Area in Grantsburg WI. We will talk briefly about the cranes and Crex, and leave in our own cars to caravan from the center about 4:30, returning about 8:15 to the same parking lot.

**DIRECTIONS** Take I-35 North to the Rock Creek/Grantsburg Exit (Highway 70), approximately 34 miles from Forest Lake. Take exit and turn right (EAST) on Highway 70. Follow for 15 miles (into Wisconsin) to the stop light in Grantsburg. Turn left (NORTH) onto Pine Street. Follow the goose signs through town to the Visitor Center, located on the NE corner of the junction of County Road D and County Road F. Meet in the parking lot.

**INSTRUCTIONS** Dress for cooling temperatures during the evening. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. Stay by your car at the Visitor Center parking lot and wait for introductory remarks from the trip leaders. We will caravan from the parking lot.

**REGISTRATION** Register with Louise Eidsmoe 651-231-0453 [eidsmoel@comcast.net](mailto:eidsmoel@comcast.net)

**DIFFICULTY** Easy. We stay close to the cars so as not to spook the cranes.

#### LEADERS

Louise Eidsmoe 651-231-0453 [eidsmoel@comcast.net](mailto:eidsmoel@comcast.net)

Chase Davies 651-246-9754 [RockyBirder@gmail.com](mailto:RockyBirder@gmail.com)

This field trip is modified from past years to include strict COVID-19 prevention strategies: no carpooling; stay by your own car when viewing cranes and other birds; no sharing of equipment (e.g., scopes, binoculars, field guides); wear a mask and practice social distancing at all times. Note that the Visitor Center is closed until further notice so no restrooms are available there.

## Elements of a Successful Bird Walk

What goes into a successful bird walk? Most birders have attended many walks. In fact, this is how we often learned, and continue to learn, to bird. The Saint Paul Audubon Society encourages members to volunteer to plan and lead walks, and veteran bird walk leader Chase Davies had developed a series of on-site conversations for this summer to do some birding and reflect on the elements that make a good walk. If you have ever considered becoming a field trip leader, or just want to know how it all comes together, contact Chase Davies at 651-246-9754 or [RockyBirder@gmail.com](mailto:RockyBirder@gmail.com). Chase will arrange for small-group and/or individual 1 ½ hour walks to help you decide whether you too can guide people through a familiar area of your choice. The goal is to feel comfortable doing this even if you don't consider yourself an expert. The pooled experience of the group creates its own expertise!

## Safe birding guidelines

Whether you are birding on your own or with others, please observe these guidelines:

- Drive separately to the birding site
- Wear a face mask and stay six feet away from other birders
- Do not share equipment or field guides

In all cases, please consider your own level of risk and take the necessary safety precautions. We want everyone to stay well until we can once again enjoy all our events together.



Would you like more field trips? Please consider selecting a familiar birding place and volunteering to lead there. Contact Cathy Croghan for details at [crogh001@umn.edu](mailto:crogh001@umn.edu)

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## BOARD MEETINGS

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The Chapter's Board Meetings, held the first Monday of most months, have been conducted via phone conference or Zoom since March. The next meeting will be Sept. 14 at 6:00 p.m.

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## MEMBER MEETINGS

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Member meetings, typically held the second Thursday of each month, have not taken place since February due to Covid-19. The board is working on resuming monthly programs and speakers using a video conference service. Stay tuned for more details.

## Fall 2020 Big River Journey Canceled

A long-running volunteer opportunity, the Big River Journey, will be on hiatus this fall along with so many other favorite events. Members of Saint Paul Audubon's Education Committee have been involved with this National Park Service field trip program for the last ten years. The program gives 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders the opportunity to learn about the Mississippi River from park rangers and staff from the DNR, Science Museum, Jonathan Padelford, and volunteers from the Saint Paul Audubon Society.

"Many of us will surely miss our chance to interact with great kids getting to ride on their first boat trip or seeing their first Bald Eagle," says volunteer and society board member Barbara Lindeke. "We hope trips will be offered again next spring."

To see and learn more about this great educational opportunity, visit [bigriverjourneyonline.org](http://bigriverjourneyonline.org), a website created by the National Park Service. "You may spy Saint Paul Audubon members Dick Wachtler and Brian Goodspeed in the videos," says Barbara.

## Book Review: Birds in Flight: The Art and Science of How Birds Fly

By Carroll Henderson  
c 2008 Voyageur Press

Did you know the Wright Brothers studied the dihedral of the Turkey Vulture "to help them learn how to achieve stability" when designing their first airplane?

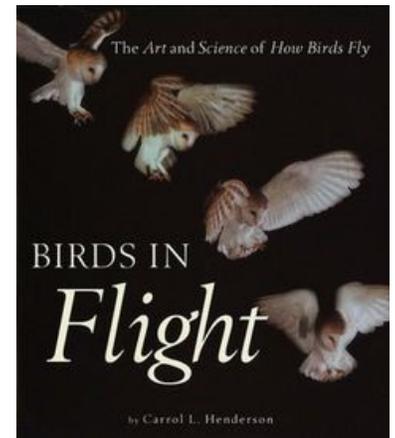
I did not - I learned that and much more when I took this book from the library over our tough spring. It was great to lose a few hours every few days, looking at some marvelous and serendipitous photographs of birds caught in flight: some poses only became clear when looking at the image later (p. 43 - Ruby-throated Hummingbird). Or, one of the most lovely and artistic images of birds ever, of Trumpeter Swans on the Mississippi River at -25° F one January.

I also didn't know that birds' alula, that vestigial thumb between the secondaries and the primaries serves like a "slat, that forces an intense airstream along the top of the wing" when a bird is coming in for a landing at more than 16 degrees. That helps the bird to intentionally stall. Then it uses its outspread feet, tail, and wings to slow it further.

Descriptions of wing, tail, and foot function as they relate to flight are simply presented, with great diagrams, descriptions, and photographs.

Anyone, from beginner to expert, will enjoy this timeless book.

*-Reviewed by Holly Peirson*



## Fall Landscape Revival Canceled

Sadly, the Shoreview/Oakdale Landscape Revival Native Plant Expo and Market has been canceled due to COVID-19. Organizers had hoped that it would be possible to hold the event by rescheduling it to the fall, but continuing concerns for the safety of participants led to the decision to cancel.

You can still shop for native plants on your own and this website can help you find native nurseries in our region: <https://tinyurl.com/y9phw463>

By choosing Minnesota native plants, species that have grown in this area for hundreds of years and are thus well adapted to our conditions, we can create spectacular gardens that are a haven for wildlife and protect our lakes and rivers.

Landscape Revival of the east metro, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, got its start with funding and volunteers from the Saint Paul Audubon Society. It has since expanded to include co-sponsors Blue Thumb, Wild Ones, Shepherd of the Hills Church and the City of Shoreview. There are typically two events, in Shoreview and Oakdale, in June. Colleen Swedberg volunteers on behalf of Saint Paul Audubon and is the main coordinator for the Shoreview event.