

# The Cardinal

OCTOBER NOVEMBER 2020

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## 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 p.m. 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)



## Exploring Birds Together During COVID

Saint Paul Audubon is pleased to announce that there are some opportunities coming up to explore and learn about birds and their habitats together. Taking the place of our monthly chapter meetings are monthly talks with guest experts, now in a virtual format. See page 3 for more on the upcoming speakers. Also, two field trips have been organized that are ideal for physical distancing – the trip to Crex Meadows, as described here, and a gathering near Brownsville, MN to view swans and other waterfowl. See page 6 for details on the swan trip.

## 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.

## SAINT PAUL AUDUBON SOCIETY

PO Box 7275, St Paul, MN 55107-7275

Welcome...

To the Saint Paul Audubon Society.

**Next issue: December 2020/  
January 2021**

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

<b>President</b> Donn Waage	612-735-4085
<b>Vice President</b> Jane Braun	651-636-4009
<b>Vice President, Communications</b> Martha Douglas	651-227-0584
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<b>Education Chair</b> David Kuhlmann	507-514-2110
<b>Assistant Editor</b> Jackie Bussjaeger	651-295-3967 cardinalstpaul@gmail.com

### 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

### Regenerative Agriculture and Birds

Grassland birds have suffered an unparalleled decline over the past half century, largely stemming from the widespread transition of North American grasslands into farmland. In Minnesota, more than half of our land is devoted to agriculture and in recent years its use has intensified with fewer idle acres and more chemical inputs. The result is there is less and less habitat on the farm for birds, mammals, or even insects, and more chemicals drift off the farm into waterways.

Conservationists have recognized this problem and have worked with farmers for at least 40 years to encourage more environmentally friendly practices on farms. Working with farmers one on one and providing subsidies for good practices, however, has been very expensive. This expense has been justified by considering these farm practices as models that other farmers would copy. Unfortunately, other farmers have not adopted these practices without subsidies as conservationists had hoped. These experiments therefore have been expensive and limited.

Fortunately, a new concept, "regenerative agriculture," has been developed. The goal of regenerative agriculture is holistic—to improve the soil, water and air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and the local economy. In the past few

years, food companies — pushed by consumers — have begun to back this concept. Some smaller food companies, such as Blue Nest Beef (a partner with National Audubon), have adopted regenerative agriculture principles for years. General Mills was probably the first big food company supporter. It announced in 2018 that it would support a million acres in regenerative agriculture projects (<https://www.generalmills.com/en/Responsibility/Sustainability/Regenerative-agriculture>). In just the past two weeks commitments have been made by Tyson Foods (5 million acres) and Cargill, Inc. (10 million acres).

Regenerative agriculture promises to work more harmoniously with natural systems, increase the life in soils, reduce chemical inputs and reduce greenhouse gases. This is a very positive development for the environment and for birds. In the coming months we will be contacting food companies to see how we can encourage and support their efforts and study the positive impact on birds.

*-Donn Waage, Saint Paul Audubon Society President*

## Saint Paul Audubon Society International Migratory Bird Project

Our project with the University of Belize to support a migratory bird banding station is now underway. Belize is a small country (only 12% the size of Minnesota, with a population smaller than Ramsey County). Although a small country, thousands of birds that visit Minnesota in the summer spend most of their lives in Belize. Our sponsored banding station is at Runaway Creek Reserve (<https://runawaycreekbelize.org/>). It will capture and band birds from November 1 until the end of March 2021. The object of the banding is to assess the survival rates of different bird species based on habitat, sex and age. The station will also evaluate the late winter physical condition of migratory birds in their wintering grounds. The work will help create management plans for the conservation of birds throughout their lifespan. Finally, our contribution will also help support an outreach program at Runaway Creek Refuge for local students. We are making plans for the University of Belize Environmental Research Institute to share its experiences at the station with Society members.



## BOARD MEETINGS

The Chapter's Board Meetings, held the first Monday of most months, have been conducted via phone conference or Zoom. The next meeting will be October 5 at 6 p.m.

### See You on Facebook

Just a reminder that Saint Paul Audubon has a Facebook account where anyone can post photos and comments from our upcoming field trips, to Crex Meadows on October 20 to see the cranes, and on November 22 to Brownsville to see the swans. You might also want to post photos and comments about your own birding experiences.

If you have a Facebook account, log in and go to <https://www.facebook.com/SaintPaulAudubon>.

## Announcing the Online Speaker Series for 2020-21

Although precautions with COVID-19 transmission means that we still cannot meet in person for our traditional monthly chapter meetings, we are pleased to present guest speakers every month in a virtual format, as listed below. To watch, go to [saintpaulaudubon.org](http://saintpaulaudubon.org) on the scheduled date and click on the link provided.

**October 8: "Large-scale Elk River Prairie and Forest Restoration,"** featuring Alex Roth and Karen Schik, ecologists with Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR). Alex and Karen will talk about the large-scale restoration work they are doing at the William Houlton Conservation Area near Elk River. The William H. Houlton Conservation Area is a 335-acre property located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Elk rivers in Sherburne County. It was one of the largest undeveloped family-owned riverfront properties between Elk River and Hastings. Since 2014, Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR) has been working with the city of Elk River to protect and restore Houlton into high-quality wildlife habitat.

Now, 180 acres of farm fields and degraded grassland have been converted to diverse native prairie and savanna habitat, and 155 acres of floodplain and mixed hardwood forests are being restored through invasive plant removal and native seeding and planting. This work not only restores important habitat types that have experienced tremendous historical decline, but replaces a monoculture system (primarily soybeans) with a high-diversity native plant community

that benefits wildlife from the ground up.

Now in its third growing season, the expansive prairie is starting to yield results. Reptiles and amphibians are using the newly installed wetland habitats, and pollinator surveys have shown steady increases in abundance and diversity, with 2019 surveys finding 16 species of bumblebees and 25 species of butterflies. Bird surveys are also showing exciting results, as species like grasshopper sparrows and savannah sparrows are now using the restoration.

Join FMR ecologists Alex Roth and Karen Schik to hear about the stunning changes happening at the site, learn about the experimentation and partnerships that are driving conservation research, and see how this restoration is benefitting wildlife, water quality, and the public.



## 2020-21 Online Speaker Series

**November 12: “The Dramatic Evolution of Birds on Madagascar,”** featuring Dr. Sushma Reddy, the Breckenridge Chair of Ornithology at the Bell Museum of Natural History and the University of Minnesota.

Islands are natural laboratories to study how species evolve in novel environments. When species colonize new biogeographic regions, it can expose them to new ecological opportunities and unique selective regimes, which can lead to the evolution of spectacular diversity. Madagascar is a biodiversity hotspot with exceptional species found nowhere else. Here, several lineages of birds have undergone this evolutionary experiment with varying results. Some groups, like the vangas and tetrakas, demonstrate dramatic adaptive radiations of high ecological and morphological diversity similar to classic examples like Darwin’s finches. Other species have persisted for millions of years with little change. Dr. Reddy will outline her work so far in uncovering the remarkable diversity of birds on Madagascar and investigating the biogeographic mysteries of how they got to this island.

In her research, Dr. Reddy investigates biological diversity by using genetic, phenotypic, and geographic data to study the evolutionary history of birds. She collaborates with scientists across the world as she strives to build our knowledge of global biodiversity patterns and aid conservation efforts.

**December 10:** Darby and Geri Nelson, along with Editor John Hickman, will present “For Love of a River: The Minnesota,” which is also the title of a book by Darby Nelson, published in 2019. Together, the three will tell the heartwarming story of how Darby finished the book as he suffered the beginning signs of dementia. His wife, Geri, and John Hickman, the book’s editor, played key roles in getting the book finished and published.

**January 14:** Dr. Sarah Hobbie, Distinguished McKnight University Professor in the Dept of Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior. Her research addresses the influence of changes in atmospheric composition, climate, land use, and plant species composition on communities and ecosystems, and the effects of urbanization on biodiversity and water quality.

**February 11:** Phil Hartley, photographer and naturalist, will present “Hidden Gems of the North Shore.” Phil will use photography to highlight nearly two dozen great birding spots along the North Shore that are somewhat off the beaten path and used more by locals than tourists.

**March 11:** Marcie and Mike O’Connor will present “Prairie Haven – Prairie and Savanna Restoration on an Old Wisconsin Farm. The O’Connors bought the farm in 2000 and decided to restore the land back to the way it was before it was farmed. Marcie will talk about the restoration and Mike will talk about his project of collecting recordings of birds and animals.



*Sickle-billed vanga. Photo courtesy of Dr. Sushma Reddy*

**April 8:** Lynette Anderson, Interpretive Naturalist and Restoration Assistant at Belwin Conservancy, will present “Belwin, Bison, and Birds.” She will talk about the wide variety of habitats at Belwin, most notably prairie and oak savanna, and about the introduction of a bison herd onto their land. Belwin was founded in 1971 and launched Belwin Outdoor Science, a collaboration with Saint Paul Public Schools. Belwin has served more than 400,000 students since then and continues to serve over 10,000 a year, currently through virtual field trips.

**May 13:** Rob Schultz, Audubon Minnesota executive director and conservation team leader.



## Meet Saint Paul Audubon Field Trip Leaders

Continuing in our conversations with field trip leaders in the absence of group events, Linda Whyte and Louise Eidsmoe tell us more about their backgrounds and birding experiences. Enjoy!



### Linda Whyte

As a volunteer bird bander, Linda Whyte has held owls and other raptors in her hands, but she still gets excited with the birds at the feeders in her yard, such as the red-breasted nuthatch that stopped there this fall and seems intent on overwintering. Being interested in birds started early on. "It's all my

Dad's fault," she says with a smile. Her family had a summer home in Connecticut, where her father taught the kids to keep the birds in mind in everyday ways. "For example," says Linda, "he placed the wren houses near the raspberry patch so they had a source of food throughout the seasons. He left the hayloft windows open so the barn owl and barn swallows could come in. He dug a pond and mallards came. He planted a variety of trees to attract a variety of species. I learned about birds from living with them."

Linda's more formal birding started in Minnesota after moving here with her husband in 1969. They were campers and hikers and went to state parks and learned from the rangers, which led to becoming actively interested in the peregrine falcon and bald eagle restoration projects. They also started going on walks with Audubon and MRVAC. "Going birding with a knowledgeable guide is really the way to focus and learn," she says.

Linda leads or co-leads several hikes a year for Saint Paul Audubon but that is only a fraction of the time she spends on behalf of birds. She volunteers for the Raptor Center doing "transport and rescue" of birds in trouble, and for the Carpenter Nature Center doing raptor care. She helps master banders at Hawk Ridge, Sugar Loaf Cove, and Carpenter, and did bird banding alongside an ornithologist working on a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Population Survivorship) project. One of her most memorable experiences is the first time she pulled a great-horned owl from a cage as a Raptor Center clinic volunteer.

"Raptor releases are also exciting," she says, "because you see the result of your work in rescuing and caring for the birds." Many of her most memorable experiences were trips north to release raptors: snowy owls, a northern hawk owl, and a great gray owl in Sax-Zim Bog, and a northern goshawk in Grand Rapids.

Linda's father was also a role model in promoting conservation, including working to stop the use of DDT in their Connecticut town, and Linda has followed in his footsteps here too. She believes it's important to donate and advocate for the causes you care about, volunteer to help with projects, and stay educated about issues. A former elementary school teacher, she is especially concerned about educating the younger generation and getting them involved. "The nonprofits we support need the energy and enthusiasm of our young people," she says.

### Louise Eidsmoe

Although Louise Eidsmoe is not usually listed as the leader for field trips and walks, she often fills a behind-the-scenes role, helping to organize car pools, taking registrations, or being a contact for questions and directions. Louise is a quintessential volunteer and joiner, always ready to help, and she contributes her time generously to the Saint Paul Audubon Society. In addition to helping with field trips, she has served on the Board for 6 years and takes part in many of the Society's special activities.

And if Louise is not present on a walk or at a project, it's probably because she's in Guatemala, where she volunteers for the Lake Atitlan Libraries, a nonprofit that is devoted to increasing literacy in indigenous communities. Louise spends several months most years in Guatemala visiting friends, and that is where she was first inspired to get into birding. "I started going in 1997, and I was seeing so many beautiful birds, such as toucans," she says. "And then I wanted to see a quetzal, which are birds with long green feathers that the Mayans used in the plumes on their headdresses." It took several trips up the volcanic mountain where they were before she saw one. "That is still my most exciting birding experience ever," says Louise.

After retiring in 2006 from the Wilder Foundation, where she worked



for 27 years, Louise set out to learn more about birding. She joined Saint Paul Audubon and started going on a lot of field trips. For beginning birders, Louise also recommends joining MOU (Minnesota Ornithologist's Union) or signing up on their listserv. "I've learned about several birding hot spots this way, including the 180<sup>th</sup> Street Marsh in

Dakota County, one of the few places where you can see yellow-headed blackbirds."

Another issue that Louise cares about strongly is native plants. "We really need to encourage people to grow more native plants in their yards," she says, "and encourage the use of native plants in our parks." She applauds the recent increase in native plantings around Snail Lake, Como Lake, and the Phalen chain of lakes. "You can see the difference this makes," she says. "There are more insects that come around, followed by a greater number and variety of birds."

This summer Louise has been keeping an eye on a pair of trumpeter swans in Roseville's Central Park. An avid walker, she often heads to Central Park and having the swans there makes her walks more fun. "I like to have one or two things in certain places that I want to keep going back to look for. It can really spice up your routine."

## FIELD TRIPS

### Swans and Other Waterfowl

Brownsville, MN

November 22, 2020

Swans galore are the norm just south of Brownsville, MN. Fall migration offers birders an opportunity to decide: trumpeter or tundra swan? Swans and dabbling ducks can be seen from one overlook; less than one mile away is a deep water overlook with diving waterfowl. This is a staging area for one species and is used year around for the other.

From 2-3 p.m. and again from 4-5 p.m. on November 22, Chase and Ed Davies will be at the Brownsville Overlook to talk about what swans and dabbling ducks are in sight, the life histories of the swans, and management challenges of the constantly changing river. Sundown is at 4:37; the sight of swans returning from feeding areas to congregate overnight in Pool 8 is an unforgettable experience and the reason for this late-day meeting.

From 3-4 p.m., Chase and Ed will be at the Hwy 26 overlook, a mile south of the Brownsville Overlook. Diving ducks feed in this part of Pool 8, possible including canvasbacks and mergansers.

Plan ahead and enjoy a "Day Along the Mighty Mississippi River," and post your photos and comments afterwards on Saint Paul Audubon's Facebook page.

TIPS: Swans are dispersed during the day but depending on wind a bunch may be seen feeding along US 61 within sight of the Minneiska Cemetery in MN just south of where the Whitewater River enters the Mississippi River; a roost site can be seen from a viewing platform in a park north of the Buffalo River, just north of Alma, WI.

#### OTHER THINGS TO DO:

The Eagle Center in Wabasha

<https://www.nationaleaglecenter.org/>

Wild Wings Art Gallery in Lake City MN

<https://wildwings.com/>

MN Marine Art Museum in Winona

<https://www.mmam.org/>

Riecks Lake Park, just north of Alma, WI

Colvill Park, Red Wing, MN. Check out some of the pullouts along Lake Pepin

**DIRECTIONS** The time and travel distance are nearly the same whether you travel to Rochester, then use I-90, or if you travel along the river on US 61 in MN or partly in WI to I-90.



*Trumpeter swans. Photo by Jackie Bussjaeger.*

North of LaCrescent MN, I-90 crosses the river between MN and WI. Take US 61 and/or I-90 to MN 16 South; about 3 miles south of LaCrescent, on a curve stay left at junction with MN 26. Stay on MN 26 to the Brownsville Overlook, which is 3 miles south of Brownsville. The Hwy 26 Overlook is another 1.5 miles south of the Brownsville Overlook.

**INSTRUCTIONS** Dress for cool temperatures and probable winds on the river bank, including a warm hat and gloves.

**SAFE BIRDING GUIDELINES** Wear a face mask and observe social distancing. Sharing equipment is not safe, but bring a spotting scope for your own use, binoculars, field guide, or a camera with telescopic lens.

**DIFFICULTY** Overlooks are curbside to parking and are handicap accessible.

**AMENITIES** In the past, Brownsville Overlook had a handicap-accessible portable outhouse.

**REGISTRATION** Please sign in at the sites.

**LEADERS** Chase and Ed Davies, 651 246-9754, [rockybirder@gmail.com](mailto:rockybirder@gmail.com)