



KINGFISHER



Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 49 No. 1

Representing the National Audubon Society
in Greater Minneapolis and Hennepin County

Feb 2000

Upcoming Program

Marathon in the Sky Tuesday, February 1st at 7:30 p.m.

We have watched birds in migration, birds on nests, summer birds, and winter birds. The February meeting will have something different. We will hear about and see on film birds that race and know their way home. yes, racing pigeons, otherwise known as homing pigeons.

Bob Capitola, an avid racing pigeon fancier since 1961, will bring us the eleven minute film, "Marathon in the Sky", narrated by Michael Landon. Bob is the past president of the American Racing Pigeon Union, an organization of approximately 9,000 members nation-wide. He has traveled to Europe twice to represent the United States at the World Olympiad sponsored by the Federation Colombophile International, a gathering of the leaders of racing pigeon organizations world-wide.

In the film, we will see these remarkable birds competing in thousands of races in every continent; flying home at speeds up to 50 mph from 100 to 600 miles. Also included will be intimate glimpses of the life cycles of pigeons, as well as the history of pigeon racing.

Bob will demonstrate race timing devices and aspects of the military use of homing pigeons and related artifacts.

This is a "don't miss" program! There will be coffee and cookies at 7:00 p.m. (feel free to bring some cookies) and the program begins at 7:30 p.m. All this at Mayflower Church located immediately west of Hwy. 35 W at the Diamond Lake Road exit. If you come by bus, get off at Diamond Lake Road and Nicollet, walk one block east to the church. Enter through the parking lot door. See map on page 2.

—Fran Duritsa

New Kingfisher Editors

We have two new Kingfishers editors this year: Wina Mortenson and Paul Kinzer. You may now e-mail your articles to winapaul@earthlink.net. The deadline for the March issue is February 1st.

We would like to thank the past editors for all of their hard work and creativity!



Join Armchair Activists!

Many environmentalists would like to be able to do something to help preserve and restore our surroundings, but find the demands of work, physical limitations or just plain procrastination prevent them from doing what they know they should. National Audubon has an activity that is designed just for these individuals. It is called the ARMCHAIR ACTIVIST.

The concept simply is you receive a letter informing you that this month's issue is ----. You are asked to write a letter (without getting up from your Armchair) to the appropriate official on the issue. Sample letters are provided, so you don't even have to compose your own letter, although it is best if you do. There are usually 5 national, 3 state and 2 local issues that are sent to the Armchair Activist to respond to. There are two free months.

Think of the impact this has on an issue when the appropriate authority receives these letters. Currently the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (ACM) has only 6 Armchair Activists. Our goal is to increase that to 50. If we can attain our goal that would mean if each state chapter had a proportionate number, Governor Ventura could receive over a 100 letters on a statewide issue. This sort of action does have an influence, Minnesota Audubon Director Don Arnosti has stated many times that the reason Minnesota Audubon and National Audubon are so influential is that they can mobilize their members to act. The Armchair Activists are an important link in this mobilization.

How can you sign up? Just drop us a note to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, PO Box 3801, Minneapolis 55403 or send an e-mail to HYPERLINKmailto:bahls001@tc.umn.edu or call 612 572-2333.

National Audubon suggests a donation of \$6/year be made to defray mailing costs. Currently ACM pays \$50 to National Audubon to participate in this program. If you can receive the information via e-mail there would be no need for this donation, since almost no costs would accrue. Also if you feel your budget can't stand the extra expense but want to participate, let us know and ACM will assume the mailing costs. If you would like to simply try it without totally committing, we can put you on a temporary list and you can see how it goes.

The Thrill of the Chase

Birding as a sport is all about going out to find birds. And let me tell you it is an exercise in humility. Birds do not particularly care whether you find them or not. Last week I grew tired of my birdless yard and headed up to the Sax-Zim bog to look for northern specialties. I knew that my chances were slim with the warm and sunny weather. Owls are not fond of sunshine. Nevertheless, I headed off hoping for Evening Grosbeaks, Rough-legged Hawks, Boreal Chickadees, Common Ravens and the like. Well, I did find the ravens and the hawks. I was thrilled to get close enough to the Rough-leggeds to get some decent photographs.

I bring up this trip because while I was cruising every gravel road through the bog I ran into a birder from Texas. He had taken a weeks worth of vacation to come up here to look for northern specialties. He was in utter despair because there were no birds to be found. I pointed out the Rough-legged hawks. He sighed with frustration and replied he had already seen those. Trying to be neighborly I turned over all of my printouts from MNBird which provided locations for recently seen birds. He thanked me and

we drove off in opposite directions. Once out of his sight, I ruefully shook my head-birding is not like going to the zoo. There are no guarantees. I sympathized with his frustration, but frustration is part of the game.

Yesterday I got a dose of both the joy and the frustration. I don't always chase birds reported on the hotline, but I am getting very tired of my birdless back yard. So, I went to chase the Varied Thrush and Carolina Wren which had been reported. I drove to the thrush location only to find that no one was home and the feeders were in the backyard. Trespassing is not something I do. Looking around for options, I wondered if I could get a look at the feeders from the next street over. I drove around the block, parked the car and pulled out my binoculars. Within ten minutes I had the thrush. What a beautiful bird! And, thank goodness for good binoculars.

With success to buoy my spirits I went to look for the wren. I found the yard, and the alley. I parked the car and sat-and sat, and sat. An hour and a half later I still had not seen the wren. With other responsibilities calling me, I sadly put away my binoculars and reminded myself it's not like going to the zoo. Nothing is guaranteed. If it were, what would be the fun?

—Vija Kelly

Web Sites

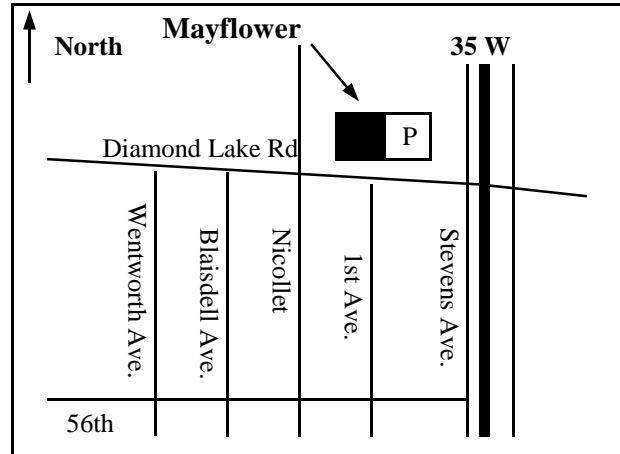
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
www.geocities.com/RainForest/5835

MN Audubon Council
www.audubon.org/chapter/mn/mn/index.html-ssi

National Audubon Society
www.audubon.org

Come to our next program!

DATE: Tuesday, February 1, 2000
TIME: 7:00 p.m. Cookie Social
 7:30 p.m. **"The History of Racing Pigeons"**
AT: Mayflower Church (Lower Level)
 109 E. Diamond Lake Road, Minneapolis
 (35W & East Diamond Lake Road)



Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis 1999-2000 Contacts

President	Tom Mahan	588-5440
Vice President	Phyllis Mahan	588-5440
Treasurer	Kim Halek	427-8656
Secretary	<open>	
Board Member	Jerry Bahls	572-2333
Board Member	Fran Duritsa	822-4822
Board Member	Dorene Scriven	922-4586
Board Member	Tom Stinson	767-8736
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Board Member	Jean Kelly	862-1421
Board Member	Bill Sipe	331-1223
Board Member	<open>	
Birdathon/Big Day Coord	<open>	
Bluebird Recovery	Dorene Scriven	922-4586
Camperships Hunt Hill	Marion Borell	866-1266
Camperships North Woods	Bob Nelson	933-7340
Conservation Chair	<open>	
Education Outreach	Mary Ellen Vetter	561-1761
Field Trips Chair	Terry Brashear	929-1976
Field Trip Leader	Don Wanschura	866-3276
<i>Kingfisher</i> Editor	Wina Mortenson	781-7998
<i>Kingfisher</i> Editor	Paul Kinzer	781-7998
Lending Library	Dorene Scriven	922-4586
Mailing / Membership	Jerry Bahls	572-2333
Park Feeders	David Stamps	374-3609
Programs	Fran Duritsa	822-4822
Publicity	Bill Sipe	331-1223
Sales	Tom Stinson	767-8736
Social	Phyllis Mahan	588-5440
MOU Rare Bird Alert		780-8890



1999 Bluebird Report

Each year about one-third of the 1200 members of the Bluebird Recovery Program (BBRP) send in detailed reports about their bluebird nest boxes. The information is compiled into the Annual Bluebirder's Directory. The sampling gives us an indication of the current bluebird population trends as well as other native cavity nesters using bluebird nestboxes.

After a very favorable 1998, reported bluebird numbers were down in 1999. Until other state and national bluebird organization reports are published, we won't have all the answers for the possible decline, but for the record:

293 Minnesota reports covered 6,697 nestboxes from which hosted 2,112 successful broods. 8,255 eastern bluebirds fledged. Reports to us from BBRP members in other states tallied 3,463 boxes with 3,336 successful broods and 8,460 fledged bluebirds.

Most Minnesota bluebirders put their nestboxes in pairs to accommodate tree swallows as well, so to compare number of bluebirds fledged per box, take into account that only one box of each pair is available to bluebirds. Actually, Minnesotans averaged 3.9 bluebirds fledged per brood, while those out state averaged 2.53 for each successful brood.

These numbers are only a sampling of the total membership. There are at least three times more bluebird trails in Minnesota than were reported.

The 19th Annual Minnesota Bluebird Conference will be held April 15 at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

—Dorene Scriven, Chair, Bluebird Recovery Program

Great Backyard Bird Count

Birdwatchers of all ages, regardless of your skill level, are needed by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count. The data that you collect on the birds in your backyard will help scientists document the status and health of winter bird populations.

The process has never been easier: during the period of **February 18-21, 2000**, count the birds that you see in your backyard, parks or other areas, then enter your data online at BirdSource (<http://birdsource.org>). Participants are to tally the highest number of each species seen at one time (so as not to count the same birds more than once). You may spend as much time as you want recording the numbers and kinds of birds seen or heard on any or all days of the count. Participants will see within hours how their data combine with data from around the continent. Researchers will then have the ability to determine the value of backyards as habitat and evaluate the species dependent on them.

If you do not have computer access at home you may use the online services at a library, school, or ask a friend. You may also contact Tom Mahan, 612-588-5440. The user friendly BirdSource website was developed by the Cornell Lab and Audubon. Wild Birds Unlimited is a major sponsor of this count. For more information go to the BirdSource website: <http://birdsource.org>.

Conservationist of the Year

Marlys and Dick Hjort of Chisago City first joined our chapter's Bluebird Recovery Program in 1983, and reported 25 nestboxes with nine bluebirds fledged. In those days even nine bluebirds was good news in Minnesota. For 17 years the Hjorts have continued - they now fledged over 100 bluebirds a year in Chisago and Anoka counties.

They are probably the most active bluebird members we've every had. Marlys took over the whole mail order department of the bluebird program - for 13 years! They have traveled all over the continent representing our chapter and its bluebird program. Dick and Marlys conduct many programs on bluebirds and bats for classrooms and clubs each year.

But there are many other facets to the conservation work they do, whether it be birds, or animals - or reptiles - or even insects. In their beautiful gardens they have made special bird feeders and homes for Wood Ducks, Purple Martins, bats, turtles, salamanders - you name it.!

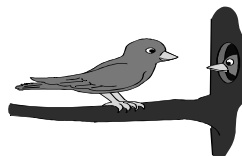
Dick has become so well known for his knowledge of bats - not only how to provide housing for them, but how to convince them to move out of human habitations, that the Minnesota Historical Society has asked him to be their guest at the famous lighthouse at Split Rock Lighthouse. There are now quite a few people nationally working to change people's attitudes about bats, but Dick has gone much further - and even researched the needs for female bat nurseries, different than the regular "bat" house.

Neighborhood youngsters, under Marlys and Dick's tutelage are helping turtles - not just to cross the road without getting run over, but they are marking and protect the egg deposits, (with special stakes with their name on it!), how and when to wait for the eggs. You know about the Wind in the Willows and toad hall? There IS such a thing as a toad house! and Dick has perfected it! Did you know toads can die from botfly larvae borrowing into them? Dick has been saving their lives by delicately removing botfly larvae!

Dick had participated in national studies about Orchard Mason bees - which are just as valuable as honey bees. He has helped develop special nesting boxes for them! You ever wonder where the U.S. Weather Reports get all the information? It comes from people like Dick who monitors a U.S. Weather Station - every morning 365 days a year - at 6 a.m.! Marlys and Dick are active members of Wild River Audubon Society, and volunteers at Wild River State Park. And they probably are into a hundred other conservation projects we don't even know about!

It wasn't hard to reach a consensus to proclaim them our chapter's Conservationists of the Year! A beautiful framed photograph of a bluebird, by Michael Shoop, was presented to them at the chapter's Christmas Dinner December 7, 1999.

—Dorene Scriven



Nov Program Review

On November 9th, about 50 people came to the monthly Chapter meeting to view a slide presentation by Christine Turnbull. Christine spent a summer on the North Slope in Alaska a few years ago, doing research for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Some of you may know her from her current position as executive director of Hunt Hill Audubon Sanctuary.

Several small teams (hers had 4 members) were air-lifted to pre-selected study areas, to survey plant and animal life in order to form a baseline understanding of the area's ecology. The slides, and Christine's words made clear just how lonely, strange and distant this land is. She talked of the almost ceaseless winds that stopped for just a day or so, only to be replaced by countless mosquitoes. She told us about talking on the short-wave in the evenings, sharing with other teams the events of the day.

On one such evening she mentioned that she missed fresh fruit; and the next day, a supply helicopter dropped her team some pears. During their free time, she and the other female team member took a map and went on adventures. They had two goals they wanted to accomplish on these adventures; finding bushes, and seeing a Musk ox. They were successful.

She talked about the work: walking miles to a study plot; then walking up and down it for more miles, counting each bird nest, animal, and plant type; then, yet more miles back to camp; all done over springy tundra and bogs, and through ravines and permafrost ponds. And all alone. It was the kind of experience you're glad to hear about, but just as glad you didn't live through it.

—Paul Kinzer

Audubon Lending Library

It's time to update the Minneapolis Chapter's Audubon Lending Library. The "Library" lists birding books, particularly field guides, that chapter members own AND are willing to loan to other chapter members. The current list covers several countries as well as state and regional field guides. The list simply states the names of the books, by geographic category, and the name and telephone numbers of those willing lenders. All arrangements for loans are made between the person wishing to borrow a book and the book's owner.

Please send to Dorene Scriven by e-mail (scriv001@tc.umn.edu) or snail mail (2044 Cedar Lake Parkway, Mpls, MN 55416) the titles, authors, a short description, and types of books (paperback field guide, hardcover, etc.) that you would be willing to lend another chapter member for their next birding trip! Specific coffee-table books can be listed too, but large general bird books, books on behavior, etc., would make the list too long.

Questions? Call Dorene at 612-922-4586.

Dec Program Review

December 7th was a double-treat day for the Minneapolis Chapter. If you weren't at the Mayflower Church that evening, you missed (1) a marvelous repast: a vast assortment of sliced ham, turkey and cheeses provided by the chapter combined with a sharing of do-it-yourself dishes and dessert, enhanced by the Christmas table settings by Fran Duritsa and crew. (2) a splendid and unusual talk on wood ducks by Roger Strand of New London, MN.

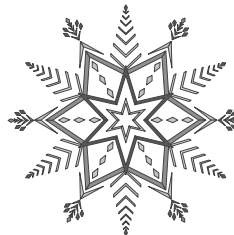
Most of us have attended at least one wood duck program before. Roger Strand, a retired surgeon turned wood duck researcher, gave us quite a different perspective. We learned many new facets about these beautiful box nesters. Accompanying his talk were full size samples of the free-standing, six-foot-pole-mounted boxes he uses AND a special cone-shaped predator guard below the box which stops raccoons and other climbing predators. [Eliminating predation makes a world of difference].

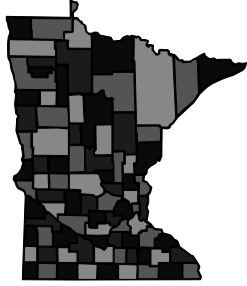
In the last two years, new literature has appeared condoning wood duck boxes erected within sight of each other, with the contention that egg "dumping" will result in loss of all the eggs. Not so! Through his own research and that of others comes the knowledge that older wood duck hens will eventually take over eggs dumped by a young female as well as her own. The senior hen is quite capable of incubating and successfully fledging even up to 30 eggs in one box (which may have been laid by several younger hens). Did you know that the MAJORITY of successful clutches contain eggs from more than one hen? It's also possible that 16 eggs can be laid and hatched by a single older female? On the other hand, a young hen is quite likely to lay eggs in three different boxes and not incubate any of them herself.

Without banding or radio-tagging, but with several years of careful observation, individual woody hens can be recognized by their facial patterns: the amount of white around the eyes and in front of the bill and on the head increases with age, and is slightly different with each individual. The older hen's behavior adds another clue (just like humans: self confidence and ability to persevere!).

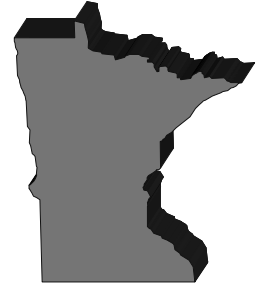
A delightful addition was Roger Strand's own video with fresh narration. We watched old, white-masked hens lead 20 or more genetically diverse ducklings (and sometimes a mixture of wood duck and merganser chicks!). Now we can identify the mix by markings (the merganser chick heads are dark), and also by how they feed in the water (surf or dive).

We gained a new perspective on the delight of raising Wood Ducks and the rewards of being able to watch the newly hatched chicks fledging from their box.
Thank you, Roger Strand!





Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis Programs & Field Trips February - May 2000



Guests are welcome!

Programs

Programs are held the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m.
Mayflower Church, 35W & East Diamond Lake Road, Minneapolis

Feb 1 "The History of Racing Pigeons" Bob Capitola will present on the history and aspects of Racing/Homing Pigeons. This presentation includes the video "Marathon in the Sky" with Michael Landon.

Mar 7 "Natural History Photography" John Gregor will discuss the values of nature photography with the use of slides of the photography of Coldsnap Studios and the natural history photography of the northern plains and forests.

Apr 4 "Hummingbirds of California" Don Mitchell is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota. He will present a slide program on the many delightful hummingbirds found in California.

May 2 "Fox Sparrows: Is One Species Enough" Ann Kessen will explore the methods used to determine whether a group is a special species by looking at diversity among researchers.

Field Trips

Field trip details such as meeting times and directions,
are included in *Kingfisher* issues dated the month of the trip.

March

11 Mississippi River Valley (Bald Eagles)

April

TBA Salt Lake

TBA Coon Rapids Dam, 7:30a.m.

29 Spring Council Meeting Field Trips

May

6 Rice Creek

7 Wood Lake Nature Center

13 Old Cedar / Bass Ponds

18 Springbrook Nature Center

20 Tom Crosby Park

TBA Big Day Bird Count

TBA Spring Lake Park

TBA Louisville Swamp



Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
PO Box 3801
Minneapolis MN 55403

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KINGFISHER
February 2000



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Calendar of Events

February

- 1 Chapter program, 7:30 p.m.
"The History of Racing Pigeons"
Mayflower Church
- 8 Chapter Board Meeting, 7:00 pm
Anwatin School
- 18-21 Backyard Bird Count (see page 3)

March

- 7 Chapter program, 7:30 p.m.
"Natural History Photography"
Mayflower Church
- 11 Bird Walk, 7:30 a.m.
Mississippi River Valley
- 14 Chapter Board Meeting, 7:00 pm
Anwatin School

This schedule is also available at our Internet address:
www.geocities.com/RainForest/5835

Board of Directors meet at Anwatin School, Minneapolis.
All are welcome! Call the president for details.



National Audubon Society Chapter Membership Application

- Yes, I'd like to join!* Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local chapter at the special introductory rate of \$20! Please send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to the address below.
- As a senior citizen or student, I am able to join for only \$15!

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____
STATE _____ ZIP _____

Send this application and check to:

National Audubon Society
Chapter Membership Data Center
PO Box 51001
Boulder, CO 80322-1001



LOCAL CHAPTER
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
PO BOX 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403
Chapter Code: **CM02**
9M99