



KINGFISHER



March 2003

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 52 No. 2

Representing the National Audubon Society in Greater Minneapolis and Hennepin County

Wood Ducks, Part 3...



In the fall, after my first observed jump, I noticed a squirrel going in and out of the Wood Duck's nesting box. After this occurred several times, I thought it would not be a good idea to have a squirrel become accustomed to using the box, since they are known to eat duck eggs. I consequently removed the box and stored it in my garage for the winter.

In late February, I took it out and to my surprise there were no mouse nests in it. I proceeded to clean it out and put in fresh wood chips—I like to use the hamster/rabbit bedding from the local pet store. I reattached the box to the 1¼-inch electrical conduit I use. I noted that the base of the pole was split, probably from freezing water. I made a mental note to check it periodically so it wouldn't give way in a storm.

The ducks arrived almost on schedule and the annual process began anew. Again, I observed that the female seemed to have a lot more trouble getting into the hole during her early visits and during the egg-laying period. The female was always escorted to the box by her mate who would linger in the trees nearby while she laid her egg. When that was accomplished, they both flew off. This was a good time to get some nice photos of the male in his full plumage. The male is not there just to linger while the female lays an egg—I noticed on a couple of occasions he would sound an alarm when I would enter the yard.

During the summer, my niece had come to stay with us while she finished some college work. I got her interested in the Wood Ducks by having her watch for the female during the evening. She became very interested in the whole process and became more aware of the birds around her. I don't know if I turned her into a bird watcher, but she is definitely much more interested in the environment.

Once during the egg-laying period, I was watching when a second female entered the box. The box rocked a bit on its pole and after about 5 minutes, one of the females left. I thought it was the second one since I think the male that arrived with her also left. About ten minutes later, the other female left. I thought there would probably be a little more genetic diversity in this brood.

As fate would have it, we had to be out of town about the period that I estimated the eggs would hatch and much to

March Program

Do you think that urban wildlife consists of pigeons, house sparrows, starlings and maybe Canada geese and Mallards around the lakes and ponds? Come to our March program and find out that there is a lot more to watching wildlife in the Twin Cities area.

For those who don't have the opportunity or ability to jump in the car and drive off to the Sax-Zim Bog or other birdy places, Vija Kelly will present a slide program on "Watching Wildlife in the Twin Cities Area." Starting with the backyard and then progressing to city boulevards, the chain of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, as well as the Three Rivers Park District and the nature centers in the area, Vija will tell you what kind of birds and animals you might see and when.

According to Vija, you can become a witness of the great migrations of swans, ducks, warblers and other birds just by taking regular walks close to your own home. You may also be able to see beavers and river otters, as well as squirrels and rabbits. If you maintain bird feeders and a "bird friendly" yard, you can observe the most intimate details of bird life.

Please join us at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 4th at Mayflower Community Church for an enjoyable program presented by Vija Kelly, our own Chapter's monthly columnist and notable wildlife photographer.

my chagrin, we were! When we returned, I watched for a couple of days (I was still reluctant to look in the box for fear of disrupting the female) then looked in the box and observed the flattened ping pong balls characteristic of the hatched egg membranes. I counted 10 membranes, possibly 11. All of the eggs had hatched.

Again, I had assisted Nature in providing 10 or 11 young ducklings for us to observe. The thrill of doing so was just as intense the 3rd year as it was the first!

—Jerry Bahls

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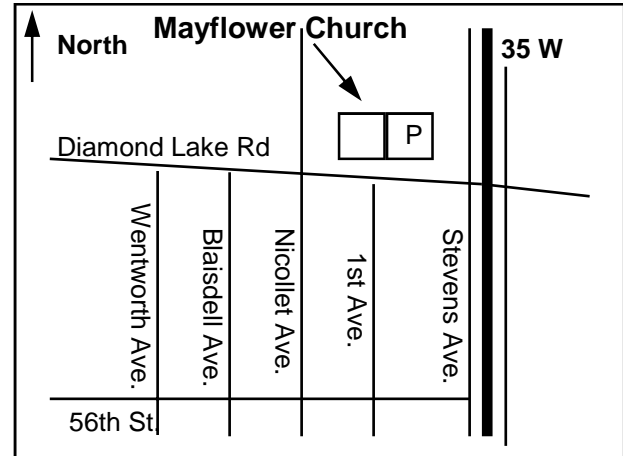
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www.audubon.org

Come to Our Next Program!

DATE: Tuesday, March 4th "Watching Wildlife in the Twin Cities Area" by Vija Kelly

TIME: Program begins at 7:30 p.m.

AT: Mayflower Church (Lower Level)
109 E. Diamond Lake Road, Minneapolis
(35W & East Diamond Lake Road)



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bahls001@tc.umn.edu

Doing What Comes Naturally

This is a story about some ospreys. The title comes from a conversation I had with one of my birding friends. We were discussing the proliferation of literature instructing humans on how to perpetuate the species. She commented that such material was unavailable in her day, and perhaps unnecessary because the species had managed to perpetuate itself for some time by “doing what comes naturally.”

The ospreys that I have first been observing—and then following—with regular reports by phone and e-mail seem to have a little trouble doing what comes naturally. Just as we humans need our teen years and the explorations of puppy love and other crushes to learn the ways of mature love and family-rearing, these ospreys seem to have to learn the behaviors of courtship and mating to bring off a successful nesting which seems to come naturally to more mature birds.

The story of these ospreys really began when the nest on the platform they were attempting to use blew down in a storm. The mature pair that had used the nest decided to relocate across the bay, where they successfully built a new nest and proceeded to set up housekeeping and other domestications.

The vacant nesting platform was an invitation to young birds to claim it as their own. The going was not so easy—at first the activity on the platform was sporadic at best. The male would bring a stick and place it on the nest platform and then go off and just sit around for awhile. Sticks would drop off the platform. The young osprey ignored them and would go off to find another. Other males would come by and chase the young bird off the platform. Although a female would occasionally show up and sit on the platform, not much interaction occurred between them.

The young osprey's next maneuver was to try and impress the female with his ability to provide for her: he went fishing. Now, fishing is as difficult a task to learn as courtship and matrimony. The bird was not always successful, but he was successful enough to catch a fish and fly around with it. It is common for ospreys to hang onto their fish and feed on it for some time. In this case, however, it was pretty obvious as to what the bird was trying to do.

He was, to some degree, successful. The female came around more often and joined him on the nesting platform. Then the stick gathering for the nest got very serious. Even some of the dropped sticks were picked up and added to the nest which was beginning to take some sort of shape on the platform. More importantly, the young male was able to convince the female of the seriousness of his intentions and frequent copulations began to cement the pair bond.

Alas, the road to mature love was not an easy one. The old osprey couple across the way still seemed to have a vested interest in their old nesting platform. Every once in a while, the older male would fly in and harass the younger



one. His intimidation frequently chased the young osprey off of the nest. As of this writing, successful nesting has not yet been assured.

We think of the lives of birds as following set patterns, somewhat inevitable and based on instinct. The tale of the young ospreys reminds us that birds, too, have to learn; that success is not automatic, even when you are a top predator in your environment. For birds of prey, as well as many others, the early years are hard—there is so much skill that must be developed. Once the skills have been learned and the successful behaviors rewarded then, perhaps, the birds can have an easier time of it. Some birds never make it that far.

—Vija Kelly

Audubon Summer Youth Camp

It's not too early to begin thinking about summer youth camp at the Audubon Center of the North Woods near Sandstone, MN. If you know of a young person between the ages of 10 and 15, please share the following information with them. Our chapter sponsors \$500 towards North Woods camper scholarships—contact Bob Nelson at 952/923-7340 to apply. Level I sessions fill up fast so contact Bob soon!

Level I “Wild Things: Ecology of the North Woods”

Ages: 10-12**Dates July 13-18, 2003**Cost: \$450

Get close to snakes, turtles and frogs in the wildlife classroom as you learn to understand the needs and unique characteristics of our wild neighbors. Nature activities include bird identification and banding, beaver studies and aquatic studies. Also experience day hike adventures, Native American crafts, campfires and an overnight campout. Included is a visit to the Wildlife Science Center, Duluth Zoo and the Great Lakes Aquarium.

Level 1 “Adventures – Ropes, Rocks and Rapids”

Ages: 12-14**Dates: July 5-11 or July 21-27**Cost: \$450

Spend an adventurous week on our skywalk ropes course and climbing wall. Learn to use wilderness navigation and whitewater canoeing skills. Experience the fur trade history of Minnesota and learn outdoor survival skills. Develop camping skills during an overnight canoe trip on an historic fur trade route. These exciting activities will help develop self confidence and teamwork, while exploring the beauty of the North Woods.



Two additional sessions are offered for campers with advanced skills: **Level II “Aqua Adventure Week”** and **Level III “Sea Kayaking in the Apostle Islands.”** For more information about these sessions, please see the Audubon Center's web site at www.audubon-center.org

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March 2003



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- 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.
- Yes, I'd like to join!* As a senior citizen or student, I am able to join for only \$15!

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PO BOX 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403
Chapter Code: **M02**
7XCHA

Calendar of Events

March

- 4 Chapter program, 7:30 p.m.
"Watching Wildlife in the Twin Cities Area"
by Vija Kelly
- 11 Chapter Board Meeting, 7:15 p.m.
- 21 First day of spring!

April

- 1 Chapter program, 7:30 p.m.
"Monarch Migration" by Professor
Karen Oberhauser
Also, Optical Swaptical prior to program

See you on the birding trails!

All are welcome to the Chapter Board Meetings!
Call President Tom Mahan for details...