



Debra L. Pilger  
Director, Environmental & Equipment Services  
Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board  
3800 Bryant Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55409

November 1, 2010

Dear Deb:

The Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis appreciates the opportunity to submit the attached set of recommendations as input to the development of a long-term management plan for the Thomas Sadler Roberts Bird Sanctuary.

These recommendations reflect decades of local ornithological observation and expertise by many Audubon Minnesota members. Consistent with the current conservation priorities of the National Audubon Society, key priorities relate to the growing challenges of habitat loss, invasive species, human population pressures, and a changing climate. We hope Audubon's recommendations provide a framework in which to effectively address these significant challenges.

The overarching goal of revitalization efforts should be to maintain the natural and historic character of the Roberts Bird Sanctuary. It's important to reexamine the original goals of the Sanctuary in order to preserve its identity, while recognizing the changing needs of the community. This management plan will help preserve intimate and natural experiences for visitors, prevent incremental shift in utilization over time, and protect an irreplaceable resource.

ACM looks forward to an ongoing collaboration with MPRB to develop strategies to preserve the legacy of the Roberts Bird Sanctuary and protect this Important Bird Area.

Sincerely,

Jim Egge  
President, Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis



**Priorities and Recommendations  
for the  
Revitalization of Roberts Bird Sanctuary**

*Submitted to:*

Deb Pilger

Director, Environmental & Equipment Services

**Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board**

(MPRB)

*Submitted by:*

Jim Egge, President

**Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis**

(ACM)

November 1, 2010

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## Introduction

Roberts Bird Sanctuary includes about 13 acres of woodland and wetland north of Lake Harriet and south of Lakewood Cemetery. Part of Lyndale Park, this area was officially designated as a bird sanctuary in 1936 by Christian Bossen, the third Minneapolis Park Superintendent. In 1947, the sanctuary was named for Thomas Sadler Roberts, a physician who became a professor of ornithology at the University of Minnesota and director of the University's Museum of Natural History (now known as the Bell Museum of Natural History). As part of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Important Bird Area (IBA), Roberts Bird Sanctuary is now recognized by the National Audubon Society as important habitat for the conservation of bird populations, both migrating and resident. (The Appendix includes information about IBAs.)

The Chain of Lakes IBA is used by hundreds of species that migrate between the northern forests and the southern states and Neotropics. As one of the few regional parks with a dense understory, Roberts Bird Sanctuary is used by migrants that need such habitat, including Connecticut and Mourning warblers. Among the species recorded in the past but not in recent years are Prothonotary Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Red-headed Woodpecker. (The Appendix includes lists of birds seen in and around the Roberts Bird Sanctuary.)

The Sanctuary provides feeding and breeding ground for woodland species such as Great Crested Flycatcher and Indigo Bunting, and birds that specialize in woods-wetland edge such as Warbling Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow Warbler. It also provides refuge for predator species including Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Screech Owl, Cooper's Hawk, and Broad-winged Hawk, which have larger territories but need secluded habitat for roosting and breeding.

Like many natural areas in the park system, Roberts Bird Sanctuary has been considerably altered by non-native invasive species, urbanization and historical uses of the land. Both the wetland and woodland areas within the Sanctuary are not regenerating well due to the competition imposed by non-native invasive species, primarily reed canary grass and buckthorn (both glossy and common). Although small pockets of native shrubs and wildflowers remain, the value of the sanctuary as bird habitat is diminishing, especially in the wetland areas. This decline diminishes the experiences of visitors, since fewer types and smaller numbers of birds use the Sanctuary.

Although large-scale efforts will be needed to remove invasive species in the Sanctuary, such efforts must be timed and scaled to minimize disruption to bird populations. For example, buckthorn and other invasive shrubs and saplings should be removed during the late fall and winter, when damage to the habitat and disturbance of birds is minimal. Large trees should not be removed, since some species (particularly Pileated and other woodpeckers) use large dead trees. Invasive tree and shrub saplings should be removed so that as these species die off, they will be replaced by native species.

The Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis fully supports efforts to revitalize this Important Bird Area. The following pages propose priorities and management activities consistent with the goals of a bird sanctuary, in which the overriding goal is to enhance and conserve the natural environments that sustain bird populations. As a partner in this revitalization project, ACM looks forward to ongoing collaboration with MPRB in planning and executing management activities that will preserve the legacy of Roberts Bird Sanctuary and ensure its sustainability for future generations of birds and people.

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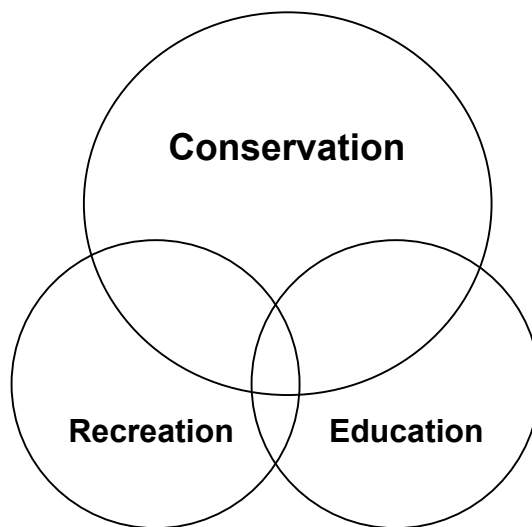
## Roberts Bird Sanctuary Management Goals

ACM believes that four basic goals can be established for a bird sanctuary to provide a context in which to establish priorities and create a plan to revitalize Roberts Bird Sanctuary:

1. Protect birds and bird habitat.
2. Provide the public with a quality wildlife-watching experience.
3. Educate the public about birds, their role in ecosystems, and their conservation needs.
4. Demonstrate effective bird conservation practices, including systematic monitoring.

These goals involve three broad and overlapping areas of opportunity to revitalize the Sanctuary:

- *Conservation* is the keystone of efforts to revitalize the Sanctuary, in order to ensure that the site can continue to provide sustainable quality habitat as an Important Bird Area.
- *Recreation* includes activities that support and do not disrupt or compromise the health and sustainability of this IBA.
- *Education* includes both onsite and offsite activities that promote learning about birds and the natural environments that sustain bird populations.



Three Components of Revitalizing Roberts Bird Sanctuary

Ongoing systematic monitoring in each of these areas is an important component of effective bird conservation practices. Tracking changes and quantifying results of management activities will help evaluate effects and direct future activities.

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## Conservation

**Goals:** Protect birds and bird habitat and demonstrate effective bird conservation practices.

### **Revitalization Activities:**

- Enhance existing natural wetland and woodland ecosystems in order to improve bird habitat for both migratory and nesting birds.
- Proactively manage invasive non-native and aggressive native tree and plant species.
- Increase biodiversity by introducing appropriate native plant species.
- Document bird and plant species.
- Minimize disruption to migrating and resident birds through appropriate planning, timing and scaling of management and other activities.

### *Highest priorities (activities with the most immediate impact):*

- Remove non-native invasive species, including common and glossy buckthorn, reed canary grass, non-native honeysuckle, garlic mustard, mulberry and Amur maple.
- Plant shrubs and trees that provide high value (food and shelter) to birds, leaving dead trees for habitat.
- Repair the fence to control access by people and other large mammals (including deer).
- Enforce prohibitions against activities that are inconsistent with conservation goals, including biking, dogs, fires, building structures, and team sports.

### *Other short-term priorities (years 1 – 3):*

- Schedule quarterly meetings with Audubon and neighborhood associations to discuss and plan conservation activities, identify funding opportunities, and collaborate on implementation.
- Strengthen the role of volunteers to assist with ongoing conservation efforts, e.g., through invasive species removal events, bird counts, and a Legacy Steward program (in which volunteers monitor and maintain targeted small areas through invasive species removal).
- Identify and seek various funding sources to achieve conservation goals.
- Identify and work with bird conservation projects, such as the Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas.
- Survey trees, shrubs and other plants, as well as animals (especially deer and other large animals).
- Monitor and manage tree diseases.
- Test soil and water quality to identify potential issues.
- Eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides within the Sanctuary.
- Establish and maintain a buffer zone around the Sanctuary.
- Document and report conservation activities and use by birds.

### *Long-term priorities:*

Continue to:

- Consult with Audubon and neighborhood associations to identify, fund and implement appropriate conservation activities.
- Effectively utilize various funding sources to achieve conservation goals.
- Pro-actively monitor and manage invasive and aggressive species within and around the Sanctuary.
- Plant high-value native shrubs and trees, leaving dead trees for habitat.
- Protect a buffer zone around the sanctuary.
- Document bird and plant species and track changes over time as a way to inform future practices.
- Monitor and document effects of conservation activities on birds and adjust activities as needed.

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## Recreation

**Goal:** Provide the public with a quality wildlife-watching experience.

### **Revitalization Activities:**

- Limit entry to current designated east and west entrances.
- Create and maintain a limited system of unpaved, low-impact and low-maintenance trails.
- Limit access to designated areas that will not disturb birds and bird habitat; discourage off-trail and nighttime use.
- Enhance and increase signage related to access to and movement through the Sanctuary, without detracting from looking natural,
- Allow activities that do not disrupt or compromise the health and sustainability of the IBA, including birding, walking, nature observation, drawing, photography, and traditional cross-country skiing on ungroomed trails.
- Enlist volunteers to publicize and supervise recreational activities, including classes and tours.

### *Highest priorities (activities with the most immediate impact):*

- Design and implement a limited and low-maintenance trail system that supports conservation goals and minimizes construction and disruption.
- Improve signage by consolidating existing signs to clarify allowed and prohibited activities in a bird sanctuary. (“Take only pictures, leave only footprints.”)
- Continue to prohibit activities incompatible with Sanctuary conservation goals, such as dog walking, biking, and competitive and/or team sports.

### *Other short-term priorities (years 1 – 3):*

- Schedule quarterly meetings to consult with Audubon and neighborhood associations to plan and manage recreation activities.
- Publicize allowed recreational activities of bird watching, walking, nature observation and drawing/photography.
- Recruit local birders and artists to offer classes on birding and drawing/photography.
- Erect a crosswalk with stop sign and painted stripes at the west entrance to improve safety for pedestrians crossing the road.
- Repair and/or move damaged sections of boardwalk through the wetland.
- Document and report recreational activities.

### *Long-term priorities:*

Continue to:

- Maintain a limited system of unpaved, low-impact and low-maintenance trails.
- Limit recreational activities to those that do not disrupt or compromise the health and sustainability of the IBA.
- Document and report recreational use.
- Monitor and document effects of recreational activities on birds and adjust activities as needed.

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## Education

**Goal:** Educate the public about birds, their role in ecosystems, and their conservation needs.

### **Revitalization Activities:**

- Enhance and expand utilization of the visitor shelter as a central area for education and events.
- Provide educational materials about the Sanctuary at the visitor shelter.
- Plant native plants near the visitor shelter to educate people about food sources for birds.
- Expand the use of MRPB and Audubon websites as vehicles for education related to Roberts Bird Sanctuary.
- Identify and inspire the next generation of stewards by reaching out to schools, groups and neighborhoods.
- Work with the University of Minnesota and other local higher-education institutions to recruit interns for conservation and research projects.
- Sponsor educational events by local experts and educators.

### *Highest priorities (activities with the most immediate impact):*

- Expand and maintain displays about birds in the visitor shelter.
- Develop and distribute a customized brochure/map that provides historical, ornithological and botanical information and explains how the Sanctuary can be used for recreation.
- Work with local schools to offer educational programs for students and to recruit volunteers for special projects related to the Sanctuary.
- Contact the University of Minnesota and other local higher-education institutions to recruit interns for conservation and research projects.

### *Other short-term priorities (years 1 – 3):*

- Continue to offer birding classes and tours.
- Develop materials about birds for guided and self-guided tours.
- Provide a log in which people can write descriptions of their observations.
- Recruit local educators, birders and naturalists to design learning activities and materials, such as a self-guided hunt for specific birds and interpretive materials that draw people to see wildlife and plants they might otherwise miss during their visit.
- Plant a ‘bird magnet’ garden near the visitor shelter to educate visitors about food sources for birds.
- Document and report educational activities.

### *Long-term priorities:*

Continue to:

- Create and maintain displays, literature and websites for educational purposes.
- Consult with Audubon and neighborhood associations to plan and manage educational activities.
- Recruit schools and colleges/universities for educational programs and research projects.
- Expand educational materials and events to encompass native plants and wildflowers.
- Monitor and document effects of educational activities on birds and adjust activities as needed.

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## APPENDIX

### Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

The Important Bird Areas Program (IBA) is a global effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. By working with Audubon chapters, landowners, public agencies, community groups, and other non-profits, Audubon endeavors to interest and activate a broad network of supporters to ensure that all Important Bird Areas are properly managed and conserved.

Important Bird Areas, or IBAs, are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of bird. IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. IBAs may be a few acres or thousands of acres, but usually they are discrete sites that stand out from the surrounding landscape. IBAs may include public or private lands, or both, and they may be protected or unprotected.

To qualify as an IBA, sites must satisfy at least one of the following criteria. The site must support:

- Species of conservation concern (e.g. threatened and endangered species)
- Restricted-ranges species (species vulnerable because they are not widely distributed)
- Species that are vulnerable because their populations are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome
- Species, or groups of similar species (such as waterfowl or shorebirds), that are vulnerable because they occur at high densities due to their congregatory behavior.

Identification of a site as an IBA indicates its unique importance for birds. Nonetheless, some IBAs are of greater significance than others. A site may be important at the global, continental, or state level. The IBA identification process provides a data-driven means for cataloging the most important sites for birds throughout the country and the world. The use of a hierarchical classification system further helps to establish priorities for conservation efforts.

The Important Bird Areas Program helps birds by setting science-based priorities for habitat conservation and promoting positive action to safeguard vital bird habitats.

The identification of IBAs is an important first step in larger bird conservation initiatives. IBA inventories provide a scientifically defensible method for prioritizing conservation activities and allocating limited conservation dollars to ensure the maximum benefit to birds.

Conservation activities at IBAs reflect the unique circumstances of each site (e.g. size, location, and ownership). For example, public areas may be conserved by open-space acquisition and by working with land managers to improve habitat management practices for key species of birds. Private lands may be conserved through public-private partnerships such as easements, and through landowner education.

Source: <http://web4.audubon.org/bird/iba/>



## Birds Seen in Roberts Bird Sanctuary

		Status	Breed	Frequency	Notes
1	Wood Duck	S	b		has bred in sanctuary
2	Mallard	S	b		
3	Green Heron	S		r	
4	Sharp-Shinned hawk	M		r	
5	Cooper's Hawk	S	b		increasing in recent years
6	Broad-winged Hawk	S			
7	American Kestrel	R			
8	Common Pheasant	R		r	
9	Sora	S			
10	Solitary Sandpiper	M		r	
11	Killdeer	S	b		has bred in Peace Garden
12	Rock Dove	R			
13	Mourning Dove	S	b	c	
14	Black-billed Cuckoo	M			
15	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	M		r	
16	Eastern Screech Owl	R			
17	Great Horned owl	R	b		
18	Barred Owl	R	b		
19	Long-eared Owl	M		r	
20	Common Nighthawk	S			seen overhead
21	Whip-poor-will	M		r	
22	Chimney Swift	S		c	seen overhead
23	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	S			
24	Red-headed Woodpecker	S	b	x	
25	Red-bellied Woodpecker	R	b		seen nesting in tree cavity
26	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	M			
27	Downy Woodpecker	R	b	c	
28	Hairy Woodpecker	R	b	c	
29	Northern Flicker	S			numbers reduced
30	Pileated Woodpecker	R		r	now rare
31	Olive-sided Flycatcher	M		r	
32	Eastern Wood-Pewee	S	b		
33	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	M			
34	Alder Flycatcher	M		r	
35	Willow Flycatcher	S		r	
36	Least Flycatcher	M		c	

### Key

Status: R: resident all year; S: summer (and migration); M: migrant; W: winter (and migration)

Breed: b: probably breeds

Frequency: c: common; r: rare; p: presumed present; x: extirpated, seen in past but probably gone

## Birds Seen in Roberts Bird Sanctuary (continued)

		Status	Breed	Frequency	Notes
37	Eastern Phoebe	S	b		
38	Great Crested Flycatcher	S	b		
39	Blue-headed Vireo	M			
40	Yellow-throated Vireo	S			
41	Philadelphia Vireo	M			
42	Red-eyed Vireo	S	b	c	
43	Warbling Vireo	S	b	c	
44	Blue Jay	R	b	c	
45	American Crow	R	b	c	
46	Tree Swallow	S	b		seen overhead
47	Barn Swallow	S		c	seen overhead
48	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	M		c	
49	Golden-crowned Kinglet	M		r	
50	Cedar Waxwing	S		c	
51	Winter Wren	M			
52	Marsh Wren	S		x	
53	House Wren	S	b	c	
54	Gray Catbird	S	b	c	
55	Brown Thrasher	S		r	numbers reduced
56	Common Starling	R	b	c	
57	Veery	M			
58	Gray-cheeked Thrush	M			
59	Swainson's Thrush	M			
60	Wood Thrush	M		r	
61	Hermit Thrush	M			
62	American Robin	R	b	c	
63	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	S			
64	Black-capped Chickadee	R	b		
65	Red-breasted Nuthatch	M		r	
66	White-breasted Nuthatch	R	b	c	
67	Brown Creeper	M			
68	Blue-winged Warbler	M		r	
69	Golden-winged Warbler	M			
70	Tennessee Warbler	M		c	

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## Birds Seen in Roberts Bird Sanctuary (continued)

		Status	Breed	Frequency	Notes
71	Orange-crowned Warbler	M			
72	Nashville Warbler	M			
73	Northern Parula	M			
74	Yellow Warbler	S	b		
75	Chestnut-sided Warbler	M			
76	Magnolia Warbler	M			
77	Cape May Warbler	M			
78	Yellow-rumped Warbler	M		c	
79	Black-throated Blue Warbler	M			more common in Fall
80	Black-throated Green Warbler	M			
81	Blackburnian Warbler	M			
82	Pine Warbler	M			
83	Palm Warbler	M			
84	Bay-breasted Warbler	M			
85	Blackpoll Warbler	M			
86	Cerulean Warbler	M		r	
87	Black-and-white Warbler	M			
88	American Redstart	S		c	
89	Prothonotary Warbler	M		x	
90	Ovenbird	M			
91	Northern Waterthrush	M			
92	Kentucky Warbler	M		r	
93	Connecticut Warbler	M		r	
94	Mourning Warbler	M			
95	Common Yellowthroat	S	b		
96	Hooded Warbler	M		r	
97	Wilson's Warbler	M			
98	Canada Warbler	M			
99	Pine Siskin	M			
100	American Goldfinch	R	b	c	
101	Common Redpoll	W		p	
102	House Finch	R	b	c	
103	Purple Finch	M		r	
104	White-winged Crossbill	W		p	

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**Birds Seen in Roberts Bird Sanctuary (continued)**

		Status	Breed	Frequency	Notes
105	Fox Sparrow	M			
106	Song Sparrow	S	b	c	
107	Lincoln's Sparrow	M			
108	Swamp Sparrow	S	b	c	
109	Harris's Sparrow	M		p	
110	White-crowned Sparrow	M		r	
111	White-throated Sparrow	M		c	
112	American Tree Sparrow	W		p	
113	Dark-eyed Junco	M			
114	Chipping Sparrow	M	b	c	
115	Vesper Sparrow	S		x	
116	Field Sparrow	S		x	
117	Eastern Towhee	S		r	
118	Scarlet Tanager	M			
119	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	S	b		
120	Northern Cardinal	R	b	c	
121	Indigo Bunting	S	b		
122	Baltimore Oriole	S	b		
123	Red-winged Blackbird	S	b		
124	Rusty Blackbird	M		r	
125	Common Grackle	S	b	c	
126	Brown-headed Cowbird	S	b		
127	House Sparrow	R	b	c	

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## Birds Seen in Lake Harriet and/or Nearby

		Status	Breed	Frequency	Notes
1	Red-necked Grebe	M		r	
2	Horned Grebe	M			
3	Double-crested Cormorant	S			
4	Ruddy Duck	M		r	
5	Tundra Swan	M			
6	Canada Goose	S	b	c	seen over sanctuary
7	American Wigeon	M			
8	Gadwall	M		r	
9	Green-winged Teal	M			
10	Northern Pintail	M		r	
11	Blue-winged Teal	M			
12	Northern Shoveler	M			
13	Canvasback	M		r	
14	Redhead	M		r	
15	Ring-necked Duck	M		r	
16	Greater Scaup	M			
17	Lesser Scaup	M			
18	Common Goldeneye	M			
19	Northern Pintail	M		r	
20	Bufflehead	M			
21	Hooded Merganser	M		r	
22	Red-breasted Merganser	M			
23	Common Merganser	M			
24	Great Blue Heron	S			
25	Great Egret	S			
26	Black-crowned Night Heron	S	b		
27	Turkey Vulture	S		r	
28	Bald Eagle	S		r	seen over sanctuary
29	Red-tailed Hawk	S			seen over sanctuary
30	Peregrine Falcon	S		r	
31	American Coot	M		c	
32	Spotted Sandpiper	M			
33	Ring-billed Gull	S		c	seen over sanctuary
34	Herring Gull	S		c	seen over sanctuary
35	Bonaparte's Gull	M		r	
36	Caspian Tern	M			
37	Forster's Tern	M			
38	Pacific Loon	M		r	one record
39	Common Loon	M			
40	Sage Thrasher	M		r	one record

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