

Coulee Birder

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Audubon Society

Website: <http://couleeaudubon.org/>



November-December 2005

Events

Coulee Region Audubon meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the third Wednesday of the month in the lower level of the Ho Chunk building, 724 Main Street, La Crosse.

November 16 -

In May and June of 2004, Noel Cutright celebrated his 30 years of running Breeding Bird Surveys by doing what many said was impossible. He set out to run 30 BBSs in 30 consecutive days within the boundaries of four Midwestern states. He planned this as a fundraiser for bird conservation - in this case all of the money raised went to the Important Bird Areas (IBA) program.

At this month's meeting, Noel will present a slide show of pictures he took during his campaign as well as a talk describing his fascinating trip, the birds that he found and the results that he achieved.

December 17 -

The annual Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, December 17. Rick Kinzie is again organizing the event. Volunteers are welcome as we have not had sufficient volunteers in the last few years to cover some areas that we would like to include. If you have a few hours or all day, contact Rick at (608) 734-3136 or at huey@mwt.net. He will be assigning areas to individuals or groups to cover.

The count will be followed by a pot luck dinner at 5:30 at the home of Mike and Laura Furr, W5324 Cty MM, La Crosse. Directions: Take Hwy 14 to MM. Go up the big hill. Their home is on the left near the top of the hill. Their lane makes an acute angle from MM and through a dense pine plantation.

Please bring a dish to pass. Both the count and pot luck are open to non-members.

January 18, 2006 - Annual Meeting, pot luck and slide show.

President's notebook

Seeking views on flyway festival

BY BOBBIE WILSON

Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival—The Next Generation. The Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival may be approaching a crossroads in its short existence.

One of our proudest recent accomplishments as a chapter has been Coulee Audubon's active involvement in the two past birding festivals, with a third annual event planned for this coming May. Our organization's nonprofit status and our mailing permit have enabled the festival's steering committee to produce and advertise this regional nature-oriented event that many have come to en-

joy. Coulee Audubon is also heavily represented on the steering committee, with more than two-thirds being chapter officers and members. Another crucial key to the success of this festival, however, has been the support of National Audubon's Upper Mississippi River Campaign, in the form and person of one Bonnie Koop. Without her energy and time on event-related tasks—especially tracking registrations, dealing with prospective and registered attendees, and acting as communications central—this otherwise volunteer-led event might have

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Audubon trash pickers clean up along Interstate 90

By MARK WEBSTER

A beautiful, sunny day greeted us on Saturday, Oct. 22nd for our Fall Adopt-a-Highway Trash Pick up. Seven dedicated volunteers spent about 2 1/2 hours, on what was forecasted to be a cold, wet, raw day (the weatherman can be wrong like this anyday) picking up litter in beautiful sunshine and temperatures that reached the low 50s. The area was along a two mile stretch of Interstate 90 & Highway 61 from Dresbach to Dakota, MN. A total of 36 bags of trash were

collected and left along the side of the highway for the Minnesota DOT highway crew to pick up. Because we had seven people helping, we even had time to pick up the median strip! Along with the usual mix of soda cans & plastic bottles, beer cans & bottles, and assorted paper wrappings & plastic bags, were two types of trash that may indicate several trends, one good and one bad.

There appeared to be a large increase in the number of individual milk contain-

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We need your contributions of material for the Audubon newsletter. Please send your suggestions for articles, news of events and other things birders need to know. Deadline for copy is the third Friday of the month preceding publication. The next deadline will be Dec. 16. Send information to: dskoloda@earthlink.net or by mail to Newsletter, W6396 Riverview Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650.

Feeder Watch project begins in November

Project Feeder Watch begins in November and people of all ages and skill levels are welcome to participate.

David Bonter, of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, leader of the Feeder Watch program, says that more than 10,000 participants across North America have

made the project part of their winter feeder watching. Their participation helps scientists monitor bird populations.

For example, last year's season showed the inexorable march of an invasive species, the Eurasian Collared Dove.

According to Bonter, a few years af-

ter being introduced into the Bahamas, the dove, a native of the Indian sub-continent, has spread over nearly two-thirds of the continental United States.

To learn more about Project FeederWatch or to register, log onto www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw or call the lab toll-free at (800) 843-2473.

Cost of participation is \$15.

In other news, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has announced that the definitive reference on more than 700 species of North American birds, some 18,000 pages of the Birds of North America are now available via The Birds of North America Online at <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu>.

Cost of the service is \$40 per year. The service includes video clips that show the bird behaviors you are reading about, recordings of bird vocalizations and image galleries with close-up views of plumages, nests, eggs and habitats,

Interested persons can go to <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/BNA> or call (866) 924-7362.

Audubon president calls for action on river management

Letter to the NY Times Editor by John Flicker, President of National Audubon Society August 31, 2005

"New Orleans is paying a deadly price for decades of mismanagement of the Mississippi River. But New Orleans didn't cause the problem alone, and it can't solve it alone. The Louisiana coast is sinking and vulnerable because so much of the natural sediment needed to replenish coastal wetlands is trapped upstream by 29 dams and thousands of miles of levees from Minnesota to the gulf. What little sediment reaches Louisiana is then routed away from the coast by an Army Corp of Engineers navigation canal. The solution requires changing how the entire river is managed. That takes cooperation from 10 states, and leadership from Washington."

New species of dragonfly discovered in Wisconsin

By WisDNR

MADISON – Six years after the original specimen was collected along the banks of Wisconsin's Eau Claire River, the scientific community has officially recognized a new species of dragonfly discovered by a state Department of Natural Resources biologist.

A medium-sized insect with an impressive name, *Ophiogomphus smithi* (pronounced smith-eye), is named after its discoverer, William Smith, a biologist with the DNR Bureau of Endangered Resources. Originally thought to be an example of an already-named dragonfly species, the determination of *O. smithi* as a distinct species was confirmed when two other entomologists in the mid 1990s recognized important differences in the

specimen collected by Smith in Eau Claire County in 1989. The 1.8-inch dragonfly also goes by the common name of sand snaketail.

This is the second new dragonfly species discovered by Smith who collected an undecided species in the St. Croix River in 1989. The 1989 find was eventually named *Ophiogomphus susbehcha* in 1993 with a common name of Saint Croix snaketail. "Susbehcha" is Lakota for dragonfly.

Dragonfly larvae in Wisconsin are found in almost any reasonably clean water body with permanent or seasonal open water. While many common showy species of adult dragonflies are associated

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collapsed under the weight of the work involved.

Now Bonnie's attention is being directed to other projects. The geographic area for establishing and mapping birding trails along the river—a key part of her work on the Campaign—has been enlarged. It makes sense that her role in birding festivals should be to inspire their creation and help get them "fledged." But now this La Crosse area festival is like the baby bird that has to learn to fend for itself. In future years, can we manage without Bonnie? Would we hire someone to do her work? How would the event remain affordable? Should we simplify the event so it is manageable by volunteers? What about partnering with another agency?

The steering committee would welcome input and ideas from our chapter. The Board will deal with this topic, among others, at its next meeting, at 6:00 on Wednesday, November 16, prior to the regularly scheduled Coulee Audubon meeting. Members with thoughts to share or who want to learn more are welcome to attend. Next, festival steering committee members will join us at February's board meeting to work on this some more. The Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival is a great event that seems to accomplish worthwhile awareness and conservation objectives. Whatever form it may take in the future, your active involvement will help ensure its success. Let us hear from you!

Details cited in process of confirming sighting of Ivory Billed Woodpecker

NEWSWISE - On April 25, 2004, University of Arkansas researcher David Luneau accidentally kept a video camera running as his canoe drifted through a bayou in the Big Woods of Arkansas — and recorded an ivory-billed woodpecker. The video, blurry because the recorder was on auto focus, was the main piece of evidence featured online in an April 25 Science Express paper claiming the rediscovery of the woodpecker, once thought to be extinct. While skeptics have refuted the video, claiming that it shows a pileated woodpecker, Cornell University researchers are standing firmly by the video as evidence of the existence of the ivory-billed woodpecker.

Ken Rosenberg, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Conservation Science Program, offered a frame-by-frame analysis of Luneau's video at the American Ornithologists' Union Meeting at the University of California-Santa Barbara, in August.. Rosenberg re-

viewed the researchers' rationale for claiming that the video captured an ivory-billed woodpecker. Though blurry, the video shows the bird's outlines and black and white coloring, he said.

The main difference between ivory-billed and pileated woodpeckers is in the placement of the black and white coloring, especially on the wings, and accounts for why an untrained eye may easily mistake a pileated for an ivory-billed woodpecker. On an ivory-billed woodpecker, white feathers run along the trailing back edges of its spread wings, while black feathers trail along a pileated woodpecker's wings, from the bird's body all the way to its wing tips. Rosenberg showed frames from the Luneau video, indicating that only white feathers were visible along the broad trailing edge of both the underwing and upperwing. To show the differences, the video frames were compared with blurry frames of pileated woodpeckers.

Also, using models of ivory-billed woodpeckers, scenes were reenacted with an out-of-focus camera, revealing a striking similarity to the actual video. Frames from a video of a pileated woodpecker model were shown for comparison.

Other evidence is that in one segment of the Luneau video, a large bird partially peeks out from behind a tree trunk, showing a portion of its white wing. Researchers from the Lab of Ornithology placed a stuffed ivory-billed woodpecker on the actual tree where the video was shot to show that the white corresponds to the white outer wing of the perched bird. Still, skeptics claimed this could be the underwing of a pileated woodpecker extending from behind the trunk and revealing white feathers. To counter this claim, Lab of Ornithology members in Arkansas physically measured the tree trunk that appeared in the video, Rosenberg explained. They also measured a roosting cavity from a 1935 photo of an ivory-bill. Using the actual tree trunk and cavity, which the lab has in its possession, the researchers were able to take the relative measurements from the images and make absolute measurements of the bird's wings.

While the distance from the pileated woodpecker's wrist (part of the ulna, one of the wing bones) to tail-tip measures 29 centimeters (11.4 inches) on average, the wrist-to-tail tip distance in the video reaches a full 35 centimeters (13.8 inches), which is in the upper range for ivory-bills. The size of the wing ruled out that the frames were of a pileated woodpecker, Rosenberg said. When one audience member asked about sightings of pileated woodpeckers with extra white on their wings, Rosenberg said that he and his colleagues were aware of molting pileated woodpeckers that lose some of their black feathers, revealing more white. But, he added, he has never heard of such molting occurring symmetrically, as the wings in the Luneau video appear.

"We think the body of evidence confirms the presence of at least one ivory-billed woodpecker," said Rosenberg.

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ers; you know, the plastic 8 to 12 oz. type sold at convenience stores, or more recently in school vending machines. Maybe this is indicative of an increase in milk consumption by people who litter or, more seriously, an increase in milk consumption by young people who are choosing milk instead of soda. The second trend deals with a rather large quantity of empty cold-medicine packages found. Specifically, these were empty packages of pseudoephedrine used to make Methamphetamine. This is the first time these have been found to my knowledge, and not a good trend.

It was a good morning though, and our heads weren't always looking down for the next discarded piece of litterbug delight. Looking up into the bright sunshine, 6 Bald Eagles were soaring above the Minnesota bluffs. At least two appeared to be juveniles. One juvenile looked like it had a large snake in its talons, the

snagged reptile swaying back and forth as the eagle flew low over the treetops. There was also one roadside ash tree with 4 Cedar Waxwings perched on its leafless branches, basking in the sunshine. On the other side of the tree, 4 White-breasted Nuthatches were busily probing for food in the rough bark. Behind that tree was a large conifer filled with Red-winged Blackbirds singing away, grouped up, ready for migration, and enjoying some lovely October sunshine. I think we all enjoyed being out there on such a beautiful day and doing something good for the environment. I know I did!

Thank You to the other volunteers who helped out (several for the first time): Tim Collins & his granddaughter Jenna; Denise Edmunds and her daughter Patty; John Schuppel; and my energetic wife Marilyn. It was a true group effort.

Mark Webster, Coordinator



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with small ponds, cat-tail/bulrush marshes, and sedge marshes, several species prefer specific types of wetlands and bodies of water. Wisconsin has an excep-

tional stream dragonfly fauna. A few are found in seasonal ponds that fill with spring rains and dry up over the summer.

“They’re an important part of a stream ecosystem,” says Smith.

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