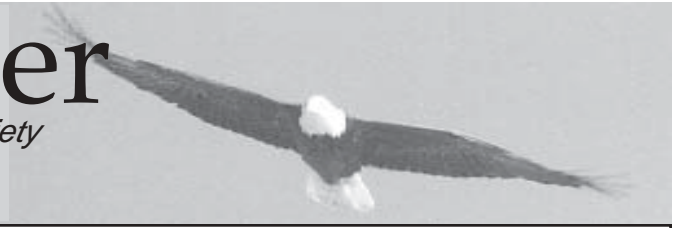


Coulee Birder

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Audubon Society
Website: <http://couleeaudubon.org/>



September-October 2005

Events

NOTE: Coulee Region Audubon meetings starting this fall will be 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.

Upcoming speakers are:

September 21 - Eileen Kirsch, a USGS biologist whose current work concerns community ecology and habitat relationships of breeding birds on the Upper Mississippi River and wet meadows of the Upper Midwest.

Her prior work includes community ecology of prairie small mammals, habitat selection and productivity of interior least terns, distribution and ecology of Double-crested Cormorants.

October 19 - Kevin Kenow has worked at the Upper Mississippi Environmental Management Center in the Wildlife Ecology section since 1987.

His research interests include common loon, waterfowl and wetland ecology, vegetation response to water level management, and development and application of radiotelemetry techniques for avian studies.

His current work involves assessing the ecological risk of mercury exposure to piscivorous wildlife, documenting vegetation response to pool-wide drawdowns on the Upper Mississippi River, and studying the migration ecology of common loons and tundra swans.

Field trips

Saturday, Sept. 17. Hillside Rd. RR signal tower up the big hill north out of Reno, Houston Co., MN. Goal is to watch hawks, mostly kettles of Broad-winged Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Red-tailed, and maybe a Peregrine Falcon riding the winds along the bluffs. Passing passerines also possible. Park along

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President's notebook

Chapter finances in good shape

By Bobbie Wilson

Welcome to a new year with Coulee Region Audubon Society. I hope your summer activities were relaxing—or exciting, if you prefer—and included lots of good birds!

Last year at this time some of you were answering the call to make a local membership contribution to keep the club afloat. Your responses were generous and timely! Add to that the successful fundraisers that Coulee Audubon members produced in conjunction with this year's Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival, and we're in better financial shape than we have been for a number of years.

Audubon Adventures

One of the good things our chapter can afford to do again is to sponsor "Audubon Adventures" for area teachers and their classes. Audubon Adventures is an environmental education program for children in grades 3 to 6. Developed by professional environmental educators, the program presents basic, scientifically accurate facts about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. The aim of the program is to produce enlightened and environmentally aware citizens for the future. Since its inception in 1984, over 7 million

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Preparations underway for another bird festival

Planning has begun for the third annual Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival set for May 19-21, 2006.

Headquarters for this year's festival will be the OmniCenter in Onalaska. Tentative plans for the festival are for a mix of bird hikes, birding by boat tours, seminars and evening events similar to the successful format of the first two festivals.

The festival again will feature a Sunday morning railcar trip through the Tiffany Bottoms, a popular feature of this year's event

Coulee Region Audubon will again

use the rail event as a fund raiser for the chapter, according to Bobbie Wilson, chapter president. Wilson is a member of the planning committee that has been meeting monthly for more than two years to develop the three-day annual event. Craig Thompson is chair of the committee. Others include Gretchen Skoloda, Ann Blankenship, Bonnie Koop, Steve Houdek, Tim Collins, Barb Zeman, Fred Leshner, Anita Doering, Peg Zappen and Dave Skoloda.

New to the schedule this year will be a Friday evening social event aboard the Julia Belle Swain.

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 Oct. 21. Send information to: dskoloda@earthlink.net or by mail to Newsletter, W6396 Riverview Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650.

Peregrine falcons back on the bluffs here

We received the following note earlier this summer from George Howe, who is the conservation specialist for the Mississippi Valley Conservancy. George lives on the Minnesota bluffs just across the river from La Crosse. His family has placed an easement on a bluff parcel that includes an historic peregrine nesting site. -ed.

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Today was a tremendous day for conservation in the Coulee Region that we must celebrate!

This morning, four Peregrine Falcon chicks were banded on the bluff-top at the Howe Family's "Hawk Ridge Nature Preserve" on the Mississippi River Bluffs just a few miles from La Crosse.

This is the very first Peregrine Falcon nesting success on private land in the State of Minnesota and only the 3rd site statewide to produce young since the 1950's.

Falcons were last documented at this site in 1956. Shortly thereafter, they nearly became extinct due to pesticide toxicity and are still listed as endangered species in the State of Minnesota and many other states.

The Hawk Ridge Preserve land including the nesting site, is protected by a conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust, a Blufflands Alliance partner of the Mississippi Valley Conser-

vancy of La Crosse, WI.

Attached are pictures of the chicks as they were banded and measured atop the bluff- enjoy!

George Howe



Peregrine falcon chicks are banded at a site on the Mississippi River bluffs across from La Crosse.

Photo courtesy of George Howe

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the gravel road. Bring a lawnchair & binocs. Leave UWL Cowley Hall parking lot at 7:30 AM or drive to location on your own whenever. Depart the site about 12N and stop for lunch at The Copper Penny in Brownsville.

Sunday, October 30 (Daylight Savings Time ends?). Goal is to scope out Tundra Swans & waterfowl including large numbers of Canvasbacks on Pool 8 of the Mississippi R. between Brownsville & Reno, Minnesota. A new viewing platform is to be installed this

fall by the USFWS near Mile Marker 11 along Hwy. 26 south of Brownsville & we will check it out. Meet at The Copper Penny in Brownsville at 12N for soup & crackers or about 1PM at the "old" deck for scoping.

Watch & listen for news of a November outing and the December Christmas Bird Count & potluck possibly on Dec. 17.

Fred Leshner
CRAS Field Trips Organizer

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youngsters have participated in the program.

The topics for 2005-06 school year are: The Nature of Spiders, Return to Turtle Creek, Dragonflies and Damselflies, and The Watery World of

Waterbirds. If you know a teacher here in the Coulee Region who would enjoy using these materials in his or her classroom, let me know, and I'll pass their contact information to Artis Aasen, chapter education chair. Thanks!

Bird feeding tip: Watch the sugar

Kent Mahaffey, manager of the San Diego Wild Animal Park's famous Bird Show, has more than two decades experience working with captive birds. When asked about offering jellies to wild birds, such as orioles, he said, "In general, any food that exceeds the balance of sucrose in a bird's natural diet is suspect." Natural nectars contain 12% to 30% sugars, while jams and jellies are more than half sugar. Unfortunately, a bird that develops a strong liking for jam or jelly may focus on those foods and may give up searching for needed protein-rich insects. This behavior can be especially damaging to fledglings or young birds that still need protein for development. Kent

See **SUGAR**, page 4

Wolf role cited in maintaining bird species

Newswise — Willow trees, riparian willow warblers and beaver dams once were bountiful in an area near the town of Banff, Alberta, Canada. But once wolves left this area, elk grew more plentiful, browsing heavily on young willows. Today, there is little trace of beavers, and sparrows have replaced the warblers in what is now a grassland meadow. These

profound changes were driven by the absence of the wolf, a top predator. That's the compelling finding of the paper, "Human Activity mediates a Trophic Cascade caused by Wolves" that appears in the August issue of *Ecology* by Mark Hebblewhite (University of Alberta) and colleagues.

Top-down effects of predators are

called trophic cascades. While studies have demonstrated this phenomenon in aquatic environments, the Hebblewhite et al study is one of the first terrestrial, large-scale studies that so clearly exemplifies the strong role played by a top predator.

In the mid-1980s, wolves naturally recolonized the Bow Valley of Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada. The nearby town of Banff has been steadily growing and prevented wolves from fully recovering in areas surrounding the town while wolves fully repopulated adjacent areas. Hebblewhite and his fellow researchers were able to examine the effects of wolf exclusion on elk—wolves' preferred prey—on plants such as willow, which are favored by the ungulates, and on other species that depend on the willow habitat.

Hebblewhite and his colleagues found that in the low-wolf area of Bow Valley elk populations were 10 times as high as in the high-wolf area.

"We also found that as elk populations climbed, active beaver lodges declined, probably because beavers could no longer find sufficient trees with which to build their dams," says Hebblewhite.

In addition, songbirds, such as the American Redstart, which is strongly dependent on willow, also vanished from the wolf-excluded area.

Although the presence of people in the Bow Valley area also kept away other large predators, such as grizzly bears, Hebblewhite and colleagues believe their large-scale natural experiment demonstrates a wolf-driven cascade effect. Only wolves were completely eliminated from the study area and subsequently recovered. Bears and other large carnivores were never completely extirpated. In addition, the researchers traced elk deaths in the high-wolf area to wolves, which also supports the major role wolves have in this trophic cascade.

"Our study findings strongly bolster the use of conservation and restoration strategies which are based on the key role of large predators," says Hebblewhite.



Kirtland's recovery noted

In mid-July, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources announced the annual survey results indicating that the state's population of the federally Endangered Kirtland's Warbler is increasing.

Biologists, researchers, and volunteers counted as many as 1,415 singing males during the 2005 official census period. This count exceeds the 1,348 males observed in 2004, and it represents the largest number of Kirtland's Warblers recorded since this monitoring program began. The census was started in 1951 and has been conducted annually since 1971. The lowest numbers of warblers were recorded in 1974 and 1987, when only 167 singing males were found.

In addition, three singing males were discovered in Wisconsin this year.

Cooperation between the Michigan DNR, U.S. Forest Service, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Michigan Department of Military Affairs in attempting to restore the warblers' nesting habitat has been heartening.

This report is from the SWAROVSKI BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN, which gives information, communication, and inspiration on birds, wildlife, and nature. The E-bulletin is distributed as a joint effort between Swarovski Optik of North America (SONA) and the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA).

You can access an archive of past E-bulletins on the NWRA site:

<<http://www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html>



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Mahaffey summarized this situation by stating, "Birds developed the way they did by adapting to the environments in

which they lived and the foods that sustained them. We do our best for them when we stick as closely as possible to

their natural diets." An alternative to jelly: grapes, a natural food.

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