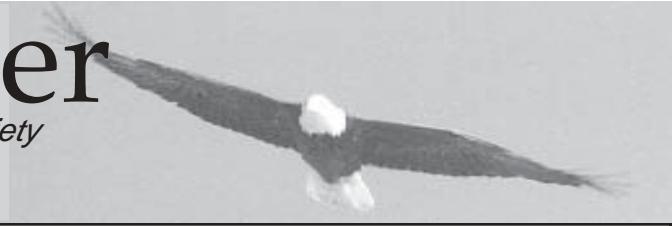


Coulee Birder

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



January-February 2005

Events

Note change of meeting places!

January 19 - Annual Meeting, Pot-luck and Member Slide Show. Our usual meeting room at the library is not available in January or February. The January meeting will be at the Ho-Chunk Nation Headquarters at 724 Main Street, La Crosse, just west of the library. The meeting room in the lower level has been reserved and will be open after 5:45.

Bring a dish to pass and your own dishes and silverware. Coffee will be provided.

Also, bring your best bird and nature slides to share with the group.

February 16 — The February meeting will be held at the U.S.G.S., Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center on French Island. The address is 2630 Fanta Reed Road. Take I-90 to Exit 2 and go north on Fanta Reed Road until you see the sign for the U.S.G.S.

The gate to the facility will be open for us. One of the research scientists with a background in ornithology will be the speaker. We will have a brief tour of the facility as well. The meetings will include updates on the 2005 Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival to be held May 13 -16.

May 13-15 — Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival.

Bird counters tally 50 species

Christmas Bird Count volunteers reported 50 species and 6,598 birds during the Coulee Region Audubon Society count on Dec. 18.

Count totals were provided by 21 persons on the Wisconsin side of the river and 8 on the Minnesota side.

President's notebook

Resolved: Help the birds!

By BOBBIE WILSON

Have you made some new year's resolutions? I'd like to offer one more. This year, how about doing something for the birds?

Yes, you could add a bird bath or put up a nest box. Or, you could do something less tangible but more meaningful in the long run. Take a child bird watching. Join a conservation-oriented organization. Write to your legislators about an issue affecting wildlife and the environment.

For more ideas, stay in touch with the Coulee Region Audubon Society. We'll need help throughout the year with activities that can make a difference. From representing the club at Earth Day, to spring and fall highway cleanup, to joining the Sandhill Crane Count or the Christmas Bird Count, your active participation makes our club strong. And the birds will benefit.

Have a happy new year, enjoying birds and other wildlife. And do something that'll help the birds. If not us, who will?

Second annual bird festival taking shape for May 13-15

By DAVE SKOLODA

A Coulee Audubon-sponsored rail car birding trip will be incorporated into the second annual Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival to be held in the La Crosse/Onalaska area May 13-15.

Coulee Audubon will organize and staff the event scheduled for Sunday as a fund raiser for the club. The tour takes birders by open rail car through the Tiffany Bottoms natural area.

The rail car trip has proved popular in past years, so early signups are recommended to be assured of a seat, according to Bobbie Wilson, Coulee

Audubon president.

Other events at the festival include guided hikes at Perrot State Park, Rush Creek State Natural Area, Beaver Creek State Park in Minnesota, The Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge, and Myrick Marsh.

Birding trips by motor boat, popular at last year's festival, will be offered again this year as will the backwater paddle trip on Saturday morning.

Bird banding has been added to the schedule this year in hopes of attracting families. Seminars on optics, digiscoping, Mississippi River issues, bird identifica-

See FESTIVAL, page 2

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 February 17th. Send information to: dskoloda@earthlink.net or by mail to Newsletter, W6396 Riverview Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650.

Some birds sing, “UV Light Up my Life”

By University of Wisconsin-Madison news service

MADISON - Two related South American species of birds, difficult to distinguish with the human eye, use ultraviolet light to differentiate between themselves, according to a zoologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The markings on the two sibling species of mountain tanagers, which live and often flock together in the northern Andes of Colombia and Ecuador, are remarkably similar, with vibrant blue trim on the wings and tail plumage, black on the head, and bright yellow on the crown and underparts. The biggest difference is in the coloring of the plumage on their backs: The black-chinned mountain tanager is olive-colored, whereas the blue-winged mountain tanager is black. But in the field this difference is difficult to see.

“They’re similar-looking - even to an experienced birder,” says Robert Bleiweiss, associate professor of zoology at UW-Madison. “I hate to admit this, especially as I’m a very experienced birder, but even I had trouble with them.”

When he examined the birds under UV light, though, he found that the difference between the two species is clear.

The back of the black-chinned mountain tanager displays high plumage reflectance under UV light, whereas the back of the blue-winged mountain tanager has low reflectance. The birds can see this distinction because of a special receptor in their eyes that allows them to see UV light outside the usual visual perception of humans.

“But it’s one thing to say that they differ,” Bleiweiss says. “The second step is, is it important to interbreeding?”

To answer that question, he examined other populations of blue-winged mountain tanagers in which the plumage color on the back of those birds ranges from black to the olive color. And these birds, despite the variation, interbreed.

Under UV light, he discovered that all of the blue-winged mountain tanager populations had a similar low reflectance, no matter what color the plumage on their back was in visible light.

This would imply that the birds use the visible cue of UV plumage reflection to distinguish between species to mate, Bleiweiss says.

And this difference between the species, he says, brings them up to the standard of differences between other tanagers that live together, which are known for their distinctive and brightly colored plumage. The visual similarities between the two distinct species had long been a

curiosity for birders.

“It’s the bird standard that matters,” Bleiweiss says. “We can look at it with better technology, but we won’t see exactly what birds do. That would be the ultimate goal - to get into the birds’ brain and see the way that they do.”

The next challenge, he says, will be to find out if this pattern of differences in UV reflectance is true in other sibling species.

“We might learn that sibling species are not so similar,” he says. “They just differ in ways we find difficult to detect.”

Banded hawk completes odyssey from Mexico to Iowa

McGregor, IA—On October 7, 2004, Jon Stravers and David Kester of Audubon’s Upper Mississippi River Campaign captured an adult female Cooper’s Hawk at their raptor banding station near Effigy Mounds National Monument on the Mississippi River. The hawk had been previously banded as a second year bird on October 14, 2000 near the town of Jalapa in Veracruz, Mexico. The distance between these two banding stations is approximately 1,750 miles.

This is an amazing journey. Mortality rates of most raptors are significant during the first year - as much as 70%. Likely born in 1999, this is a bird that has survived five migrations to the tropics and back.

This story has an interesting personal note in that Ernesto Ruelas, director of Pronatura, a conservation organization in eastern Mexico, banded this particular Cooper’s Hawk in 2000. Ruelas first came to the U.S. in 1989 and worked with Jon Stravers in the Goshute Mountains of Nevada at a raptor banding station operated by Hawkwatch International. For more information, contact Jon Stavers at hawk2@alpinecom.net.

FESTIVAL from page 1

tion and birding in the tropics will also be included. A birder’s social will be held Friday evening and a dinner Saturday evening. The keynote speaker Saturday evening will be Paul Baicich, community leader for Swarovski Optics.

The festival represents a cooperative effort of many local environmental organizations, including Audubon. Planners try to make the event as useful as possible for all levels of birders. In addition to volunteers from these organizations, Barb Zeman, of Zeman Graphics, Onalaska, has contributed her skills

toward creating promotional materials for the festival.

The event is also meant to make local tourism and public officials aware of the great potential for eco tourism in the region as well as highlight the importance of a healthy habitat for birds.

For more information on the birding festival go to the website at couleeaudubon.org/festival05. Or call 608-784-2992 to request registration materials.

Audubon calls Ron Kind “conservation hero”

Washington, DC, Tuesday, December 7, 2004 - The National Audubon Society today praised the work of Congressman Ron Kind (D-WI) for his unwavering support for the protection of America's migratory birds. The organization praised Congressman Kind's leadership in sponsoring two important measures that will do much to protect America's birds, and today named him a “Conservation Hero”.

“Ron Kind's conservation values have made him a leader among lawmakers,” said John Flicker, president of the National Audubon Society. “The bills he has sponsored will restore protection to America's migratory birds and provide them with the places they need to survive; he is truly an Audubon Conservation Hero.”

“The Wisconsin Audubon Council, representing 14 chapters statewide, is very pleased that Representative Kind has

championed these 2 measures,” said Karen Etter Hale, first vice president of the Wisconsin Audubon Council. “They will further our work with the 140 partner Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI), which is working statewide and beyond on all issues related to conservation of birds and their habitat.”

Congressman Kind sponsored an amendment to H.R. 4114 (the Migratory Bird Treaty Reform Act) that reauthorizes the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, a five-year program to restore habitat for the birds that return to America every spring. A multi-million-dollar fund will protect and restore bird habitat not only here in the United States, but also in Latin America and the Caribbean, where more than 5 billion birds of 500 different species spend the winter months. These species comprise a vast array of many well-known birds, such as ducks and other waterfowl; raptors; war-

blers; thrushes; shorebirds such as sandpipers and plovers, as well as hummingbirds; orioles and others. Unfortunately, the survival rate for many migratory birds is relatively low, due primarily to loss of habitat on breeding and wintering grounds and along their migratory routes.

With the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act set to expire in 2005, Congressman Kind's work to get the act reauthorized ahead of schedule sends a very positive message to the nearly 50-million birders in the United States that this is a program that works and deserves to be expanded. According to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, American birders spent more than \$40 billion on Bird Watching in 2001 alone, and birdwatching has created more than 850,000 jobs for American workers. Congress recently approved \$4 million for the program in the 2005 omnibus spending bill.

“Through the establishment of a matching grants program to fund projects that promote the conservation of these birds in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean, Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act provides a comprehensive approach to address the varied and significant threats facing the numerous species of migratory birds,” stated Rep. Kind. “Most importantly, the program has a proven track record of reversing habitat loss and degradation and of advancing innovative management and habitat restoration strategies for the broad range of neotropical birds and I intend to work hard to get it reauthorized in the 109th Congress.”

Congressman Kind has also been a leading sponsor of H.R. 4114, an act that will restore the full weight of the Migratory Bird Treaty to its intended beneficiaries: America's migratory birds. This bill was introduced to reverse the effect of Hill vs. Norton, a decision that applied Migratory Bird Treaty Act protection to destructive introduced birds, which are decimating America's migratory bird populations. Hill vs. Norton made it impossible to control invasive species such as the European Starling, English Sparrow, and Mute Swan.

DNA bar codes used in species ID

Newswise — The task of identifying Earth's estimated 10 million species has daunted biologists for centuries - fewer than two million have been named. Using a technique called DNA barcoding, researchers at Rockefeller University and two Canadian institutions have uncovered four new species of North American birds. The findings are reported in the September 28 issue of Public Library of Science (PLoS) Biology.

The result is an important step toward proving that the sequence of a short stretch of DNA — a so-called DNA barcode — can be used genetically to identify known species and to find new ones.

“A uniform system to use DNA to identify all plants and animals would allow many more people — from environmental regulators to nature lovers — to identify organisms,” says Mark Y. Stoeckle, M.D., guest investigator in the Program for the Human Environment at Rockefeller University.

“For humans, birds are probably the easiest species to identify. They're big, they're colored differently, and they sing different songs. Yet even in that easy to

identify group, there are hidden species,” says Stoeckle.

As the cost of DNA sequencing goes down, Stoeckle and other proponents of DNA barcoding envision developing a hand-held device that amateur naturalists and others could take outdoors for species identification.

In the course of their research, the scientists found two distinct COI barcodes within each of four species — solitary sandpiper, eastern meadowlark, marsh wren and warbling vireo. This discovery indicated that what had been identified as one species, in these cases, was actually two.

Based on traditional species identification methods such as morphology and behavior, some taxonomists had already suspected that these species should be split. The DNA barcode data confirmed the suspicions.

For further information on DNA barcoding and the International Consortium for the Barcode of Life, go to:

<http://barcoding.si.edu/>

<http://www.barcodinglife.org>

<http://phe.rochester.edu/BarcodeConference/>



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Peregrine lingers on US Bank building in La Crosse

Audubon's Fred Lesher says that as of Dec. 2, a Peregrine Falcon was still using the sign on the U.S. Bank building in La Crosse as a perch.

Peregrines reappeared this spring and

summer in downtown LaCrosse for the first time since May of 1996.

Lesher said that a nest box was placed on the St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral this fall, so that returning Peregrines

will have two nest site choices next spring-- the cathedral and the box that was placed earlier on the U.S. Bank building..

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YES, please enroll me as a member of the Coulee Region Chapter (Z19) of the National Audubon Society at the introductory rate of \$20 for one year or \$35 for two years. Membership benefits include The Coulee Birder and Audubon Magazine.

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