

Coulee Birder

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Audubon Society

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

May-June 2009

Events

Meetings

May 20 -- 7 p.m. at the Ho Chunk Nation building, lower level, 725 Main Street, La Crosse, across from the Main Branch of the La Crosse Public Library.

Abbie Meyer, Conservation Specialist for local land trust Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC) will present a program on Coulee Region Birds.

Mississippi Valley Conservancy owns several nature preserves throughout the Coulee Region. Learn where these preserves are, how to access them for hiking and birdwatching and what birds you may find as you visit them. Possibilities range from grassland to wetland to woodland birds.

Habitat loss is frequently cited as a cause for declining bird populations. Abbie will discuss what MVC is doing to manage these preserves for bird habitat and what you can do locally to help out Wisconsin birds!

Abbie has a B.S. in Biology from Loras College and spends her time at MVC working with private landowners to permanently protect their land. This includes doing site assessments, species inventory, and habitat restoration. Abbie has been working in Natural Resources since 1997.

June 17 - 6 p.m.

Pot Luck Picnic at the new Myrick Hixon EcoCenter. Enter at the Main Entrance on the south side of the building.

Pot-luck starts at 6:30 with a bird walk after in the marsh for those who are interested.

Bring a dish to pass and your own eating utensils.

See EVENTS, page 2

President's notebook

Exploring new programs

Before last month's general meeting, the board of the Coulee Region Audubon Society sat down to do some brainstorming and strategizing for the future. We were specifically trying to figure out how to do a better job of meeting the needs of our members and how to reach out to potential new members.

There was a strong consensus that our programming is doing well. With the help of all of the members of the board and other key members of the organization, we have been able to find interesting speakers and topics for our monthly meetings and as a result the

attendance has improved over the last few years. We do feel that a continued effort to recruit excellent speakers is very important to members who attend the meetings and this will continue to be a priority. Where possible, we will work in conjunction with other organizations to allow us to bring in high profile and more expensive speakers with strong audience appeal.

We also discussed other ideas that could make us more effective in getting more people interested and engaged in outdoor activities and envi-

See NOTEBOOK, page 2

Audubon, Corps sign Mississippi River pact

Audubon News — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Mississippi Valley Division (MVD) and the National Audubon Society signed an agreement to strengthen collaboration and communication aimed at restoring and protecting habitat and water quality along the Mississippi River, one of this nation's greatest natural and economic assets.

The regional Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) unites ecosystem restoration experts from the environmental

and natural resource staff of MVD's six districts with those of Audubon's Mississippi River Initiative to collaborate on key conservation initiatives within the 12 states and 370,000-square-mile geographic boundary of MVD that stretches from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

Corps and Audubon staff have already begun exploring sustainable management of important habitats such as the Atchafalaya River system in Louisiana;

See PACT, page 3

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 for the September/October issue is September 1. Send information to: dskoloda@earthlink.net.

Trash pickers report having a ball along I-90

By Mark Webster

The Coulee Region Audubon Society held it's Spring Adopt-a-highway Trash Pick up on Saturday morning, April 25th. The rain held off for the morning, and allowed six hardy volunteers the opportunity to pick up 25 large trash bags along a two-mile stretch of I-90/Hwy 61 from Dresbach to Dakota, Minn.

Some interesting things found were:

a basketball; a pair of blue jeans; a cloth Winona Post Newspaper delivery bag; an entire Styrofoam car bumper; a brand new, crisp one dollar bill; a small iron pry bar; a fairly new car tire with wheel intact; a car tire cut in half (length-wise); and many, many car parts (probably 2-3 bags worth) from an accident. . .

I kept the pry bar (and the dollar!), Over the years I have found lots of tools: screwdrivers; wrenches; jack knives; pli-

ers; a 50 Ft. Tape Measure; and other useful things like a brand new tarp; rubber tie downs and every type of ball that there is; golf balls, tennis balls, baseballs, softballs; whiffle balls; footballs - and now a basketball !

I guess you could say that we have a ball out there.

A very big Thank You! goes out to Denise & Patty Edmunds, Sue Fletcher, Tom Link, and Marilyn Webster for all your help!

NOTEBOOK from page 1

ronmental issues. We feel that this is important to the long-term health of individuals and the environment. Birding field trips are of interest to some members, but at times are poorly attended. Last year's field trip to see the flight training of the Whooping Cranes was very popular and that interest suggests that similar programs could be of interest.

Over the past several months, we have also been talking about collaborating with other area organizations on projects and activities that will have broad appeal and will be mutually ben-

eficial to the Coulee Region Audubon Society and its potential partners. It was decided to keep this very limited to start with to see if there is enough interest among our membership.

For this year, we are talking about partnering with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy with projects and field trip opportunities on one of their properties. The details are still being worked out but this could take the form of habitat improvement work and birding or nature walks on a very special local property.

We are hoping to bring some of the details of this discussion to the May meet-

ing. Hopefully, this initiative and other potential collaborative efforts can help us to reach out to more people and to help them to enjoy the world around us while also having a positive impact on the local environment and environmental awareness.

If anyone has any ideas or suggestions for activities, field trips, potential speakers, or other items for our organization, please feel free to call any member of the board. We are always interested in ideas and your help would be greatly appreciated.

EVENTS from page 1

Field Trips/Hikes

May Morning Bird Walks

Join Pat and Bobbie Wilson and Dan Jackson for weekday morning bird walks from 6:30 to 8:00 a.m. to enjoy the spring migration and to see our regular residents return. Feel free to leave early or stay later.

Tuesdays: May 5, 12, and 19 in the La Crosse River Marsh. Meet at the R.A.B.I.T. trail, near the new Myrick Hixon EcoCenter parking lot.

Thursdays: May 7, 14 and 21 at Hixon Forest. Meet at the Hixon Forest trail parking lot, off Milson Court.

May 16

International Migratory Bird Day Festival at the Trempealeau National

Wildlife Refuge.

The theme of this fun-packed day is Birds in Our Culture. Events during the day include hikes, canoeing, a Prairie Wildflower walk, an owl prowls, programs including a raptor presentation and bird song, photography, face painting, displays and bird banding. Food will be available for purchase.

Some of the events require preregistration.

For more information visit www.fws.gov/midwest/trempealeau. Click on Calendar of Events and birding festival. or call 608-539-2311, ext. 16.

May 17

On Sunday, May 17th, the Coulee Region Audubon Society will host a

birding field trip to Wyalusing State Park. We will meet in the parking lot by the gate house at 6:30 AM and will bird until around noon. This is a very special birding location. Local specialties include: Cerulean, Yellow-Throated, Kentucky, and Prothonotary Warblers, Cuckoos, Henslow's Sparrow, Acadian Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, and many others. There is a strong probability that late migrants will still be coming through which means that we can and will see many other species of sparrows, thrushes, warblers and other great birds. For those interested in carpooling, please e-mail Dan Jackson at

DanJackson@LBWhite.com.

See EVENTS, page 4

DNR constructs prothonotory nest boxes

FITCHBURG – A small songbird that breeds in the eastern United States and then migrates to lowland tropical forests of Central America during winter recently received a helping hand from Department of Natural Resources wildlife staff.

The prothonotary warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*), is a Neotropical migrant listed as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) for Wisconsin.

“Prothonotary warblers are the only eastern wood warbler that nests in cavities. It breeds in moist bottomland forests that are seasonally flooded or in permanent wetlands. Nests are almost always over water,” said Andy Paulios, Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative Coordinator.

In Wisconsin, prothonotary warblers nest in floodplain forests along the Mis-



Nest boxes erected along the Sugar River at Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area in Rock County. (WDNR Photo)

PACT from page 1

Mississippi River diversions to restore wetlands and strengthen storm protection below New Orleans; and conservation education projects at places such as the Mississippi and Missouri River confluence near St. Louis.

“A strengthened relationship between the Corps and Audubon is absolutely essential,” said Brig. Gen. Michael Walsh. “And the MOU will foster even greater collaborative achievements as both organizations strive to preserve our Nation’s environment.”

“Together, we can meet the broad array of challenges to keep this vital working river a river that works,” added Audubon Vice President Roger Still. “We can advance the restoration of Mississippi Delta habitats that ensure a sustainable future for the people of coastal Louisiana. We can make certain the Mississippi remains as a globally significant migratory flyway for birds, and that it supports other important wildlife species. And we can protect water quality along the entire length of the river.”

Corps and Audubon representatives will meet in May for joint planning and

implementation efforts.

“This agreement must be more than a piece of paper,” Walsh said. “The importance of this great river to our nation’s economy and to our natural heritage demands that we work together for a balanced, sustainable future.”

The MOU was announced aboard the Motor Vessel Mississippi before members of the Mississippi River Commission. The panel is making its annual high-water inspection tour as part of its mission to advise Congress and the administration of President Barrack Obama on the management of the Mississippi River.

Col. Michael Wehr, District Engineer for the Corps’ Vicksburg District, assisted with the signing ceremony. The Vicksburg District will lead in implementing the agreement.

The Mississippi Valley Division encompasses 370,000 square miles, 28 million people, and portions of 12 states (from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico) bordering the 2,348 mile-long Mississippi River. The division comprises six interdependent districts with a regional headquarters in Vicksburg.

sissippi, Chippewa, Black, Wisconsin, Sugar, Wolf and other large river systems. Many of these systems no longer have intact floodplain forests and prothonotary warblers, red-shouldered hawks and other important bird species have likely declined from historical numbers due to this habitat loss, according to Paulios.

That’s why 13 DNR wildlife staffers got together and, in assembly-like fashion, constructed 315 nest boxes as part of a pilot project to see if they can help augment breeding in floodplain forest areas of Rock County that have lost a lot of tree cover.

“We are hoping to increase population of this species along the Sugar River in the Town of Avon with the hopes that it could be expanded to other areas of the state,” said Paulios.

Much of the nest box is made from a four inch, thin-wall PVC drain pipe adapted by DNR wildlife biologist Mike Foy, Fitchburg, from a design used for blue bird boxes.

The nest boxes are sprayed with a textured light color plastic paint to help keep the box cool and enabling birds to grip boxes when landing.

Nest boxes have already been placed in the Sugar River bottomlands and “if all goes well, we’d like to see bird clubs and other river groups volunteer to place boxes and monitor the results similar to that of bluebird volunteers statewide,” noted Paulios.

Prothonotary warblers have olive backs with blue-grey wings and tail, yellow underbody, a long pointed bill and black legs. The adult male has a bright orange-yellow head while females and immature birds are duller and have a yellow head.

The Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative is also working to protect wintering habitat for the prothonotary warbler and many other long distance migrant species of greatest conservation need through projects in Central America, added Paulios.



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EVENTS from page 2

June 6 - Mississippi Valley Conservancy La Crosse Blufflands beginning at 10 a.m. Bob Wingate will lead the hike and will talk about the geological forma-

tion of the Mississippi River Valley and German settlement in the coulees.

The exact location is yet to be deter-

mined. Call or e-mail Margie Artus at 784-3606, extension 1, e-mail at martus@mississippivalleyconservancy.org

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