



Wild River Audubon Current

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President's Column

Our family revels in the fact that on clear nights, we can see the Milky Way from our driveway. We look for certain constellations—Orion, the Big Dipper, Cassiopeia—whenever we're out in the evening. So far, Chisago County is still dark enough that we can still enjoy the beauty of the night sky.

But with development come city lights. For some reason, people do not like darkness, and so we put up street lights, yard lights, "vanity lights" that decorate buildings, and gas station lights—particularly egregious offenders—that turn midnight into noon.

But evolution has tuned wildlife to dark nights. When we banish the darkness, we endanger the birds, mammals and many other creatures that flourish in the night. Most notable are migrating birds, that collide with tall buildings. But you'd be surprised at the effect other types of lighting have on wildlife.

Joanna Eckels from Audubon Minnesota will speak on the effect of the electric light on wildlife at our next meeting. Be there to learn how you can avoid being part of the problem—and invite an elected official to go with you to the meeting!

See you there!

Sue



About the Speaker

Light Pollution and Wildlife

Joanna Eckels of Audubon Minnesota will speak to Wild River Audubon on March 10, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. at the Chisago Lakes Area Library on "The Effects of Light Pollution on Wildlife." A graduate of Cornell University in Natural Resources and Wildlife Science, Ms. Eckels now heads up Audubon Minnesota's Light-Out Program that aims to reduce city lighting during bird migration.

Formerly a trainer with the World of Birds show at the Minnesota Zoo, she will discuss how various forms of night lighting adversely affect many different kinds of wildlife.

In suggesting this topic, WRA's executive board hoped to begin conversation with Chisago County elected officials in how to avoid the damaging effects on wildlife that the overly-lit Twin Cities are now experiencing. If you know an elected official, please invite them to this meeting! If you are an elected official—put this date on your calendar.

Audubon meetings are always open to the public. See you there!

Northern Minnesota Forest Protection?

You may have read about the proposal in a recent newspaper article. UPM Blandin Paper Co. of Grand Rapids, under Finnish ownership, has proposed putting all their holdings under a conservation easement. They would retain ownership, and would continue to cut timber and pay taxes. But they could not subdivide the property or develop it and they would agree to manage it sustainably. It would be open to hunting, hiking and snowmobiling.

The price tag: \$51 million dollars. The money would come primarily from the new sales tax amendment approved last November, and would take up a large portion of those funds.

The block of land under consideration is huge: 75 % as large as all of Minnesota's state parks combined. It is bordered by county or state forest land, which would result in 4,000 square miles of unfragmented land.

This proposal should be very appealing to bird lovers, for many species require large areas of intact forest in which to breed. In particular, Scarlet Tanagers are threatened by the forest fragmentation. Other species requiring large, intact forest are Eastern Wood Pewees, Yellow-throated Vireos and Red-eyed Vireos. Some studies have also found Wood Thrushes to benefit from large forest tracts.

The DNR, the Nature Conservancy, the Trust for Public Land and the state legislature are all involved in the talks.

Information for this article came from the Minneapolis Sunday StarTribune, February 22, 2009.



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The Cerulean Warbler

A flash of blue and a buzzy song emanating high in the treetops alert the birder to the presence of the lovely Cerulean Warbler. This species nests and forages in the upper half of the forest canopy, one of the birds responsible for producing the legendary “warbler neck” in binocular-wielding gawkers.

Ceruleans are feisty birds. Researchers have witnessed territorial males audibly collide in mid-air. Females physically ram into their perched mates. Studies record aggressive encounters between ceruleans and Blue-winged Warblers, Golden-winged Warblers, Hooded Warblers, American Redstarts and Least Flycatchers. Female ceruleans have been seen tussling with Blue-gray Gnatcatchers over choice bits of nesting material, notably spider webs.

Yet, for all their pugnacity, these warblers are in trouble. Cerulean Warbler populations show the steepest decline of any warbler in North America, 82% by some reckoning, in the past 40 years, and this decline is occurring in the heart of their breeding range, where the birds should be most successful.

Ceruleans require large, intact mature deciduous forests. As neotropical migrants—those birds that shuttle between North and South America—they suffer a double whammy, because suitable habitat is disappearing in both homes.

Historically, they were abundant in the canopy of North American eastern deciduous forests, especially in the bottomland woods of the Ohio and Mississippi River Valleys. In South America, they live in the mature montane forests of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and northern Bolivia. These forests are being destroyed on both continents for many reasons. In North America, they have been logged off, cleared for agriculture, and urbanized. Mountain-top strip-mining for coal in Appalachia poses a new, alarming threat. In South

America, the remaining forests are being converted to coca fields to fuel the illegal cocaine market. Large-scale, sun-grown coffee plantations contribute to the deforestation. Shade-grown coffee fields, on the other hand, provide suitable winter habitat for the beleaguered warblers.

Minnesota ornithologist T. S. Roberts thought, in 1930, that Cerulean Warblers were expanding their range into Minnesota from the south. Records of the bird were scarce until 1919, after which they seemed to be “gaining steadily in numbers.” The first Minnesota nest of a cerulean was found in 1934 at Linwood Lake in Anoka County—a site where ceruleans continued to nest until very recently.

Today, ornithologists still believe their range is expanding northward. Although most sightings remain in southeastern Minnesota (and these are few, indicating its rarity), birders have seen ceruleans as far north as Otter Tail County. Murphy-Hanrehan IBA has harbored as many as 12 males defending territories in the recent past (2003). It is difficult to know nesting success and the extent of cowbird parasitism because the nests are usually inaccessible and often obscured by leaves.

Alarmed at the precipitous decline in ceruleans, in 2000, National Audubon, Defenders of Wildlife and other regional groups petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to list the warblers as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act. After foot-dragging by the FWS, these groups then sued the agency in February, 2006 for not issuing a prompt decision. In November, 2006, the FWS announced it would not list the Cerulean Warbler as threatened.

In Minnesota, the Cerulean Warbler is a species of special concern. It is on the Audubon Watchlist in the red category, “extremely high priority.”

References
Birds of America Online
NatureServe
Audubon website (82% decline fig. from Dec 7, 06 press release)
MOU website
T.S.Roberts, 1932. The Birds of Minnesota
The Loon vol 69-78 for recent state sightings

Audubon Minnesota's Lights Out Program

In Spring, 2007, Audubon Minnesota launched a program to reduce the effect of city lighting on migrating birds. 29 buildings in six cities now keep their lighting at a minimum during fall and spring migrations.

Volunteers walk prescribed routes in Minneapolis and St. Paul to pick up dead and injured birds. In 2008, volunteers walked the two downtown routes 200 times and found almost 500 birds of nearly 70 species. Here's the grim results:

- ✦ 20% White-throated Sparrows
 - ✦ 17% Nashville Warblers
 - ✦ 7% Tennessee Warblers
 - ✦ 7% Ovenbirds
 - ✦ 5% Dark-eyed Junco
 - ✦ 5% Common Yellowthroat
- 39% 60 other species, less than 2% per species.



For more information, visit: http://mn.audubon.org/Bids_BirdSafe.html

www.wildriveraudubon.org

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