

Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance (formerly Madison Audubon) works to protect and improve habitat for birds and other wildlife through land acquisition and management, education, and advocacy. - *Mission of Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance*

Goose Pond Sanctuary Update – February 7, 2024

Graham Steinhauer, Resident Land Steward gsteinhauer@swibirds.org

Mark and Susan Foote Martin, Sanctuary Managers goosep@swibirds.org

Emma Raasch, Ecological Restoration and Research Technician eraasch@swibirds.org

1) Cranes in Late Migration

On January 11, Mark and Jenny McGinley sent the following report:

“Between 9am and noon we had a significant sandhill crane flyover. We live about four miles southeast of Goose Pond on Wangsness Road. The cranes were flying to the south-southeast over Wangsness Road... Most of the groups in the air were between 250 and 300 birds. Some of the groups were between 500 and 600. We didn't count all the groups, but for the groups we did see and count, we think we saw between 7,000 and 10,000 total birds. We've seen similar flyovers in previous years, but we don't think they were ever this late. Typically, we see these big migrations in mid to late December.”

A few days later, on January 13, Graham counted 640 sandhill cranes flying high over Goose Pond, also heading south-southeast. Both observations occurred between major snowfall events. According to the UW Farms weather station in Arlington, we received six inches of



Sandhill Crane. Arlene Koziol

snow on Jan. 10, two more inches on the 11th, and nine on the 13th, which left us with 16 inches of snow by Jan. 13. The significant snowfall coupled with a steep temperature drop may have been the final push for the Sandhill Cranes to move south, despite heading south earlier in most years. We suspect these migrating cranes may make a late arrival to Jasper Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area in Indiana, a key stopover site for birds during fall migration.

2) Twenty-eight acres of New Prairie and Fifty-six Acres of Interseeding

On January 3, 2024, Goose Pond staff and volunteers hand seeded a diverse prairie mix over 18 acres of a cropland. Every acre restored to prairie is significant, but this planting was particularly noteworthy because those 18 acres were the last chunk of cropland that fragmented the Lapinski-Kitze (LK) Prairie. This planting stitched together the existing grassland habitat into a solid 116-acre block. In the future, we hope to see Short-eared Owls, Eastern Meadowlarks, badgers, tiger salamanders, rare invertebrates, and many more species using the area. We also planted wet-mesic species south of Jill's prairie (6 acres) and a diverse savanna/prairie mix at Otsego Marsh (4 acres).



Volunteer planting. Brenna Marsicek



Calla preparing a seed mix. Graham Steinbauer

In addition to our new plantings, we also interseeded (added seeds to an existing plant community rather than seeding a non-vegetated area like cropland) custom seed mixes onto 56 acres of existing restorations. This includes 12 acres on the land of a private partner, 19 acres in a wetland at Goose Pond, and 25 acres at Erstad Prairie. Because the endangered Karner blue butterfly was found for the first time at Erstad Prairie in 2023, we're tailoring management for their support. High densities of wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*), the only larval host plant for the Karner blue butterfly, along with some of its favorite nectaring species (leadplant, butterfly milkweed, dotted horse mint, etc.) were put into the mix.



Eighteen-acre planting map at LK Prairie along with Graham's travels for the day

3) Opportunities, Articles, and More

- Would you like to volunteer on prescribed burns at Goose Pond Sanctuary? Read more and sign up for our Prescribed Fire Workshop - Fire Ecology and Field Instruction [here](#).
- Check out Goose Pond Sanctuary's recent Friday Feathered Features: [Rough-legged Hawk Project Update: December 2023](#) (Dec. 8), [Northern Cardinal](#) (Jan. 12), and [45 Years of Ring-necked Pheasant Observations](#) (Feb. 2).
- To hear what's happening in the Northwoods of Wisconsin, check out Tom and Mary Lou Nicholls' [eNature Report No. 275](#). You can also sign up to receive their reports.

4) 2023 Christmas Bird Counts (CBC)



Mark and Jenny in the swamp. Emma Raasch

High counts included 12 Pileated Woodpeckers, 2 Common Ravens, 4 White-crowned Sparrows, and 25 counters gathering for lunch. The first time a Common Raven was reported on the Poynette CBC was in 2019 at DNR MacKenzie Center. This year, a raven was found at the MacKenzie Center by Fred Dike and Jeff Lang and also at Rocky Run State Natural Area by Curt and Arlys Caslavka. Our count area is in the southernmost portion of the Common Raven's Wisconsin breeding range. Other exceptional numbers include 15 Swamp Sparrows along open water at the Mud Lake State Wildlife Area, 12 Brown Creepers, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler, a species we do not expect to find this time of year.

Yellow-rumped warbler. Richard Armstrong

Poynette CBC

With the help of 43 field counters and 9 feeder counts, we were able to cover 448 miles (421 by car, 27 by foot) in 67 hours (45 by car, 32 on foot) to reach a total of 8,829 birds from 68 species. An additional effort of 1.6 hours and 29 miles were spent searching for owls. Weather conditions were milder than normal with 33 degrees, light winds, 0 to 1 inch of snow on the ground, and mostly open water.



Pardeeville CBC

On December 21, observers spent 51 hours counting birds over 417 miles, which yielded 54 species and 4,815 birds. This was an unusually windy CBC (low 20 mph, high 34 mph) with cloudy skies and light snow in the morning; there was a trace of snow on the ground, and both still and moving water were partly open. High counts included 100 Lapland Longspurs, 47 Common Mergansers, 58 Bald Eagles, 9 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 3 Northern Shrikes, 28 Eastern Bluebirds, and 8 Red Crossbills. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped count, as well as Brian Doverspike for coordinating the Pardeeville CBC since 2017. Goose Pond staff and volunteers assisted with five out of eleven count areas.



Eastern Bluebird. Arlene Koziol

Trusty volunteers, Mark and Jenny McGinley, and I (Emma) braved the frigid wind on the top of the two highest hills at French Creek Wildlife Area to get a clear view of the water, but saw only mallards. In the hopes of adding more waterfowl to our species list, we ventured down into the cattail marsh to see that the ‘ducks’ on the pond were actually chunks of wood.



However, in our pursuit, four Eastern Bluebirds and a Rough-legged Hawk flew overhead. On our walk back, we felt discouraged that the strong wind may keep the birds in hiding, but the perfect view of a Northern Shrike gave us hope. We then added a Sharp-shinned Hawk and 38 American Robins to our list. After lunch we ventured into the 1,439-acre [French Creek North State Natural Area](#) with the goal of finding crossbills and other winter finches, but ended up fighting through poison sumac and other brush without seeing or hearing a single bird until we nearly made it out of the swamp and heard a Pileated Woodpecker. The moral of our 2023 CBC experience is, you may not find what you set out for, but you’re sure to find something (perhaps even more exciting).

Find the results of other CBCs in Southern Wisconsin [here](#).

Northern Shrike. Gary Shackelford

5) Dorothy Returns while Jeffrey is on the Move

In December 2021, Graham assisted Neil Paprocki of [The Rough Legged Hawk Project](#) in trapping and putting a transmitter on Dorothy, a female light-morph Rough-legged Hawk. Each winter since, Dorothy has returned to the Goose Pond area, and this year is no exception! According to the map of her recent movements, she has been spending time on Kampen Rd near the pond and food plot, as well as at Sue Ames Prairie and Ankenbrandt Prairie.

Unlike Dorothy, Jeffrey (the dark morph male equipped with a transmitter) hasn't been loyal to the wintering grounds where he was trapped (White River Marsh Wildlife Area), and he was last reported in southern Minnesota. Emma assisted Neil with capturing Jeffrey in 2022. To read more about the Rough-legged Hawk Project and how the birds are processed, see our past Friday Feathered Features: [Dorothy the Rough-legged Hawk](#) (Jan. 2022), [The Rough-legged Hawk Project](#) (Jan. 2023), [Rough-legged Hawk Project Update: December 2023](#).



Dorothy at Goose Pond. Neil Paprocki

6) A Winter Haven at Goose Pond Sanctuary

We strive to provide restored prairie habitat for birds migrating through and nesting at the sanctuary, however we also manage the property to provide habitat and food sources for our winter residents. In addition to 600 acres of restored prairie, this winter we again have bird feeders at three residences, two food plots with corn, and a four-acre field dominated by foxtail and sorghum to provide food and cover for winter birds.

Winter birds found at Goose Pond in the food plots and prairie during the 2023 Poynette CBC included 66 Ring-necked Pheasants, 1 Cooper's Hawk, 4 Northern Harriers, 2 American



Weedy food plot. Graham Steinhauer

Kestrels, 50 Mourning Doves, 1 Short-eared Owl, 302 American Tree Sparrows (out of 512 found on the entire count), 4 White-crowned Sparrows, 1 Field Sparrow, 3 Snow Buntings, 57 Dark-eyed Juncos, and 36 American Goldfinches.

If you would like to unsubscribe to the Goose Pond updates or if you know someone that would like to subscribe to the update, please contact goosep@swibirds.org.