

MAY 2019 NEWSLETTER

The Wetlands Edition



Our Wonderful Wetlands

Here's a fun fact: over 75 percent of Wisconsin's wildlife and fish species depend on wetlands for at least part of their life cycle.

May is American Wetlands Month, and we are celebrating the birds, plants, and all the other critters that couldn't make a living without wetlands. And we're celebrating your help in protecting diverse and valuable wetlands at our two sanctuaries.

From the birds that nest in the reeds to the frogs that sing along the shorelines, water represents life in natural places.

Wetlands are important far beyond what they provide for wildlife. They are among the most important parts of our landscape for providing natural benefits like flood abatement and clean water. They capture runoff, including stormwater and snowmelt, keeping this water from entering our neighborhoods and covering our roads. Wetlands also improve water quality by removing sediments and other pollutants before they reach our lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater. This keeps our waters clean and life-giving.



As you will read on page 4, with this spring's high water, the time and energy that the crew at Goose Pond has spent on wetland restoration paid off in improved habitat and flood mitigation. Likewise, Faville Grove's bogs, marshes, and floodplain prairies are sanctuaries themselves, with some exciting new additions (page 6). And our stellar education programs share the wonder and importance of wetlands by looking at water quality and critters that live in the muck (page 7).

Wisconsin used to be home to an estimated 10 million acres of wetlands. However, we've lost half of these wetlands to land use changes associated with agriculture, urban development, roads and more.

But most of all, we need you. We need your passion, your voice, and your time to help protect these precious resources for whatever reason is important to you—feathered or otherwise! Share some of Wisconsin Wetlands Association's new videos on Facebook, or call your

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The return of the swamp canary

You probably won't be shocked to learn that I have a big soft spot for birds (yes, even brown-headed cowbirds). One of the softest of soft spots is for the prothonotary warbler, *Protonotaria citrea*, a magnificent Wisconsin songbird I got to know firsthand more than 20 years ago (yikes!) during one of my first field jobs.

The prothonotary warbler, also known colloquially as the "Swamp Canary," is a neotropical migrant that breeds in flooded bottomland forests, wooded swamps, and forests near lakes and streams just like the ones in the Cache River wetlands of southern Illinois. My summer days in the Cache were largely spent navigating ankle-to-waist-deep swamp water to monitor hundreds of prothonotary nests. The days were long, hot, buggy, and always extremely interesting.

Unlike most warblers, prothonotaries nest in natural tree cavities, or for us, half-gallon cardboard milk cartons spray-painted brown and taped either to a tree or to poles we pushed into the muck. In addition to easy monitoring of nest status, these boxes provided a treasure trove of data including information on predation,

clutch sizes, feeding rates by adults, nestling growth, cowbird parasitism, nest site fidelity, and so much more. A box with an active nest also gave us the opportunity to band both the young and adult birds, which reminds me of one of my favorite field stories.

One sunny summer day, we set out to catch a male using a mist net, playback of its *zweet-zweet-zweet* song, and a decoy painted bright yellow to look just like a prothonotary. As soon as the cassette player started turning, the male swooped in and perched above us, vigorously counter-singing at the mystery intruder. Aha! The perfect time to place our yellow decoy in the net for the male to dive bomb. ...Except we left it in the truck, 35-minutes away up the bluff. What to do? Time to improvise. I'm proud to say we caught the male that day, my friends, thanks to a bagged lunch that included a nice, ripe, bright yellow banana.

Fun anecdotes aside, one of the insights we gained from this research is that human alterations to ecosystems have significant negative effects on prothonotary

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Swamp canary, continued

warblers. Drainage and rerouting of water in the Cache River wetlands, for example, alters the water levels around prothonotary nests so drastically that they fail at incredibly high and unnatural rates. On a broader scale, the prothonotary warbler has declined 40 percent since the 1960s, partly due to the degradation and disappearance of the precious wetlands it needs to survive and reproduce.

So, this May, I invite you to join me in celebrating the triumphant annual return of the swamp canary to Wisconsin, as well as all of the wonderful wetland habitats that make its survival possible.

Matt Reetz, executive director
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Wonderful wetlands, continued

legislators to emphasize the importance of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program to fund land and water protection. Then, follow that up with a visit to a wetland, and lose yourself in awe.

Brenna Marsicek, communications director
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Kestrels growing stronger

MAS's kestrel nestbox program continues to expand

Nearly 30 awesome MAS volunteers are monitoring 165 kestrel nestboxes in south-central Wisconsin this year, making this program one of the largest and strongest of its kind in the country. American kestrels are in decline throughout most of their range, largely due to loss of nesting sites. However, kestrels take readily to

man-made nestboxes, and we are doing our part to support them.

Thank you to all our volunteers, particularly Brand Smith who coordinates the program. Keep an eye on our website for our annual kestrel banding events this June: madisonaudubon.org/events.

At an all-time high

Goose Pond overflows with water this spring

Goose Pond Sanctuary is best known for its water and its waterfowl. If you haven't been out during migration to see the spectacle that is Goose Pond or watched the shores of the new wetland scrapes, make it a priority this year.

We spend a lot of time thinking about, working on, and striving to create high quality wetlands, and one of the most important reasons why revealed itself late this winter.

This March, deep snow cover, rain, and high temperatures resulted in record flooding and runoff levels in much of Wisconsin, including the area around Goose Pond Sanctuary. Low-lying roadways were closed or had high water advisories, and a train was stranded on the sanctuary while damage to the tracks was assessed. In the 40 years that the Martins have resided at Goose Pond, water has only flowed west out of the pond to Lake Mendota on one other occasion. Fifty-seven ephemeral springs

were counted, last seen in the 1990s. If you really wanted, you could have paddled from Ankenbrandt Prairie in eastern Goose Pond Sanctuary all the way into Lake Mendota, only getting out to avoid culverts.

You might imagine the damage that amount of water would bring to an area, and indeed there was some. But it brought some good, too! Flooded prairies and agricultural fields provide excellent habitat for wetland birds, amphibians, and mammals. It gives them safe access to cover and food that is not normally available.

Scaup, canvasbacks, redheads, and other diving ducks prefer to feed in water that is three to six feet deep, and Goose Pond is the only water body in the sanctuary that provides such depth in normal years. The extreme runoff flooded at least 160 additional acres of

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Goose Pond, continued

water to three feet deep on or adjacent to Goose Pond Sanctuary lands, effectively tripling the habitat usually available to diving ducks. In fact, 620 scaup were counted at Goose Pond in March, an all-time high since the sanctuary was established over 50 years ago.

As water recedes throughout the growing season, it will provide high quality foraging sites for shorebirds. Amphibian eggs are an energy-packed food source for predators like fish, so tiger salamanders, treefrogs, spring peepers, and others seek out wetlands that dry up seasonally. These ephemeral wetlands at Goose Pond Sanctuary are full, and amphibian reproduction is expected to be excellent this year.

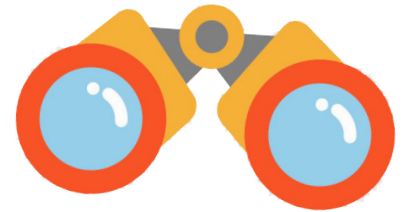
While the primary benefit here is to wildlife, these wetlands do incredible work to store flood waters that would otherwise wreak havoc on man-made infrastructure. We will continue to capture more water at Goose Pond Sanctuary using water control structures and wetland scrapes, and appreciate your generosity of time and funding that make these ongoing efforts possible. Come out to Goose Pond this spring and experience the riot of sights and sounds that the gift of water brings.

Graham Steinhauer,
Goose Pond Sanctuary land steward
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It's Birdathon time!

Birding, fundraising, and fun, all in one

Want a good excuse to get outside this spring? The Great Wisconsin Birdathon is in full swing, and it's not too late to join. This walkathon-style activity gets you outside and birding, while raising donations that are split evenly between Madison Audubon and the Bird Protection Fund through Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. It's easy, fun, and brings in needed support for these organizations and creatures you love.



Join as a team by visiting madisonaudubon.org/birdathon

Donate to a team supporting Madison Audubon by visiting madisonaudubon.org/birdathon-donate

Thank you for your support. Yay birds!

Great Wisconsin Birdathon:
April 15 - June 15, 2019

Bigger and better than ever

Recent acquisitions at Faville Grove offer stunning vistas

For birds and human beings alike, the views keep getting better at Faville Grove Sanctuary. With Madison Audubon's recent acquisitions of two key properties in the western portion of the sanctuary, the vistas are longer and more sublime than ever.

The first is an 88-acre tract along North Shore Road that was sold to MAS at a significant discount by neighbors Ohne and Karen Raasch. Madison Audubon has been working with the Raaschs and the Natural Resources Conservation Service since 2012 to restore this and an adjacent 65 acres that they enrolled in the federal Wetlands Reserve Program.

With the site's drainage ditches filled, wetland scrapes excavated where agricultural erosion had filled in low pockets, fencerows cleared of invasive brush and trees, and agricultural fields restored to diverse prairie, the property makes an instant and beautiful addition to the sanctuary. Small moraines with sandy soils and dry-mesic prairie restorations overlook shallow wetlands. A small knoll on the south end of the property is home to mature bur oaks and a rare glade of scattered eastern red cedars, which will provide

BELOW: Looking north with the floating bog of Faville Marsh in the foreground, the new Springer Pond addition can be seen at the top-center, including a three-acre detached piece of bog, and surrounding farmland with brushy field edges. Photo by Rob Couey



interesting opportunities for botanical restoration. Our work this past winter clearing brush along North Shore Road opened expansive vistas to all who pass by.

It is very nearly two miles from the south edge of this acquisition to the north end of the second recent acquisition, with all the land in between under sanctuary management. The second property of 63.3 acres,

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The joyful exploration of muck

Wetlands provide a wonderful learning experience for all ages



Wetlands are one of my favorite classrooms to teach in. They're full of animals, plants, and insects that kids don't usually encounter. Their level trails and boardwalks are generally easy to traverse. And most importantly, they're kind of gross. Wetlands have slime, they can smell in the summer, and have plenty of mud. Kids LOVE wetlands!

Wetlands generally encourage kids to touch and feel and explore. They want to lie on their stomachs to peer through the boardwalk cracks at frogs. Cattails are begging to be touched, and mud demands a footprint. You can just see the wheels turning in a child's head as they explore a wetland. Curiosity sparks questions, and kids who question are well on their way to becoming people who experiment, test boundaries, and crave more information. Scientists and artists, really.

Here are some ideas for getting the kids in your life excited about wetlands:

1. Explore water critters.

Grab a clean bucket (make sure it's free of soap residue too) and dip it into your favorite body of water. Look closely, as some organisms are almost too small for our eyes to see! Use a magnifying glass, or even flip your binoculars around for a closer look (you need to get the eyepiece within a half inch of the object you want to view). Do

you find the same critters in open water and in weedy places? How about in moving water or standing water? Make sure to release your critters quickly, exactly where you found them.

2. Listen for frog calls. You can identify frogs by their singing – just like birds. Become citizen scientists by collecting data for the WDNR's Wisconsin Frog and Toad Survey. The survey periods are coming up in May, June, and July. Or download our Wisconsin's Frogs and Toad soundtrack, found at madisonaudubon.org/store.

3. Learn alongside the kids.

Wetlands are great spots to find insects, tracks, scat, birds, and plants that you've never encountered. Show the kids that you're a lifelong learner by asking your own questions, saying

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Education, continued

“hmmm... I don’t know!” and brainstorming possibilities. Letting kids see how you work through a problem is a great learning experience for them, even if you can’t ultimately figure out what you’re looking at. Particularly if you’re willing to get your hands muddy, too.

Really, wetlands make your job as a door-opener, experience-giver, and memory-maker easy. Bring the kids to the water, and the mysteries held within the wetland will do the rest.

Carolyn Byers, education director
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Faville Grove, continued

which includes the entire north end of Faville Marsh, is approximately 17 acres of open water and seasonally emergent vegetation, known locally as Springer Pond, as well as a three-acre piece of floating sphagnum bog. The parcel also includes farmland that surrounds the wetland on three sides, and it connects the sanctuary to Springer Road and Hillview Lane on the north.

The vistas from the farmed moraines looking south are already incredible, with sanctuary land nearly as far as the eye can see. Over the next several years, as we restore the uplands to prairie and remove the walls of invasive brush on the marsh edge and property lines, we’re excited about how those vistas will expand.

By restoring prairie around the marsh, we will further protect the wetland from agricultural runoff and expand nesting habitat for waterfowl and grassland birds. The young prairie restorations on



the new 88-acre property to the south hosted a recent irruption of dickcissels, with dozens of birds nesting in the forb-rich prairies. Perhaps future restorations surrounding Springer Pond will invite the next large influx of dickcissels to the area.

A scenic and ecological restoration as large and comprehensive as the Faville Grove effort in southern Wisconsin’s fragmented landscape is a rare thing indeed. It is something that all Madison Audubon members can be proud of.

Drew Harry, Roger Packard, and David Musolf, Faville Grove Sanctuary
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A gift to monarchs

Give them what they need: more native milkweed

Planting milkweed is one of the most important yet easiest things you can do for monarch butterflies. Did you know that monarchs will only lay their eggs on milkweeds, and their caterpillars will only eat milkweed leaves (with a few rare exceptions)? This diverse family of plants often gets a bad rap because some milkweeds reseed and spread readily. However, if you have a wide-open space you're looking to fill, or want to take the time to find the right species for your garden, you have great options in the milkweed family.

Monarchs have declined by approximately 90% over the last 20 years, and much of that is due to habitat loss. While factors such as pesticide use, climate change, and deforestation play a role, the lack of places to lay eggs and raise young is the greatest limiting factor.

The Wisconsin Monarch Collaborative, a group of agencies, industries, non-profits, and individuals working together to protect the monarch butterfly, just published a guide to the 12 native milkweed species in Wisconsin. Madison Audubon took the lead in creating content for and designing the resource. Find a milkweed or two that is right for your yard, and help a monarch this summer. Download the PDF at madisonaudubon.org/monarchs.



Don't miss these events this summer

Watch madisonaudubon.org/events for more information.

Kestrel banding

Mid-June



National Pollinator

Week Jun. 17-23



Art on the Prairie

June 22



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March 8-15, 2020

Want to get away next winter? Come exploring with us! On this exciting eight-day expedition to Belize, set your sights on hundreds of neotropical species with the help of our expert guides. Enjoy birding in the pine savannas and wetland habitats of Crooked Tree Wildlife Sanctuary, in the primary and secondary tropical moist forest at Cockscomb Basin, and in private reserves, a botanical garden, and along the Macal River Valley.

Participate in several talks with members of the local community about these efforts, the training programs, and other activities that promote birding tourism as a viable option for local economic development.



Registration costs include a small donation to Madison Audubon.

Trip details, costs, and registration at: holbrook.travel/madison/bz-20

PHOTO CREDITS

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USFWS Midwest Region | Kestrel chick. Pat Eagan | Fritillary. Arlene Koziol | Botanical illustration. MAS Photo

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