

madison  
AUDUBON



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF MADISON AUDUBON SOCIETY

May 2020





Madison Audubon  
is your local  
Audubon chapter

*Together with our  
members, we work to  
protect and improve  
habitat for birds and  
other wildlife through  
land acquisition  
and management,  
education and  
advocacy.*



## Reasons to party

*New staff, great supporters, and a bright future ahead*

Let's celebrate! This is where you might say, "It's official. Matt has lost it." To be clear, the pandemic demands our serious, clearheaded, and unwavering attention. But there is no yin without yang (and vice versa) and this issue of our quarterly newsletter is chock full of good reasons to break out the party favors. Heck, the great egrets, blue jays, and great blue heron in the photo above got the memo. I hope you enjoy reading about all the new and continued ways we are bringing birds and nature into people's lives.

Madison Audubon also has a lot to celebrate about the future. Thanks to a dedicated board, talented staff, amazing volunteers and a passionate membership, we continue to grow by leaps and bounds into a more professional, strategic, and effective organization. For example, we're a nationally accredited land trust with a highly unique and meaningful youth education program, we offer a variety of engaging classes, citizen science

projects, and experiences, and own and manage the third most acreage (and growing!) of any Audubon chapter. All of this is worth celebrating and worth sustaining. So, while we're excited about where we are, we're even more thrilled about where we are going. Thanks to your support, the stage is set for bigger and better things to come.

On that note, I am delighted to welcome Becky Abel to the Madison Audubon flock as our new director of philanthropy. Alongside our team and members, Becky will help build and execute a variety of fundraising strategies to ensure Madison Audubon's financial sustainability into the future.



# RETURN OF THE HUMMERS



Fun tidbits about the ruby-throated hummingbird:

- It has the fewest number of feathers of any bird, with 940 feathers
- It also has one of the highest density of feathers for any bird
- A ruby-throated hummingbird beats its wings 55 times per second
- Each hummingbird egg is smaller than a jelly bean
- There are 325+ species of hummingbirds throughout the world
- Hummingbirds can fly 25-30 miles per hour

## FEED



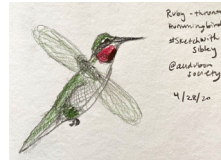
1 part sugar  
4 parts boiled  
water  
no food coloring  
refresh often

## WATCH



Check out a nestcam:  
[madisonaudubon.org/hbird](http://madisonaudubon.org/hbird)

## DRAW



5 min. video tutorial:  
[madisonaudubon.org/sketch](http://madisonaudubon.org/sketch)

**SUPPORT:** Return the donation envelope in the middle of this newsletter or visit [madisonaudubon.org/donate](http://madisonaudubon.org/donate) to support hummingbirds and many other birds.

Becky brings decades of experience in nonprofits and natural resource conservation, having served respected organizations like the International Crane Foundation, Wisconsin Wetlands Association, and The Nature Conservancy. Becky's experience, enthusiasm, creativity, and genuine interest in people make her uniquely suited to help lead Madison Audubon toward a strong future. She's also an avid birdwatcher and has fascinating field

experience with all sorts of birds including trumpeter swans and Puerto Rican parrots.

Feel free reach out to Becky ([babel@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:babel@madisonaudubon.org)) to welcome her, say hello, or tell her what great birds you're seeing!

Matt Reetz, executive director  
[mreetz@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:mreetz@madisonaudubon.org)

## MADISON AUDUBON STAFF

### CENTRAL OFFICE

Becky Abel, *director of philanthropy*  
Carolyn Byers, *education director*  
Brenna Marsicek, *communications and outreach director*  
John Minnich, *financial manager and membership coordinator*  
Matt Reetz, *executive director*

### FAVILLE GROVE SANCTUARY

Drew Harry, *land steward*  
David Musolf, *volunteer resident manager*

### GOOSE POND SANCTUARY

Mark Martin (*volunteer*) and Susan Foote-Martin, *resident managers*  
Graham Steinhauer, *land steward*

## MADISON AUDUBON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Madison Audubon is a proud member of the following organizations:



## Burning is gone with the wind

*Its absence will have many consequences*

One of the great reassurances this spring, as I hope many of you have found during the current pandemic, is the continued rhythm of the natural world. In the third week of March, just as Wisconsinites were hunkering down, swamp sparrows returned to Faville Grove Sanctuary, perhaps to call Faville Marsh home, or perhaps to continue north—their sole concern to stake a territory on an open bog or shrubby sedge meadow.

At Faville Grove, while spring remains steadfast, our usual spring routine of prescribed burning was almost entirely shut down early by a county-wide burning ban through April (see sidebar on page five). As a result, this change to our restoration work and the landscape as a result provides an interesting lens for observing the natural environment. What consequences might we see in the coming months?

The most apparent result of the absence of fire will be fewer blooming prairie wildflowers. We have collected flowering data at

Faville Grove and found that, in an average square meter of prairie, 73 percent of the species will flower in burned prairie versus 53 percent in unburned. Decreased flowering, together with poorer seed set, will increase the difficulty of finding seeds needed to establish new prairies this fall. And as you may remember, we have three new parcels, two of which need restoration.

Burns also alter the structure of grasslands by removing dead plant material, a change to which many birds are sensitive. The state-threatened Henslow's sparrow, for example, breeds almost exclusively in unburned prairie, and we hope to see many of these sparrows across the landscape this summer.

Sedge wrens also love unburned lowland prairie. In point counts conducted in 2019, we saw that sedge wrens rarely occurred in burned prairie at Faville Grove, while they thrived in unburned patches. We might see an abundance of sedge wrens this summer.

On the other hand, common

ABOVE: Prescribed burns are an essential tool in prairie restoration. What will the prairies look like without them? *Drew Harry*



DIVE DEEPER: Explore more of the data Drew has collected and describes in this article, including great graphics, at [madisonaudubon.org/faville-burns](http://madisonaudubon.org/faville-burns).



yellowthroats seem to prefer burned prairie, and our data show that burned prairie averaged about three yellowthroats compared to two in unburned patches. We might notice a smaller population of yellowthroats this summer.

The cascading effects of a lack of fire are harder to predict but may be interesting to observe. The leftover thatch from prairie grasses could encourage a population explosion of mice and voles. Might we see multiple pairs of breeding northern harriers this summer as a result of their favorite prey source increasing?

Now, consider this series of food web ponderings—stay with me here: Dominant grasses like Indian grass and big bluestem could increase in the absence of fire. In turn, we may see grasshopper abundance increase since grasses are their favorite menu item. And one step further, grass-

hoppers are preyed on by spiders, which will make the abundance of arachnids an interesting development to watch. With more spiders, grasshoppers will likely feed more on forb species due to their complex foliage, which hides grasshoppers from spiders. As a result, forb species like Canada goldenrod that tend to dominate a prairie, but are frequently grazed by grasshoppers, can become less abundant and can open a niche for a higher diversity of plants.

As always, the complexities of the natural world provide endless drama and intrigue, and the study and observation of nature can be a welcome distraction during these difficult times.

Drew Harry, land steward  
[faville@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:faville@madisonaudubon.org)

### Post-script:

The Jefferson County burn ban was lifted on May 1, and since then, the Faville Grove team—with the help of socially-distanced volunteers—has burned about 200 acres. These burns occurred later in the spring than in a typical year, but still accomplished our goals of garlic mustard and brush control, and increasing seed set. It will be interesting to study the effects of these oddly timed burns in addition to the unburned prairies.

BELOW (Left to right): Sedge wren (Drew Harry), common yellowthroat (Arlene Koziol), and Henslow's sparrow (Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren)

SEDGE WREN



8x increase in abundance in unburned prairies

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT



1.5x increase in abundance in burned prairies

HENSLOW'S SPARROW



Stats unknown, but breeds only in unburned prairies





## Spring activities at Goose Pond

*Migration is in full swing, and our work is in full motion*

TOP: The oak savanna overlooking Goose Pond looks even more beautiful in a lavender sunset. *Graham Steinhauer*  
MIDDLE: Lift-off! A northern shoveler makes a splash at Goose Pond. *Arlene Koziol*  
BOTTOM: Yellow-headed blackbirds were a surprising feeder visitor this spring. *Graham Steinhauer*

Even when you live at a rural wildlife sanctuary, it is surprising how many things change when social distancing comes into practice! We have been working to complete much-needed restoration work while not putting our staff or volunteers at risk and also observing a DNR-imposed ban on burning that affected Columbia County.

However, lots of visitors have still been able to visit Goose Pond and the surrounding hundreds of acres of protected land to enjoy spring migration. Abnormally high water levels continue to provide

excellent habitat for ducks and other birds. As of mid-April, we've seen five species of geese and 20 species of ducks. Notable sightings include 2,200 white-fronted geese (a record, seen by Tom and Wendy Schultz), 1,800 tundra swans (Mark and Sue), 305 cackling geese (Steve Theissen), 380 canvasback (Cari Sprague), 102 northern shovelers, 85 ruddy ducks,

350 Bonaparte's gulls (Galen Hasler), four northern harriers (JD Arnston), and three yellow-headed blackbirds at the Prairie Lane feeders.

The Kestrel and Songbird Nest Box Monitoring programs are both underway this spring. Brand Smith coordinates 38 volunteers monitoring 178 kestrel nest boxes in eight counties—and safely, of course. Pat Ready found a very early incubating female on March 27, and volunteers found many more kestrels laying eggs and incubating in mid-April. We still hope to band kestrel young in June with our partners at Central Wisconsin Kestrel Research program and assistance from volunteers. In addition, eight volunteers are monitoring 115 tree swallow nest boxes on nine different trails at Goose Pond.

While all of this excitement is around incoming birds, there is one departing bird we've kept an eye on, too. In January, we outfitted Columbia, the snowy owl, with a GPS unit that uses cell phone towers to transmit location data. Columbia was last heard from on her way back to the Arctic in Cando, North Dakota, about





30 miles south of the Canada border. We wish her a nice summer and hope she calls back next winter.

Goose Pond will soon have its own bird tracking tower, in construction now and to be erected once the Safer at Home order is lifted. This tower, part of the Motus network ([motus.org/faq](http://motus.org/faq)), will be one of 873 radio telemetry receiver stations across the world that collects data with a focus on migrating birds. It's a great research project and we are grateful to Don Schmidt, who is doing the construction, and our wonderful donors for their support.

Of course, restoration is always in season at Goose Pond. UW Farms Prairie is a prairie remnant with high quality species like downy gentian, shooting star, and wood lily. On the hill overlooking Goose Pond is our only oak savanna. Both sites were heavily invaded by non-native shrubs. We've made significant progress in removing them, and our goal is to have all shrub removal work done by June.

The Safer at Home order has allowed us to also work on the 2019 Annual Management, Research and Education Report, writing Friday Feathered Features, compiling a list of our Friday Featured Features from 2013 to present (see links here →), producing monthly Goose Pond Updates, and revising our informational signs to have them reprinted. We are also working on updating our five-year management plans for Goose Pond, Erstad Prairie, and Otsego Marsh.

There is always something to do at Goose Pond Sanctuary and we are thankful for your support that allows us to do it. Stay well and we hope to see you at Goose Pond this summer.

Mark Martin and Sue Foote-Martin, resident managers  
[goosep@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:goosep@madisonaudubon.org)

Graham Steinhauer, land steward  
[gsteinhauer@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:gsteinhauer@madisonaudubon.org)

## GOOSE POND'S ONLINE MATERIALS

2019 Annual Report  
[madisonaudubon.org/gps-2019-report](http://madisonaudubon.org/gps-2019-report)

Friday Feathered Features  
(written in partnership with Faville Grove staff):  
[madisonaudubon.org/fff](http://madisonaudubon.org/fff)  
and  
[madisonaudubon.org/goose-pond-fff](http://madisonaudubon.org/goose-pond-fff)

LEFT: Beautiful landscapes benefit from your advocacy work. *Drew Harry*  
MIDDLE: A golden-crowned kinglet peers intently at the new birder snapping the picture. *Caitlyn Schuchhardt*  
RIGHT: Nothing is quite as lovely and interesting as a bird's nest (red-winged blackbird nest). *Carolyn Byers*

## Three themes on the Madison Audubon blog

These and more at [madisonaudubon.org/bird-nature-blog](http://madisonaudubon.org/bird-nature-blog)



### ADVOCACY STORIES

Stories about the importance of protecting land and animals through action

[madisonaudubon.org/advocacy](http://madisonaudubon.org/advocacy)



### ENTRYWAY TO BIRDING

Inspiration and tips for starting birding during a pandemic

[madisonaudubon.org/entryway-to-birding](http://madisonaudubon.org/entryway-to-birding)



### INTO THE NEST

Essays, photos, and videos of the incredible world of grassland nesting birds

[madisonaudubon.org/into-the-nest](http://madisonaudubon.org/into-the-nest)





## Safer and Funner at Home

*Showing up for kids in new ways*

This spring has been wildly different than we all expected, but a few things remain the same: birds are still singing, flowers are still blooming, and Madison Audubon is still teaching kids about nature.

Our education programming has switched from in-person to online. We get less hugs and high-fives from kids, but just as many smiles. Our new webpage “Safer and Funner at Home” has it all—activities and games for staying inside, getting outside, and running out some energy. All of these lessons are great for one kid or the whole family, and all of them will help you connect with nature while keeping a safe distance.

### Live Online Lessons

I have been having SO much fun teaching live online lessons. All of these lessons are available on our website if you missed them live. You can join me in learning about mammal furs, bird adaptations, skulls, and even meet our tiger salamander. Do bird yoga with me, or learn how to start a nature journal. We’ll be adding more lessons throughout the spring, so check our “Special Events” page for the schedule. Send us an email at [education@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:education@madisonaudubon.org) if you have a lesson suggestion.

### Supporting Teachers

Teachers are making monumental transitions this year. Usually, spring is the sweet spot in a classroom: kids understand the routines, they’re in the learning groove, and aren’t yet getting antsy for summer. This year, teachers have had to pivot and teach in an entirely new way. We’re helping teachers create fun and easy lessons

to continue outdoor learning at home—even if parents are working and kids are mostly solo.

My favorite so far has been “Find, Follow, and Share a Bug.” Kids find a bug inside or outside, follow it for five minutes, and then share the bug’s activities with a friend or adult. Kids can write and draw about the bug or video chat with someone to share. Try it at home!

### Connecting with Classrooms

The sweetest part about this spring has been connecting with the kids we used to see in person. I have regular video chats with classrooms from Muir, Lincoln, and Midvale Elementary Schools. We talk about the nature we’ve been seeing, share art projects, and make silly faces at each other. But most importantly, we let those kids know that we care.

We’ll be back to teaching in person as soon as we’re able. But until then we’ll use every tool we have to keep connecting with kids!

Carolyn Byers, education director  
[carolyn.byers@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:carolyn.byers@madisonaudubon.org)

P.S. Explore the Safer and Funner at Home webpage: [madisonaudubon.org/at-home](http://madisonaudubon.org/at-home)



TOP: A nature basket is filled with all sorts of treasures, including a dead snake a child found. All were returned to the great outdoors. *Carolyn Byers*  
MIDDLE: Aly, an aspiring artist, participated in Carolyn’s Nature Journaling lesson, with great results and a happy smile. *Courtesy of Angie Mortenson*  
BOTTOM: Little critters always need a closer look. *Madison Audubon*  
RIGHT: Carolyn cracks up during one of her video lessons, introducing viewers to her tiger salamander. *Madison Audubon*







## Birding that gives back

*Bald Eagle Nest Watch from a volunteer's view*

I never expected that an eagle nest would be what held me together during a pandemic. When I signed up for the Bald Eagle Nest Watch program back in January, I was just thrilled at the chance to monitor a nest and learn about bald eagles. I could not have predicted just how valuable of an experience it would become.

I help monitor a nest on a marsh in Dane County with two other sets of volunteers. We take turns visiting the nest throughout the week, and over the past three months we've collected a lot of data. When I'm out on the marsh, I keep track of the eagles' behaviors and take note of potential disturbances. I've watched them painstakingly add sticks to their nest, arranging them *just so*. I've watched them vocalize before trading places as they incubate their eggs, pausing first to gently roll the eggs so they warm evenly. I've watched them hunt and return with food for their new, young hatchlings.

Throughout this program, not only have I gotten to know this eagle

family, but I've also gotten to know the landscape they rely on. I've seen the marsh transform through the seasons. I can tell you the precise date sandhill cranes, red-winged blackbirds, and Wilson's snipe returned. Or when the ice melted. Or the frogs started singing. Spending an hour each week observing the nest—standing alone with the magical world of the marsh around me—has given me hope, joy, and solace in a time when our worlds have been shaken.

Citizen science programs like Madison Audubon's Bald Eagle Nest Watch are opportunities to give back, to let your observations be part of research that strives to protect birds and the environments they depend on. But you may find, like I have, that you get back more than you give. You'll walk away with more knowledge and more joy than you've ever imagined.

Caitlyn Schuchardt, BENW volunteer and Communications & Outreach Assistant  
[cschuch@madisonaudubon.org](mailto:cschuch@madisonaudubon.org)



Learn more about BENW at [madisonaudubon.org/benw](http://madisonaudubon.org/benw)

### BIRD COLLISION CORPS UPDATE

Our BCC volunteers, partners, and we had big plans for this spring's program to study bird-window collisions on the UW-Madison and American Family Insurance campuses, which were both canceled due to COVID-19. We will pick the program up again in the fall. Thank you to all of our volunteers!



LEFT: The fuzzy head of a bald eaglet peaks up over the lip of the nest, a thrilling experience for BENW volunteers and bird lovers. Gary Shackelford



## Board update

*Slate of candidates approved*

Thanks to all of you who voted in our spring 2020 election of board members. The four individuals who were up for renewal (Galen Hasler, Joanne Jones, David Rihn, and John Shillinglaw) were all successfully reinstated. We are grateful to them for their time and energy, and to you for helping this important part of our organization's bylaws be fulfilled.

Cheers to the next year!

## DONOR ROLL

*Thank you to those who donated February-April 2020*

Thank you to our major  
education donors:



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I would like to find out more about Madison Audubon's Legacy Society. Please contact me!

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If you are a member of both Madison and National Audubon (One Audubon), please renew at [audubon.org/take-action](http://audubon.org/take-action) or call 1-844-428-3826. Thanks for your additional gift to Madison Audubon!

If you are a member of Madison Audubon only, your gift of \$20 or more above will renew your membership for one year.

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO THE ADDRESS ON PAGE 12, OR GIVE ONLINE AT [madisonaudubon.org](http://madisonaudubon.org)**

LEFT: Song sparrow in its little brown glory. *Arlene Koziol*

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*Conservation volunteers*  
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by UW Hospitals and Clinics Authority

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*Mary Poser*  
by Helen Poser

*Mabel Ring*  
by Ervin Ring

*John Roberts*  
by Mary Heinicka  
Belinda Jordan  
George Osterhaus

*Kyle Smith*  
by Topf Wells and Sally Probasco

*Lucille Stephani*  
by Lynn and John Stephani <sup>FF</sup>

*Jim and Laura Tyndall*  
by Marilyn Meade

**IN-KIND GIFTS...**

William Damm  
Monica Hall  
Gene Jacobs  
Arlene Koziol  
Don Schmidt

*Join the Frequent Flyers monthly donor club! Members are noted with an FF marker. More info is available at [madisonaudubon.org/take-action](http://madisonaudubon.org/take-action)*

**ANSWERS TO LBJs QUIZ, PG. 12**



Sparrows are tough to ID! How many did you get right?

- A. Song
- B. Chipping
- C. White-throated
- D. Savannah
- E. American tree
- F. LeConte's
- G. White-crowned
- H. Henslow's
- I. Grasshopper



## Your love of birds can shape the future!

Remembering Madison Audubon in your will or estate plan honors a commitment to our natural world, provides support that will protect Wisconsin's amazing birds and share nature with our kids and grandkids forever. We invite you to become a part of our planned giving recognition group, the Legacy Society.

There are many ways to create a legacy gift. Give Matt a call at (608) 210-1441 and we will help find the perfect solution for you. Learn more at: [madisonaudubon.org/legacy-society](http://madisonaudubon.org/legacy-society)

If you have already named Madison Audubon in your estate plans, please let us know. We'd love to thank you and welcome you to the Legacy Society.

## JOIN OUR FLOCK FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



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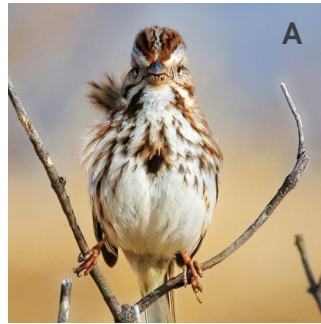


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@MadisonAudubon

## Little Brown Jobs quiz

*How's your sparrow ID?*

Below are nine species of species of sparrows (sometimes called "little brown jobs" or "LBJs") that are native to Wisconsin and found here during the breeding season or longer. Can you tell which species they are? Answers are found inside the newsletter. Good luck!



Monica Hall



Mick Thompson



Kelly Colgan Azar



Kelly Colgan Azar



Kelly Colgan Azar



Andrew Cannizzaro



Kelly Colgan Azar



Arlene Koziol



Kelly Colgan Azar