



Tropical Wings

Newsletter

Volume 3 • 2020

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Tropical Wings



The mission of Tropical Wings is to support the Sister Parks Agreement between the National Park Service in the Upper Midwest and national parks on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica (SINAC/ACOSA) by promoting an awareness of Neotropical migratory birds and supporting habitat conservation through building relationships within and between communities at both ends of the migration.

Tropical Wings is a gathering of concerned citizens in the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway communities in Minnesota and Wisconsin. The focus of Tropical Wings is the welfare of migratory birds shared between the Upper Midwest and Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula.

As a shared resource these birds play a vital role in the web of life and depend on quality habitat along and at both ends of their migration to thrive.

Tropical Wings is committed to engaging citizens in celebrating and sustaining this natural phenomenon through education and habitat preservation both in Costa Rica and the Upper Midwest.



Tropical Wings facilitates many activities as part of our mission including:

- *Engaging in habitat restoration*
- *Organizing an annual Bird Celebration in collaboration with local community groups*
- *Promoting the Sister Parks relationship and instilling an appreciation for the natural history and value of migratory birds by participating in existing community events throughout the St. Croix Watershed.*
- *Encouraging and organizing adult and student exchanges between the Upper Midwest and Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula for the purpose of education and service efforts.*



Tropical Wings

Birding Journal By Tropical Wings President, Patty Mueller



This is an exciting time to be a part of Tropical Wings! In 2019 we became the official "Friends Group" of the National Parks Service Sister Parks agreement. We also piloted a Bird Migration curriculum at a local Hudson elementary school, involving 100 fifth graders in three days of activities to increase their knowledge and appreciation of our fine feathered friends. Students also created art for our annual Youth Art Show, with art displayed at the Hudson Hospital last summer. Children from Costa Rica contributed art too, continuing our tradition of celebrating our neotropical birds at both ends of their migration.

In February 2020, ten travelers will journey to the Osa Peninsula, visiting our Sister Parks and participating in the fourth annual Costa Rica Birdathon. This incredible conservation trip is offered each winter, and is a wonderful way to explore Costa Rica off the tourist paths. It is also the main funding source for our habitat grant program.

Our annual habitat grant program funded six projects in the St. Croix watershed in 2019, and the 2020 Habitat Grant recipients will be introduced at our annual Bird Migration Celebration. Please check our website for application information if you know of a habitat restoration project that could benefit our birds. We also support habitat conservation projects on the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica each year.

We will celebrate our seventh annual Bird Migration Celebration on World Migratory Bird Day, with the theme "Birds Connect our World". The weekend of events kicks off with a celebration at the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson on Friday evening May 8 beginning at 6:30 PM. Author Steve Betchkal will be our keynote speaker, an ornithologist, environmentalist, and Emmy and Murrow Award-winning veteran journalist, Steve has worked at three national parks and backpacked 67 others. We will also have a bird of prey, a silent auction, displays and our annual Student Art Show.

Are you new to birdwatching, or want some tips to improve your birdwatching skills? Join us for Birding 101 hike at Carpenter Nature Center's Wisconsin Campus on Saturday morning, May 9 at 8 AM. There will be hikes led by the St. Croix Valley Bird Club for experienced "birders" too! Start Mother's Day with a hike at Belwin Conservancy near Afton MN with activities beginning at 6:45 AM on Sunday May 10.

Tropical Wings celebrates the fall bird migration each September with a Saturday morning event at Belwin Conservancy. Check our website for event details at www.tropicalwings.org

Tropical Wings is an all volunteer organization, we are excited and committed to continue supporting education and habitat conservation for this unique National Park Service "Sister Parks Agreement", and invite you to consider joining us in our work by becoming a member of Tropical Wings.



Bird Migration Celebration Keynote Speaker Steve Betchkal (top) is the President of the Gaylord Nelson Audubon Society.

Binoculars will be provided for those interested in participating in the Birding 101 Hike (bottom) at Carpenter Nature Center on May 9.

Bird Biographies

Aerial Insectivores By TW Board Member, Lynette Anderson



Least Flycatchers (above) are tiny; on average weighing less than a AAA battery. Note their distinctive wingbars, eye ring, small bill, and short primary feathers.

Floating up, diving down, quick turn, out and back from the twig perch, graceful, flowing, surprising in their agility to move through space, this describes the aerial acrobatics of a group of birds that hunt for food "on the fly". What are they looking for? Any winged or flying insect that would make a tasty meal.

These aerial insectivores include Common Nighthawks, Whip-poor Wills, Swallows, Purple Martins, Chimney Swifts, and Flycatchers. Some of these are characterized as "Hawkers" or those that fly and catch their food, (i.e. Tree Swallow) others are characterized as "Saliers" or those that perch, and "sally forth" or fly out and come back to the perch (i.e. Flycatchers).

One of the Saliers that lives in our area is the Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*). The smallest of this genus, the Least Flycatcher is one of the first to arrive in spring. Its song of "Che Bek, Che Bek" is unmistakable and always a joy to hear. These birds inhabit semi open deciduous forests as well as shrubby fields and forest edges. They have a bold eye ring, two white wingbars and a very short bill, which is one of the most important identification features. Like other Flycatchers, they perch in an upright posture on a small twig or branch. Their feeding strategy is flit out, grab an insect and go directly back to the perch. You may see a fidget and flicking of their wings and tail as they wait for their next meal to fly by.

Aerial insectivores are one of the bird groups whose populations are in steep decline. The reasons are not precisely known, but are thought to include; loss of insects due to pesticides, the loss of trees and shrubs that surround fields, loss of nesting structures, the loss of habitat in wintering grounds and something called phenological mismatch. This occurs when birds can't adapt to earlier blossom times and insect emergence dates which is related to climate change. All of these birds, as well as bats and dragonflies, provide important ecological services by keeping insect pest populations in check. They also are an important link in the food chain as prey for other species.

The next time you are out for a walk and see one of these entertaining birds, allow yourself time to pause, watch and be awed by the skill, grace and determination of these beautiful members of our natural world community.

To learn more about Aerial Insectivores check out the following:

- Rob Diehls TED talk on Airspace as Habitat
- Midwest Migration Network
- Midwest Aerial insectivore Discussion Group Facebook page

To support Aerial Insectivores in your area:

- Learn more about these amazing animals by reading, watching videos or TED talks or attending a talk in your area.
- When you buy your nursery plants ask what is in the soil. Neonicotinoides are a seed treatment pesticide that negatively affects insects and pollinators.
- Provide a water source in your yard.
- Support local nature groups.



Purple Martins (top) and Cliff Swallows (bottom) are considered Hawkiers. Not only do they eat while on-the-wing, they also drink by skimming the surface of the water with their beak.

Habitat Heroes

A Habitat Hero is a person or organization that has an extraordinary understanding of the importance of habitat protection, and a vision for implementing activities to raise awareness and build knowledge about conservation efforts.

The Munch Bunch By TW Treasurer, Judith Freund

Allyse and Dan Sorenson manage a flock of 115 goats known as “The Munch Bunch.” We all know that goats like to “munch”, but this is a special group of eaters – they feast on that dreadful invasive plant, BUCKTHORN! Yes, believe it or not, the “Munch Bunch” goats have an appetite for the noxious plant – along with other invasive plants, by the way.

The “Munch Bunch” is located in St. Croix Falls, when they are not out and about dining on buckthorn. The Sorensons started their business in 2015 and now their goats are put to work clearing private property and public areas. Recently they were seen hard at work in Prospect Park in Hudson. They began their “job” at Hudson in 2018, and will continue with follow-up this coming season. (It is quite a twist! When a Hudson resident hired the Munch Bunch goats to clear their property, there were some complaints filed with the city. You might say the goats faced jail time! Now they are gainful employees of the city.) Typically the goats are confined to a designated space on the property they are working. When that space is cleared, they are moved – being confined by a fence. In Hudson they are a perfect solution due to the fact that the landscape of Prospect Park includes steep hillsides that would be difficult for humans to negotiate while attempting to eradicate buckthorn.

According to an article in the Star-Tribune, “the Sorensons, who describe themselves as ‘nomadic farmers,’ consider the business an around-the-clock job. Their goats are working four to six sites at any given time within an 80-mile radius.” Obviously the huge benefit of using animals for noxious weed control is that it eliminates use of chemicals. Buckthorn is an invasive plant that is having a negative impact up and down the St. Croix. Because its leaves sprout before other plants in spring, it robs natives of light and water. Buckthorn has an extensive root system and the female plant produces berries that are spread by birds.



Although the use of goats for invasive species control may seem unorthodox, the practice is much more environmentally friendly than using machinery or chemicals, and is gaining in popularity across the country. Herds such as The Munch Bunch (top) are very effective in controlling invasive species such as buckthorn (bottom). The woody weed can be identified by its waxy, ovate, finely serrated leaves, dark purple berries, flaky bark, and prickly branches. Buckthorn is easiest to identify in early Spring and late Autumn, because it's green leaves dominate the forest understory while other trees and shrubs are bare.

Because of this environmental-friendly approach to weed control, the “Munch Bunch” is our Habitat Hero! You can learn more about the “Munch Bunch” by visiting their website at www.munchbunchgoats.com.

Sister Parks Updates

Isla del Caño Biological Reserve By TW Secretary, Nina Koch

Tropical Wings offers a Birdathon trip to Costa Rica each year. Corcovado National Park, the Golfo Dulce Reserve, Piedras Blancas National Park, Terraba Sierpe National Wetlands, and Marino Ballena National Park, are all Costa Rican Parks and Reserves that are Sister-Parks with 14 National Parks in the midwest of the United States. Tropical Wings is a Friends Group to the parks in both countries. During the Tropical Wings Bird-a-thon trips we have visited



these parks and reserves, but there is one Sister Park that we had never visited until this year - Isla del Caño Biological Reserve. Cano Island is a unique park for many reasons. First, being an island, the only way to arrive at this park, that is 10 miles offshore from the Osa Peninsula, is by boat. It is a marine biological reserve with geographical and archeological importance. But the real beauty of the park is found underwater. The beautiful coral reefs attract a huge variety of fish, whales and sharks. While we snorkeled in the clear blue water, we swam with Hawksbill Turtles, a White Tip Shark and fish in every color of the rainbow.

Initially established as an extension of Corcovado National Park, Caño Island, on March 9, 1978, was recognized as a Biological Reserve. The Caño Island Reserve encompasses 1.2 square miles of land and 22.4 square miles of ocean. The island and surrounding waters were designated as a protected reserve to protect the indigenous burial grounds and artifacts found on the island as well as the coral reefs and underwater habitat around it. There are 19 species of coral in the waters surrounding the island. The waters host schools of tangs, jacks and needlefish, boring sponges, diadem sea urchins, sea cucumbers, crustaceans, parrot fish, puffers, damselfish, large schools of barracudas, tunas, moray eels, white-tipped reef sharks, silky sharks, bull sharks and occasionally whales sharks and humpback whales which are seen during their annual migrations from July and October, and again in December through March. The island itself is the exposed part of an underwater mountain brought up by the ancient collision of two tectonic plates over 50 million years ago.

There is one Ranger Station on the island and two walking trails which start at the ranger station. The two trails start as one and separate into two trails after the initial steep climb. One trail, the "El Mirador", takes you to a scenic lookout on the south side of the island. The other trail, the "Sitio Archeologico" takes you to an archeological site. We learned that the island was formerly a cemetery or burial ground dating back to the pre-Columbian era. Evidence of this island's history are the incredible stone spheres that are hand carved and perfectly rounded. We did not get to see one of these amazing spheres on the island itself, but were able to see several that were moved to a small park in Sierpe. The balls range in sizes from as small as 12 inches to as large as 6.6 feet in diameter, and weigh up to 16 tons. Locally, they are known as Las Bolas (literally The Balls). The spheres are commonly attributed to the extinct Diquis culture and are sometimes referred to as the Diquis Spheres. To what purpose were these perfectly spheres made? The experts have developed many theories, but the mystery remains unsolved.



Interested in birds and Costa Rica's National Parks on the Osa Peninsula? If you are a Tropical Wings member, you are eligible to join us for a adventurous visit in February/March, 2021. Check out the details on our website!

Partner Profiles

It takes cooperation of many organizations to protect migratory birds and conserve the ecosystems on which they rely. Tropical Wings partners with many entities throughout the St. Croix Watershed that perform vital conservation and education services for the animals and people of our community.

The organization featured in this issue's Partner Profile was a recipients of the 2019 Tropical Wings Habitat Restoration Grant. Each year, Tropical Wings awards grants of up to \$1000 to individuals, businesses and organizations in the St. Croix River Watershed to preserve and restore bird habitat.

Kinnickinnic River Land Trust



Established in 1993, and based in River Falls, Wisconsin, the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust (KRLT) is dedicated to protecting the beauty and health of the Kinnickinnic watershed. By partnering with numerous landowners, community organizations, and volunteers, and using strategies such as conservation easements, KRLT has been able to conserve over 3,000 acres of land. Within the land area managed by KRLT, they are able to directly protect 10 miles of stream bank, including both the Kinni and its tributaries. KRLT encourages the public to enjoy the land by visiting one (or all) of their three preserves— Kelly Creek, Drewiske, and Trumpeter Swan.

Of their conservation efforts, KRLT states, "Protecting our landscapes, ground water flow and quality of surface water are key and critical to the health of the Kinni. We can take heart in the fact that we are not alone in fighting the battle to preserve our beautiful river. Numerous citizens, students, elected officials, organizations and agencies have joined in the effort. We are well-known and respected for the work we have done. We will continue to lead conservation efforts by example and actions."

As a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization, KRLT relies on the support of conservation-minded community members. To learn how to donate, become a "Kinni Guardian," and learn more about the great work done by KRLT, visit their website at www.kinniriver.org.

Bee-balm (top-right) flourishes on the restored prairie of the Kelly Creek Preserve, a tributary of the Kinnickinnic. The Drewiske Preserve includes a portion of the Kinni and offers many picturesque views (bottom).

Acknowledgements

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Membership

Tropical Wings is a non-profit 501c3 organization composed of volunteers supporting education and conservation for Neotropical Migratory birds through the Sister Parks Agreement between National Parks in the Upper Midwest and Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula.

Join our efforts today by making a contribution and becoming a Tropical Wings Member!

Contribution Levels

Hummingbird

\$15 (Students & Seniors)



Warbler

\$35 (Individuals)

Osprey

\$50 (Households)



Falcon

Donations > \$50

Membership Benefits

- ☞ Subscription to the annual Tropical Wings Newsletter ☞
- ☞ Advanced notice of birding and conservation events ☞
- ☞ Priority registration for the Costa Rica Bird-a-thon Trip ☞

To become a member, please complete the membership form and mail with payment to:

Tropical Wings, Inc.
2107 Chestnut Dr.
Hudson, Wisconsin, 54016

Thank You to Our Members

The following people have become new members to the Tropical Wings community. Your contributions help us achieve our mission. Thank you!

Bob and Peg Fashingbauer



CONTRIBUTION LEVEL:

- Hummingbird—\$15 (Students & Seniors)
- Warbler—\$35 (Individuals)
- Osprey—\$50 (Households)
- Falcon—Contributions > \$50
Amount: \$ _____

MEMBER INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Phone: _____
Street Address: _____ Email: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zipcode: _____

PAYMENT OPTIONS:

- I would like to pay by check made payable to Tropical Wings, Inc.
- I would like to pay by credit card Card Type: _____
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City: _____ State: _____ Zipcode: _____

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- I would like to make this gift in honor of: _____
- Please keep my name anonymous