



# Tropical Wings

*Newsletter*

Volume 5 · 2022

## **Birding Journal**

A Message from the  
President of Tropical Wings  
Page 2

## **GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER**

Page 3

## **Habitat Hero**

Knowles-Nelson Stewardship  
Page 4

## **Community Partners**

Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust  
Page 5

## **Osa Partners Update**

Aves Increibles Video  
Page 6

## **Help Protect Migratory Birds**

*Become a Member*

Page 7





# 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

Preserving and restoring habitat is a key objective for Tropical Wings, and habitat conservation is critically important as we have lost almost 30% of all bird populations in North America over the past 50 years (published online in *Science*, September, 2019). Grassland birds have declined drastically, with a population decline of 53% since 1970. Many things have contributed to this sharp decline, with one of the main reasons being habitat loss. Thus, anything done to preserve and restore habitat is essential to save our birds, not to mention the other creatures that depend on intact, healthy ecosystems.

One thing Tropical Wings does in response to these alarming statistics is invest in habitat through our Habitat Grant program. Each year funds are raised through our Costa Rica Birdathon - each traveler raising funds as part of their travel experience. These funds are then awarded to individuals, businesses and organizations in the St. Croix River Watershed and the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica, preserving and restoring migratory bird habitat at both ends of the migration.

In 2021 a total of \$5000 was awarded including grants to Osa Birds in Costa Rica, Chisago Lakes Middle School, Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust, Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy, and Arcola Mills Historic Foundation. Funds were used for growing and planting native species, removing invasive brush and reseeding with native plants, using fire management to restore prairie, planting native shrubs, and restoring native floodplain forest. If you or an organization you know are interested in applying for 2022 Habitat Grants, application materials can be found on our website, [www.tropicalwings.org](http://www.tropicalwings.org) by mid January, with applications due March 15 each year.



*Top Left: Streak-chested Antpitta. Top Middle: Entrance to the outdoor classroom at Chicago Lakes Middle School. Top right: Turn to page 5 for more information about the Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust. Bottom left: The Kinnickinnic River Land Trust is profiled in Issue 3 of Tropical Wings Newsletter. Bottom middle: The Standing Cedars Land Conservancy is profiles in Issue 4 of the Tropical Wings Newsletter. Bottom right: Arcola Mills historic home near Stillwater, MN.*

There are also some simple things each of us can do to help our birds- plant native species, avoid pesticide use, keep cats indoors, reduce plastics, and drink shade grown coffee. Every action matters, and together we can make a positive difference for the birds that bring such beauty and joy into our everyday life.



# Bird Biographies

## Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*)

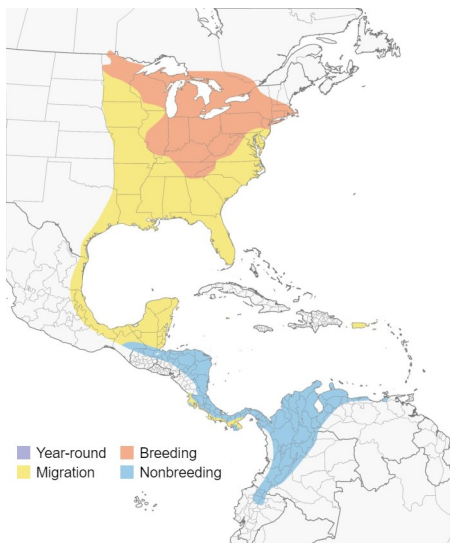
By TW Board Member, Lynette Anderson

If you have ever spent time watching warblers you know that they are very active, quick to move and oh! so brightly colored. Their behavioral antics, along with their colorful plumage inspired Roger Tory Peterson to refer to them as “sprightly butterflies of the bird world.” None so captures this title as the Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*).

Slim and gray with bright patches of black and yellow, weighing in at a whopping .31 ounces and measuring 4.6 inches long, this little bird is a joy to watch as they hop along branches inspecting the leaves for insect prey. Leafroller caterpillars appear to be a favorite at the smorgasbord of caterpillars, moths, and spiders.

Habitat is of crucial importance in the success of the Golden-winged Warbler population. These birds use a mosaic of habitat types over the course of a season. Breeding and nesting occurs in brushy areas surrounding wetlands or in early successional growth areas comprised of aspen or willow stands. Nests are built by the female on the ground near edges, made of leaves, grapevine and other long strips of plant material usually placed at the base of a goldenrod or Rubus (berry) species. The nest is typically well concealed by overhead grasses and leaves. Upon fledging the birds move into nearby woodlands to feed.

Golden-winged Warblers are one of many neo-tropical migrants, spending the summers in the northeastern United States and Canada and winters in woodlands and shade coffee plantations in Central and South America. They can be found on the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica. We are fortunate in Minnesota, along with Wisconsin and Manitoba, Canada to have the majority (70 %) of the global population of this bird in the summer. Populations have been on a steep decline due to habitat loss and hybridization with the closely related blue-winged warbler.



Here's how you can help Golden-winged Warblers and many other birds:

- Buy shade grown coffee – Visit the Smithsonian National Zoo & Conservation Biology Institute website to peruse several varieties of bird-friendly roast!
- Support organizations in your area that do the work of habitat restoration
- Allow a portion of your yard to be wild, or plant a wildlife friendly garden— Visit the National Wildlife Foundation website to learn about creating spaces for animals at your home
- Keep your cats indoors and make sure your dog is on-leash when you go for walks—Unrestrained pets pose a threat to wildlife, especially ground-nesting species of birds like the Golden-winged Warbler
- Reduce your plastic footprint by using reusable shopping bags and not using plastic straws

# 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.*

## Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

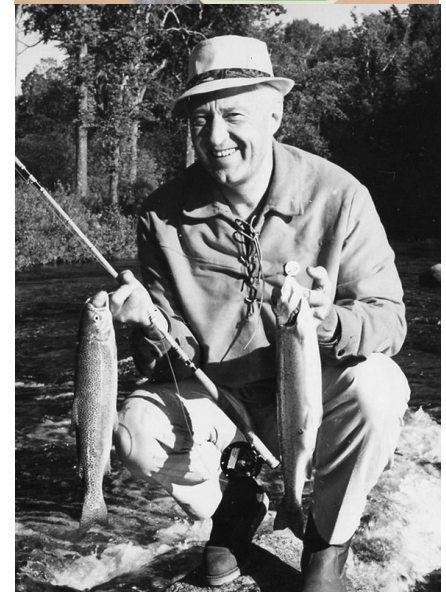
By TW Treasurer, Judith Freund

THANK a legislator! This past summer the Wisconsin Legislature re-funded the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. It is fairly certain that those of you living in Wisconsin have a natural area near you that has received funding at one time or another. This program has over-whelming citizen support. Nonetheless, reach out to your local state representatives and thank them for their support. It is critical that legislators hear from you in GOOD times and not just when things are not so good.

The bill to refund Knowles-Nelson essentially maintains the current funding of the Stewardship Program, but for only 4 years instead of the 10-year reauthorization sought by advocates of the program. As we have all learned, the demand for outdoor recreation has skyrocketed over the past year. As stated on the website, The Wisconsin Legislature created the Stewardship fund in 1989 to preserve valuable wildlife habitat and natural areas, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation. In 1993, the Stewardship Program was renamed the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship program after two of Wisconsin's revered conservation leaders, Warren Knowles (governor 1965-1971) and Gaylord Nelson (governor 1959-1963, U.S. Senator 1964-1981). The Stewardship fund gives DNR spending authority to purchase land and easement additions to state properties. Stewardship dollars also support recreational infrastructure on state properties, including campsite, restroom and trail improvements. Most annual Stewardship spending takes the form of grants to local governments and nonprofits. Stewardship grants fund local park infrastructure, boat ramp facilities, recreational trails and land purchases for parks and nature preserves statewide.

Two past recipients of Tropical Wings Habitat Grants – Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center and Kinnickinnic Land Trust – have benefited from this program. To learn more about these organizations, visit the Tropical Wings website and read about them in past issues of our newsletter.

*An Eastern Meadowlark perches on a post in the restored prairie at the Carpenter St. Croix Valley Nature Center Wisconsin Campus, a beneficiary of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program (top). Former governors Warren Knowles (middle) and Gaylord Nelson (bottom) are both members of the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame. Knowles was instrumental in the formation of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and also established the Wisconsin Governor's Fishing Opener. Among other accomplishments, Nelson founded Earth Day and Earth Week and helped create the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.*





# Partner Profiles

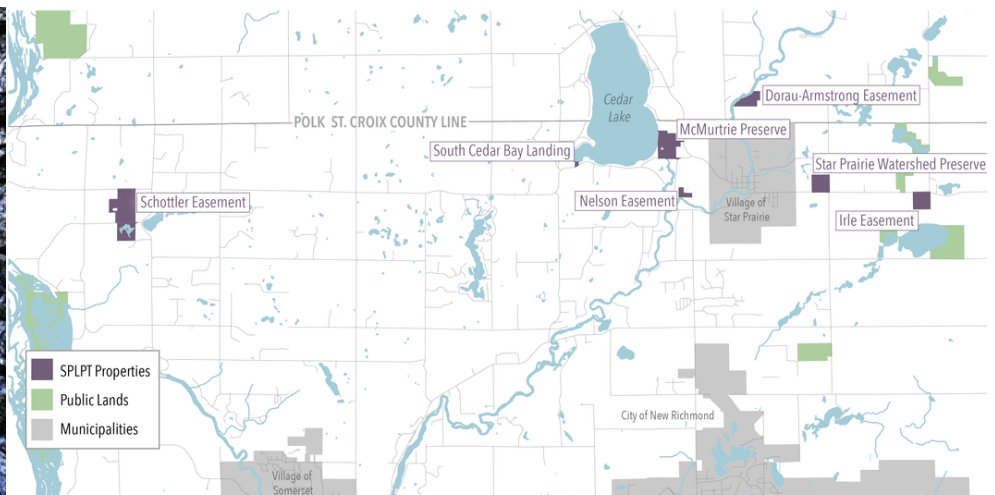
*It takes cooperation of many organizations to protect migratory birds and conserve the ecosystems on which they rely. Tropical Wings partners with many entities throughout the St. Croix Watershed that perform vital conservation and education services for the animals and people of our community.*

The organization featured in this issue's Partner Profile was a recipient of the 2021 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.

## *Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust*

The Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust (SPLPT) was formed in 2002 by individuals who were concerned with the rapid pace of development that was resulting in the loss of valuable natural areas. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Trust's mission is to preserve environmentally sensitive land and promote rural character, while protecting water quality and wildlife habitat for future generations. To meet its mission, the Trust accepts land donations and conservation easements, placing a priority on lands adjacent to water resources, with significant wildlife habitat or scenic value, or adjacent to public lands. The Trust currently protects more than 300 acres of land in northern St. Croix and southern Polk counties:

- **McMurtrie Preserve**—A 63-acre tract of land with 1,400 feet on the southeast shore of Cedar Lake that contains a diversity of wildlife habitat including wetlands, hardwoods, oak savannah and pine plantations (bottom left).
- **Cedar Bay Landing**—1.3 acres on the southwest shore of Cedar Lake that includes a boardwalk, providing lake access for canoeing, kayaking, fishing and bird-watching.
- **Star Prairie Watershed Preserve**—A 40-acre parcel of restored native prairie, located just east of Star Prairie, which complements the surrounding U.S. Fish & Wildlife Waterfowl Production Areas.
- **Irlle Easement**—A 40-acre conservation easement of undeveloped forest land, with a rustic cabin, adjacent to U.S. Fish & Wildlife property, which includes Waterfowl Production Areas.
- **Nelson Easement**—A 12-acre conservation easement beginning the creation of a connected corridor between the McMurtrie Preserve and lands owned by St. Croix County.
- **Schottler Easement**—A 162-acre conservation easement that includes a working Christmas tree farm. This agricultural acquisition also prevents development around a 20-acre wild lake, preserves habitat for wildlife, and provides scenic rural views along the roadway.



# Osa Partners Updates

## *Aves Incredibles Video* By TW Secretary, Nina Koch

We have all experienced the change and cancellation of plans during the covid pandemic. For Tropical Wings, that meant missing the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica in 2020 for the annual Birdathon. The Costa Rica Birdathon is Tropical Wings' major fundraiser that funds the habitat grants we give out each spring to organizations and individuals that manage and protect critical neotropical migratory bird habitat.

In lieu of the Birdathon, we joined forces with our Costa Rican partner, Surcos Tours, to create a video of the incredible birds that we see when we go to Costa Rica for the Birdathon. Surcos Tours and Tropical Wings used photos and video from past Birdathon trips and used the expertise of the Surcos Tours staff and our own Tropical Wings experts to create a narration of the video. The result is our video, "Aves Incredibles". It premiered, virtually, in April of 2021. The video was a great success. With the accompanying donations, we were able to fund five habitat grants equal to the amount of previous years. Thank you to all who donated.

If you missed seeing this great video, you still can see it! Contact Tropical Wings Board Member Jessie Eckroad at [jessie.eckroad@yahoo.com](mailto:jessie.eckroad@yahoo.com) for access and donate to Tropical Wings via PayPal at <https://tinyurl.com/tw-donate>.

*Although the St. Croix River Valley and the Osa Peninsula share many bird species, the focus of Aves Incredibles is "exotic" birds, such as the Bay-headed Tanager (top) that cannot be found in our Minnesota and Wisconsin backyards. All photos and video clips used to create Aves Incredibles were taken by Dionisio "Nito" Paniagua of Surcos Tours (left) and Nina Koch of Tropical Wings (right).*



## Acknowledgements

**COVER PHOTO**  
Ryan Mandelbaum

**EDITOR**  
Jessie Eckroad

**ARTICLE WRITERS**  
Lynette Anderson  
Judith Freund  
Nina Koch  
Patty Mueller

### PHOTO CONTRIBUTORS

Arcola Mills  
Carpenter Nature Center  
Chisago Lakes Middle School  
Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
Kinnickinnic River Land Trust  
Nito Paniagua  
Manuel Sanchez  
SPLPT  
Standing Cedars  
WI Conservation Hall of Fame

### CONTENT CONTRIBUTORS

Cornell Lab of Ornithology  
SPLPT

### ADDITIONAL THANKS

Buck Malick  
Brian Collins  
Anastasia Shartin

**THANK YOU TO OUR  
PRINTER**



CREATE · PRINT · MAIL · PROMOTE

**GRAPHIC DESIGN, INC.**  
315 Second Street East  
Hastings, MN  
(651) 437-6459  
<http://www.gd-inc.com/>

# 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!

**MEMBERSHIP ISN'T JUST FOR INDIVIDUALS!**

**We are pleased to welcome the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust as a new member!**



### 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: \_\_\_\_\_  
Card #: \_\_\_\_\_ CSC #: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Billing Address (if different from above): \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zipcode: \_\_\_\_\_

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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