



# Tropical Wings *Newsletter*

Volume 7 • 2024

## **Birding Journal**

A Message from the  
President of Tropical Wings

## **Upcoming Events**

Page 2

## **GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLERS**

Page 3

## **Costa Rica Connections**

Organic Shade Grown Coffee

Page 4

## **Partner Profiles**

St. Croix Valley Bird Club

Page 5

## **Habitat Hero**

Community Nature Festivals

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



We at Tropical Wings measure our success by our connections with people, programs and projects that are improving awareness, igniting passion, inspiring action and supporting efforts that benefit our migratory birds. Partnerships are the key that magnifies this essential work of bird conservation and education. This past year, Tropical Wings collaborated with the St. Croix Valley Bird Club, combining our Bird Migration Celebrations into the joint “Wings of Spring” festival held at Carpenter Nature Center’s Wisconsin Campus. Our first joint festival was a great success, with thirty volunteers and over 75 visitors participating in hikes, bird banding, crafts and activities to learn about actions to help our shared neotropical migratory birds.

Carpenter Nature Center (CNC) has been an important partner for many years. Tropical Wings is excited to support a new project beginning this year involving the Wood Thrush, a neotropical migrant that has experienced a 59% population loss since 1970. This decline is primarily due to forest loss and fragmentation in both their breeding and wintering ranges. CNC is one of an international group of conservation organizations from both the breeding

and wintering ranges that will be placing small radio telemetry tags on Wood Thrush in 2024 and 2025. These tags emit a specific signal which is picked up by an international system of receiving towers (Motus towers) found throughout North and Central America. Carpenter Nature Center has Motus towers on both their Minnesota and Wisconsin Campuses. Partners throughout the breeding and wintering grounds will be tagging up to 25 Wood Thrush each, with the overall project goal of tagging 600 birds. The data collected from this project will inform future conservation initiatives to improve Wood Thrush survival, including forest protection and habitat conservation in the specific areas where the wood thrush breed and spend the winter.

***Tropical Wings may be a relatively small group of individuals, but together with our partners, we can do significant work to make a difference for our birds!***

## Upcoming Events

*Bird programming provided by Tropical Wings would not be possible without the dedicated network of environmental education and habitat conservation partners in the St. Croix River Valley and beyond.*

*For more information, visit the TW website | [www.tropicalwings.org](http://www.tropicalwings.org)*

### **World Migratory Bird Day Celebration**

Friday, May 10th | **Immersive Rainforest Student Exhibit Opening** | 6:00—8:00pm | Phipps Center for the Arts

Saturday, May 11th | **Wings of Spring Festival** | 8:00am—Noon | Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

### **Golden-winged Warblers on the Breeding Grounds** | Led by Tropical Wings Board Member Brian Collins

Saturday, June 8th | 5:30am | Meet at Saint Croix Falls Michael Severson Memorial Overlook Park

For more details, visit our website | RSVP by contacting TW President Patty Mueller at [muellepm8@gmail.com](mailto:muellepm8@gmail.com)

### **Writing on the Wild Side**

Immersive nature and mindfulness journaling workshop | More details to come!

### **Fall Migration Celebration**

Saturday, September 14th | Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus | More details to come!

### **Annual Costa Rica Bird-a-thon Fundraiser**

February 28th—March 14, 2025

For more information, contact TW President Patty Mueller at [muellepm8@gmail.com](mailto:muellepm8@gmail.com)



# Bird Biographies



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

By TW Board Member Brian Collins

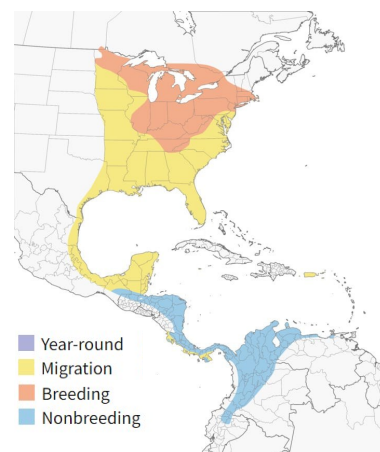
A foggy June sunrise wraps the world in warm golden tones. The Sterling Barrens wake up to a lively and rich chorus of abundant songbirds, most of them Neotropical songbirds. The chorus is joined by conversations of ravens, distant Trumpeter Swans, and the thundering gobbles of turkeys. Damp sand reveals spectacular detail in wolf tracks along a two-rut road. Amid the chorus, soft and insect-like “beeee buzz buzzzz buzz buzz” notes arrive. It warms my heart to know that this soundscape continues on the same for miles upon miles upon miles. This is an ecological landscape for Golden-winged Warblers.

Polk and Burnett counties in northwest Wisconsin own bragging rights to some of the highest breeding densities of Golden-winged Warblers in the world. While Wisconsin and Minnesota host more than 75% of the global breeding population, few places compare to northwest Wisconsin in the vitality of population and ease in finding this species. Some hotspots for Golden-winged Warbler breeding densities include the Namekagon River, the Upper Saint Croix River, the Sterling Barrens, and the aspen-alder wet meadows of Fish Lake and Crex Meadows.

High densities of breeding Golden-winged Warblers occur in three types of disturbed edge habitats around northern Wisconsin. Golden-wings breed in young aspen forests with alder shrubs along the margins of narrow rivers, creeks, and northern wet sedge meadows. Within the sand barrens, they breed in young and stunted forests of oak, jackpine, serviceberry and willow. Newer regeneration from logging operations also draws them in, structurally similar to the other edge habitats. All of these habitats have something in common beyond their immediate structural components. All of these habitats must be in close proximity to parcels of more mature forests of diverse and tall trees, existing in geographically large expanses of forested mosaic.

Costa Rica and Lake Superior’s states share many bird species. More than fifty species of “our” breeding birds overwinter in Costa Rica. But Golden-winged Warblers are on a short list of bird species that are truly *best* represented by this geographical partnership. While many bird species are also inclusive of far-reaching locations such as New York State, Tennessee, Ecuador, or Cuba, Golden-winged Warbler breeding densities and overwintering densities are far more exclusive and are strongly represented by Wisconsin, Minnesota and Costa Rica. A close habitat associate on the breeding grounds, the Chestnut-sided Warbler, is perhaps the very best representative of this high-density exclusivity between Great Lakes breeding and Costa Rica overwintering.

Golden-winged Warbler behavior is fascinating. Males sing a standard courtship song, but they also engage in agitated territorial singing, a staccato chip and buzz combination that vocally demonstrates a flaring temper. As insectivores, Golden-winged Warblers occupy a very unique niche, going after leaf-rolling caterpillars by hanging upside down (pictured above) on the distal ends of branches and using their sharp beaks to tear open leaf and silk thread to access the caterpillar nestled within. Female Golden-winged Warblers are less conspicuous, but finding a female out and about during June reveals volumes about bird behavior, nesting habitat, and, possibly even nest location. With fewer than a half million of these birds left in the world, every experience with a Golden-winged Warbler is worth more than gold.



# Costa Rica Connections

*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.*

## *Shade Grown Coffee* By Brenda Betz-Stoltz and TW Secretary Nina Koch

*Did you know that bird migration is also about coffee?*

In 2014 and 2015, Tropical Wings helped to fund a project to study migratory birds' habitat. The project was conducted by scientists from the Smithsonian Institute. They put geolocators on 18 Wood Thrushes, a Special Concern species in Wisconsin, at Warner Nature Center in Minnesota. Of the 18 birds, 7 were recovered the next year. Data was retrieved on 6. The data showed that the wintering Wood Thrushes flew to Central America and overwintered in SHADE GROWN COFFEE PLANTATIONS. Shade grown coffee means that coffee plants are grown amongst trees. Shade cover provides important habitat for migratory and resident birds in tropical landscapes, which are increasingly threatened by deforestation at an unprecedented rate.

In our area of the Midwest, TW found Farmer to Farmer Coffee, which is both organic and shade grown. Farmer to Farmers' coffee is grown in Huehuetanengo, Guatemala, and in the mountains near Comayagua, Honduras. Growing organic coffee in the time of La Roya, a fungus attacking coffee plants, is much more expensive and difficult due to organic methods of control. While we don't know for sure if there are Wood Thrushes on the coffee farms of Farmer to Farmer, we do know that organic, shade grown coffee farms are saving the deciduous forest habitat that is beneficial for migrating birds. That means when you buy Shade Grown coffee you're helping save the habitat for the migratory bird population as well as helping farmers and their families.

During the 2024 Tropical Wings Birdathon, participants visited a shade grown coffee farm called Finca Lluvias del Valle in La Union of Sabalito, Coto Brus. The farmers there grow many crops in creative, sustainable ways, including planting coffee amongst banana trees. The banana trees provide nutrients, and the coffee plants also receive moisture from the water-rich trees. Additionally, Finca Lluvias del Valle grows citrus trees which give the coffee its unique flavor. Visiting this farm is not to be missed.

*Join us for the 2025 Birdathon to drink delicious coffee, count birds, and have the adventure of a lifetime!*



*Shade grown coffee farms (top left) provide higher quality habitat than traditional coffee plantations (bottom left). Birdathon participants enjoy coffee and pastries while learning about the history of Illusicas Del Valle and their sustainable farming practices (above).*



# 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.*

## St. Croix Valley Bird Club

By TW Board Member, Lynette Anderson

Nestled near the banks of the St. Croix River in Wisconsin lies a lovely small town called River Falls. This thriving community is home to the Kinnickinnic River, a Class 1 Trout Stream, Whitetail Ridge, a premier mountain biking destination, many interesting small shops in the attractive downtown, an exceptional university, and also the wondrous gem called the St. Croix Valley Bird Club (SCVBC).

The idea for this enchanting group of bird lovers was hatched in 2008 after an annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count. One of the counters, Jim Beix was so inspired by the enthusiasm and skills of the folks in attendance that he called all the bird enthusiasts that he knew and a club was born. The official St. Croix Valley Bird Club was launched in 2009.

There are many stellar groups in the St. Croix River Valley that support nature and all her wonders. This club is at the top of the list. Their mission is simply to "Share their love of birds with others". All members of this group share a deep sense of community and sense of purpose around their support for birds and helping others to notice and love them too.

Dedicated and ever welcoming, they do this by showing up with displays at local festivals along the river, going into the Rocky Branch Elementary School for a day of activities with the 5th graders, collaborating on events with other like minded groups, hosting free monthly speakers at the River Falls library, and leading monthly bird hikes at the Wisconsin Campus of Carpenter Nature Center. SCVBC is also an essential partner in planning and hosting the annual Wings of Spring event—part of the World Migratory Bird Day Celebration organized by Tropical Wings.

***Small but mighty, the St. Croix Valley Bird Club continually flies forward with a steady pace to educate, support, and encourage loving birds.***



*Birds are something everyone notices, whether its a chickadee coming to a feeder for seeds or a crow cawing at the top of a tree. If you want to learn more about birds, their habitats, and behaviors, this is the group for you. Join SCVBC for monthly bird hikes hosted at the Carpenter Nature Center Wisconsin Campus (top left). SCVBC provides educational opportunities for learners of all ages, including teaching youth at local environmental festivals (top right). Community members can learn about a variety of environmental topics by attending the monthly speaker series organized by SCVBC at the River Falls Library (bottom).*

# 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.*

## *Community Nature Festivals* By TW Treasurer, Judith Freund

A "Habitat Hero" is someone who has a crisp understanding of the importance of habitat protection, along with a vision for implementing activities to raise awareness and build knowledge about habitat protection efforts. Throughout the year, many communities have festivals that celebrate their community character. Many of these include environmental cleanup – roadsides, riversides, parks, etc. While many of these clean-ups happen in the summer, they also occur near Earth Day – Tropical Wings has been involved in efforts in Hudson by offering bird hikes the morning of Arbor Day - or around World Rivers Day, which is in September. These cleanups rely on individuals and organizations coming together and working to achieve this goal.

Communities along the St. Croix River and its tributaries join in these efforts in a variety of ways. Hudson celebrates River Fest in July (an event that was started by a handful of citizens in Hudson); River Falls raises awareness of the Kinnickinnic River; Stillwater, Osceola, Marine-on-St. Croix, St. Croix Falls, in their own way as well, call attention to the need to protect the local environment. We certainly hope that each of us will find a way to either organize a habitat awareness event appropriate for your community or recognize the value of these events, and join in the efforts already in place. Their value, of course, goes well beyond the details of the "garbage" that is collected. These events raise awareness of the importance of protecting environmental spaces that are valued by our communities. They also are a reminder that a few dedicated individuals can have a huge impact on your local environment. Efforts to have your community designated as a "tree city" or a "bird city" accomplish the same effect. (Again, Tropical Wings is the organization that manages the "bird city" in Hudson).

The Habitat Heroes for this year are all those dedicated volunteers who are either the instigators of habitat awareness efforts or who encourage their family, neighbors and friends to lend a hand during the clean-up activities. In a perfect world, your local clean-up would conflict with an event or activity that you have going on. In a perfect world you would say, "this is definitely inconvenient, but I am going to find time to help." Give yourself a pat on the back, and don't forget the impact that one, committed person can have.



*One of the environmental awareness activities conducted as part of Hudson River Fest is gathering trash (top), and then using the materials to fill and cover a fish sculpture known as "Scrappy" (bottom). Scrappy is then displayed in a variety of locations throughout the community to show residents the pollution that ends up in the St. Croix River. Thankfully, dressing Scrappy in recent years has been difficult, as the amount of trash in the river has decreased.*

## Acknowledgements

### ARTICLE WRITERS

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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 of the United States 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*

Your contributions help to support international migratory bird education and habitat conservation.

*This was a record year for fundraising as part of the Costa Rica Birdathon!*

*Thank you to all those who donated!*



Looking for a quick, convenient giving option? Scan the QR code to make a donation through PayPal



### 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