



Tropical Wings

Newsletter

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CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER

Pages 3

Osa Partners Update

Catalina Mora

Page 4

Habitat Heroes

"Stories from the Water"

Page 6

Birding Journal

A Message from the President of Tropical Wings

Page 2

Upcoming Programs

Page 2

Partners Profiles

Unity Elementary School

Page 5

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

As we enter our second decade supporting Neotropical migrants through both education and habitat conservation, we celebrate the many ways Tropical Wings has made a difference. Beyond our annual distribution of funds through our Habitat Grants, we now have two annual bird celebrations, welcoming our birds to their breeding grounds in May, and bidding them farewell as they journey south to their wintering home in September. The newest addition to our educational programs is a field trip to highlight the Golden-winged Warbler, a bird we are very fortunate to have in the St. Croix Watershed. Their population has experienced a sharp decline, a 66% loss since the 1960's, due in part to habitat loss on both the wintering and breeding grounds. In June of 2024 Tropical Wings hosted our first Golden-winged Warbler field trip, led by board member and birder extraordinaire Brian Collins. Ten participants spent the day exploring the breeding grounds, just north of St. Croix Falls, locating and gaining insights into this rare and remarkable bird. We explored several locations that retained the preferred habitat—a patchwork of shrubby openings surrounded by deciduous forest. We saw a total of 92 species, including many additional migrants, and many non-bird species, including the Karner Blue Butterfly in a field of Lupine, the host plant for this endangered species.

We will be offering this field trip again in 2025, and all are welcome to participate in this unique birding adventure. Please check our website, www.tropicalwings.org, for information on all of our events, including our bird celebrations, nature journaling workshop, and our annual winter trip to see our migrants in Costa Rica.



Brian Collins



Brian Collins

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

Earth Day Poetry Reading | Featuring the work of Thomas Smith, James Lenfestey, and Maureen Ash

Thursday, April 22 | 6:30—8:30pm | Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

Wings of Spring Festival | Co-hosted by Tropical Wings, St. Croix Valley Bird Club, and Carpenter Nature Center

Saturday, May 10th | 6:00am—Noon | Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

Immersive Rainforest Exhibit Reception | Featuring the art of 4th Grade Students from Willow River Elementary School

Friday, May 23rd | 6:00—8:00pm | Phipps Center for the Arts Atrium Gallery

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

Saturday, June 7th | 5:30am | Meet at Saint Croix Falls Michael Severson Memorial Overlook Park

Nature Sketchbook & Journaling Retreat | Guided by artist Pam Luer

Saturday, June 21st | 9:30am—3:00pm | Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

Fall Migration Celebration

Saturday, September 13th | Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

Costa Rica Bird-a-thon | February 17—March 2, 2026 | Contact TW Secretary Nina Koch at gakoch@gmail.com

Bird Biographies

Chestnut-sided Warblers (*Setophaga pensylvanica*)

By TW Secretary, Nina Koch

In February and March each year, Tropical Wings takes ten lucky travelers to Costa Rica for a two week birdathon. While we are there, we are always surprised and happy to see some of the birds that breed in Wisconsin and Minnesota during the summer and migrate to Costa Rica for the winter. One of those birds is the Chestnut-sided Warbler.

The two habitats that they spend their lives in are very different. In the United States, the Chestnut-sided Warblers nest in young deciduous habitats and thickets, in places regenerating after logging, fire, flooding, or storm damage. Breeding birds move into regenerating areas quickly, often just a few years after disturbance, and even small patches of habitat can support a nesting pair. They tend not to nest in urban or suburban areas. Migrants can be found in virtually any wooded or shrubby habitat, including mature forests. Due to their proclivity for nesting in disturbed areas, the population of Chestnut-sided warblers has increased in recent decades. Wintering birds in Costa Rica inhabit shade-coffee plantations, scrubby edge habitats, successional habitats, and mature wet forest.

In the Midwest during the summer, Chestnut-sided Warblers eat insects, especially caterpillars and fly larvae. In Costa Rica they change their diet and eat the fruits of some tropical plants. On the wintering grounds in Central America, the Chestnut-sided Warbler joins in mixed-species foraging flocks with the resident antwrens and tropical warblers.

Individual warblers return to the same areas year after year, joining back up with the same foraging flock it associated with the year before.

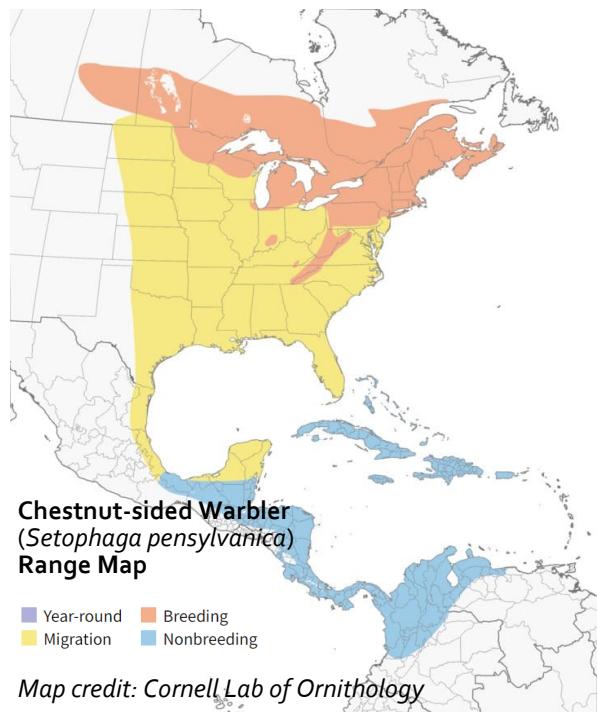
It's always a miracle to me that a small bird about five inches long and weighs about a half an ounce makes the 3,000 mile journal twice a year. Tropical Wings tries to help these beautiful birds by promoting healthy habitats by providing "Habitat Grants" at both ends of their migration. And you can help by drinking coffee where the beans are grown on shade-grown coffee plantations.

Fun Fact | What's in a Name?

The name of the genus to which Chestnut-sided Warblers belong—*Setophaga*—is from Ancient Greek and means “moth-eating.” While their official species name is *pensylvanica*, they are also known by the species name *icterocephala*, which means “yellow-headed.”

Put it together and what have you got? Chestnut-sided Warblers could also be referred to as the Moth-eating Yellow-headed Warbler.

Top: Male Chestnut-sided Warbler coming into breeding plumage in the canopy of the Costa Rican rainforest. Middle: Male Chestnut-sided Warbler in full breeding plumage in oak savannah habitat in Wisconsin.



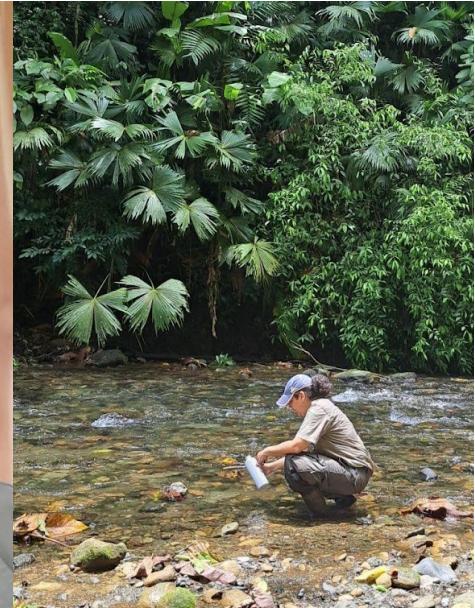
Osa Partners Updates

Catalina Mora | New Liaison to the Sister Parks of Costa Rica

By TW Secretary, Nina Koch

I first met Catalina Mora in 2014 when several board members of Tropical Wings were visiting some of Tropical Wings' Sisterparks in Costa Rica for the first time. Catalina struck me as a humorous, hard-working, intelligent, conservation-minded and kind person. Her easy smile welcomed us as we spent several days together, exploring the Osa Peninsula with our binoculars and cameras.

Catalina has worked in two of our Sisterparks. The Golfo Dulce Reserve and the Cano Island Biological Reserve. She is presently working in the Golfo Dulce



Reserve as Administrator of this protected area. She was working there from 2008 to 2016 when I first met her. She returned to the Golfo Dulce Reserve in 2021 after she became the Administrator of Cano Islands in 2017- 2020.

Catalina's favorite part of her job with SINAC (National System of Conservation Areas) is wildlife monitoring, bird monitoring, land mammal monitoring, and marine mammal monitoring. This interest in monitoring began in those years when Tropical Wings, Osa Birds, and SINAC started the Migratory Bird Festival in Puerto Jimenez. She learned a lot about birds in general, but especially about migratory birds, and the importance of conserving their ecosystems at both ends of their migration. Before that, she said that she knew very little about birds, and from those years on, "it became almost a passion, learning more and more".

Monitoring with camera traps has also been very interesting to Catalina, as there are large number of animals that live within the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. Catalina explains, "You know that the animals are there but you can never see them or it is very difficult to see them. With this camera system it is very exciting when you check the camera and a jaguar, a tapir, an anteater appears; it is a feeling of great excitement and joy." In addition, the training work that has been carried out with the communities is very interesting, where they have already taken ownership of many processes, such as the monitoring of birds and mammals, and are more interested in the conservation of the ecosystems of their communities.

Catalina's favorite protected area is the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve, because it has everything, she says: giant trees in the forest like the Ceiba, and tiny but incredible hummingbird, which she refers to as, "the jewel of nature". In Golfo Dulce, there are still undiscovered species of insects. The park is home to mammals, amphibians, and reptiles, all in the same place. There are rivers with clean water. "The reserve has it all, although it has many problems, since there are still people who hunt and cut down trees illegally, but that is the challenge of every day, but also more and more people are getting involved in conservation."

In Catalina's free time, she likes taking photographs of birds, mammals, trees and flowers. She takes her camera with her when she explores the rivers with her two dogs. To Catalina, there is nothing more comforting than having a cup of coffee, sitting in the forest and "listening to what nature wants to tell me".

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.

Unity Elementary School | 2024 Tropical Wings Habitat Grant Recipient

By TW Board Member, Jessie Eckroad

Serving the community of Balsam Lake, Wisconsin since 1958, the Unity School District educates all 1,000 of its PreK-12 students under one, environmentally-conscious roof. Unity's 100 acre campus abuts Balsam Lake and Rice Creek, where the Unity School Nature Trail weaves through grasses, forest, and wetland habitat. The school district values connecting kids with the outdoors and applied for a Tropical Wings Habitat Grant in order to provide additional opportunities for environmental education.

While it was the elementary school that received one of the 2024 Tropical Wings Habitat Grants, the project will benefit *all* students in the district and support community wildlife. The installation of a pergola and garden with native plantings will mitigate flooding on the playground, promote an alternative learning space for educators and students, and help foster habitat restoration that will promote healthier bird populations within the community of Balsam Lake.

The mission of Balsam Lake Elementary School "is to prepare each student for a changing world by building strong character and developing skills to become a life-long learner through a safe, caring, and challenging environment in partnership with students, families, school and community." With an education like this, Tropical Wings knows that the students of Unity Elementary will grow up to do great things, and it is our hope that students are inspired by nature and motivated to engage in conservation.

Although the garden project is relatively small, any pocket of habitat is helpful to migratory and resident birds. Tropical Wings is committed to engaging citizens in celebrating and sustaining birds through education and habitat preservation both in Costa Rica and the Upper Midwest. The Unity Elementary pergola and garden project is a wonderful example of these values in action.



Top: Unity Elementary School 1st Grade teacher David Anderson (third from right) accepting habitat grant alongside other 2024 recipients.

Bottom: Red box indicating the proposed site for pergola and garden south of the playground.

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.

“Stories from the Water” By TW Treasurer, Judith Freund

Mike Wurm, a champion of the Kinnikinnic River and Land Trust, has created a lovely movie that highlights middle school students coming to the realization that the Kinnikinnic River needs protection. The students come to realize they can be storied voices of advocacy. The short film, “Stories from the Water” features interviews, music, art, history, and stories about the river. It also tells the story of five local kids who spend two years learning about the river and the art of storytelling, coming to an appreciation of the beauty of the river. Lovely movie and lovely message. Those students, through their words, are voices for the river. The film was produced in 2021.

In these times, we need to all, like those young people, come to the realization that it is imperative to be engaged, be vocal, be passionate about environmental issues. The kids can come to this conclusion – so can we. We will be entering a time when the natural world stands in peril to indifference and flat-out exploitation by powers to be. There are many voices in other countries that are sounding the call of birds in peril, of animals facing tremendous threats, of insects, wetlands, prairie, rivers and lakes – all on the precipice of “can we survive this.” We can add our voices to these expressions of care for the earth. All Creation is waiting; All Creation is depending; All Creation is wondering, “what will humans do next?”. Don’t let your voice be silent. Stand up for Creation.

Top: The Kinnikinnic River, a tributary of the St. Croix River, is a haven for native plants and wildlife.

Bottom: Mike Wurm supervising student filmmakers. The children involved as the subject of the film were also active behind the scenes, serving in videography, sound, editing, and interviewing roles.



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

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Amy DeLong | Darcy Haber | Sonya Kalscheur

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Warbler—\$35
(Individuals)

Osprey—\$50
(Households)

Falcon—Contributions > \$50
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