



nature notes

Journal of Webster Groves Nature Study Society

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January General Meeting

Doug Corbett

The WGNSS general membership will meet Friday, Jan. 9, 1999, 8 PM at the St. Louis County Library Headquarters on Lindbergh. Our guest speaker is Tim Morrison, high school teacher and football coach at Parkway South. Tim was a WGNSS-sponsored attendee at the Audubon Field Ecology Camp in the Rockies this past summer. He will discuss his experiences and also his involvement with area high school students in Envirocorp. Some of this group's efforts include trail construction and wild grass restoration at Lone Elk Park. See you there! ~

Welcome to new members...

Bill & Jody Miles Imperial
 Tim Barksdale Columbia, MO
 Rick Moll Kirkwood]
 Ben Senturia University City

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Rear Window:

The Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird Mystery

Anne McCormack

I felt lucky this fall. I knew I either had to head for the Casino Queen, or keep my hummingbird feeders up. I went with the feeders. On Nov. 14, I hit the jackpot. At 7:30 AM, I glanced out the kitchen window to see a hummingbird in profile hovering at one of my feeders. The red-brown color on the flanks was immediately apparent. "That must be the morning light," I thought, but then I remembered Bill Rowe saying that a late hummer was more likely to be a Rufous than a Ruby-throat. It remained only a moment, but when it returned 5 minutes later, I was ready with my binoculars.

When I worked at a summer camp in the foothills of the Ozarks I kept a nectar feeder on my office window. The office—actually, "office" is too pretentious for this building—backed up to a slope of old oaks, poison ivy, cedars and limestone outcroppings. Many of the trees supported huge trumpet creeper vines. All day long, the hummers zipped in for the pause that refreshes, then disappeared. Tales

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Christmas Counts

Saturday Dec. 19 Pere Marquette

Pere Marquette State Park in IL will hold its annual Christmas bird census on Dec. 19. Some areas will be preassigned, others please meet at Pere Marquette Lodge at 7:30 AM. We would appreciate hearing from all participants before the count day. There may be a dinner following the count—for tally and comfort at 5 PM at Peach Tree Restaurant in Brussels, if the ferry is running. Please contact Irene Mondhink (618-885-5233), or Helen Wuestenfeld (618-498-5335) for further details. There is a \$5 fee for participation.

Saturday Jan. 2 Orchard Farm

Randy Korotev

The Orchard Farm Christmas Bird Count will be held on Saturday, January 2. Old-timers and newcomers are invited to help count birds in St. Charles County. This year is the 99th anniversary of CBCs and the 58th year (I believe) that the Orchard Farm CBC has been run. Please contact me ahead of time for an area assignment. As usual, I will be enjoying birds, relatives, and the Packers (in that order) in northern Wisconsin much of the week preceding the count. If you contact me before Dec. 19, I should be able to get back to you right away. Otherwise, leave a message on my voice mail (935-5637) or our rude and less reliable home answering machine (993-005) and I'll get back to you a few days before the count. A \$5/person fee is required by the National Audubon Society to help compile and print the results.

Sunday Jan. 3 Busch Wildlife Area

The annual Christmas bird census will be held on Jan. 3 at Busch in St. Charles Co. MO. Meet at headquarter's bait shop at 8:00 AM. Bring lunch. Call: Tom Parmeter 921-6017, home or 837-1360, work. Fee \$5.

Monday Dec. 28 Carlyle Lake

Dan Kassebaum will be coordinating the Lake Carlyle Christmas Count on Mon., Dec. 28. Call him at 618-233-5451. \$5. ∞



our website

<http://levee.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/>

Vacationing? Moving? Call me!

Linda Virga

If you are going to be "temporarily away," the post office will not save your *Nature Notes* unless you pay for first class postage.

If you are moving, please notify us. The post office will not forward third class mail. You miss an issue or two and we must pay a fee for your new address. Please send the information to the membership chair:

Linda Virga

9734 Antonia Dr.

St. Louis MO 63123

A postcard will suffice. Thank you. ∞

Ecology And The Pope

Father Larry Asma

The occasion of the pope's visit to St. Louis in January prompted me to look through his documents for ecology or conservation since his papal inauguration. Even before his installation as a bishop in Poland, he was a respected philosopher, and quite understandably his approach to this topic is from a philosophical and theological point of view. His concern for the "natural environment," as he refers to it, is clear in two of his own documents and in a document commissioned by him. The quotations which follow are, I think, worth more than a cursory glance.

"Are we of the twentieth century not convinced of the overpoweringly eloquent words of the Apostle of the Gentiles concerning the 'creation (that) has been

groaning in travail together until now' (Rom. 8:22) and 'waits with eager longing for the revelation of the sons of God,' (Rom. 8:19) the creation that 'was subjected to futility'? Does not the previously unknown immense progress—which has taken place especially in the course of this century in the field of man's dominion over the world itself reveal to a previously unknown degree—that manifold subjection 'to futility'? It is enough to recall certain phenomena, such as the threat of pollution of the natural environment in areas of rapid industrialization, or the armed conflicts continually breaking out over and over again, or the prospectives of self-destruction through the use of atomic, hydrogen, neutron, and similar weapons, or the lack of respect for the life of the unborn. This state of menace for man from what he produces shows itself in various directions and various degrees of intensity. We seem to be increasingly aware of the fact that the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning. At the same time, exploitation of the earth not only for industrial but also for military purposes and the uncontrolled development of technology outside the framework of a long-range authentically humanistic plan often bring with them a threat to man's natural environment, alienate him in his relations with nature and remove him from nature. Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption. Yet it was the Creator's will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble 'master' and 'guardian,' and not as a heedless 'exploiter' and 'destroyer.' The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization, which is marked by the ascendancy of technology, demand a proportional development of morals and ethics." (The papal document

entitled: The Redeemer of Man, *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4 1979, by Pope John Paul II.)

"Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and disordered way. At the root of the senseless destruction of the natural environment lies an anthropological error, which unfortunately is widespread in our day. Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrarily use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though the earth did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him. In all this, one notes first the poverty or narrowness of man's outlook, motivated as he is by a desire to possess things rather than to relate them to the truth, and lacking that disinterested, unselfish and aesthetic attitude that is born of wonder in the presence of being and of the beauty which enables one to see in visible things the message of the invisible God who created them. In this regard humanity today must be conscious of its duties and obligations towards future generations." (The papal document entitled: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum: *Centesimus Annus*, May 1, 1991 by Pope John Paul II.)

"The responsibility for the care of creation, which in itself has a particular dig-

nity, is given by the Creator himself to all people, in so far as they are to be stewards of creation. Catholics are encouraged to enter, at various levels, into joint initiatives aimed at study and action on issues that threaten the dignity of creation and endanger the whole human race. Other topics for such study and action could include, for example, certain forms of uncontrolled rapid industrialization and technology that cause pollution of the natural environment with serious consequences to the ecological balance, such as destruction of forests, nuclear testing and the irrational use or misuse of both renewable and unrenovable natural resources. An important aspect of joint action in this field is in the area of education of people in the use of resources as well as in the planned use of them and in the care of creation.” (A document of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity entitled: Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, March 25, 1993.)

In related news, a pioneering series of 10 conferences addressed the topic of ecology within the context of 10 of the major religions, each conference a different religion, beginning in May of 1996 and ending October 21, 1998. Each conference was a three- or four-day event involving 1,000 or more people. Religious and secular leaders exchanged views in these conferences sponsored by the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions. Many Christian leaders already accepted the idea that they needed to face environmental questions from within their tradition. Scholars from many developing countries and cultures at the Islamic conference began to accept that real problems needed to be addressed within the context of Islam, and that these problems are not externally imposed by the developed West. Striking differences regarding the relationship of ecology and spirituality were revealed by the

conferences on Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, Hinduism, Judaism, Taoism, Jainism, and indigenous traditions. Father Thomas W. Berry, a Catholic priest, who said “Human beings have human rights, but every being has rights according to its mode of being,” received a standing ovation at the last conference when he said that “we are called to the great work of moving the human community from being destructive to being creative.” ∞

Book Review: Kucera's *Grasses of Missouri*

Carl Darigo

Kucera, Clair L. 1998. *The Grasses of Missouri*. Revised Edition. University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri 65201. \$34.95. ISBN 0-8262-1164-X. Paper.

The grass family, Poaceae, is one of the largest of Missouri plants, with approximately 275 species. This book brings Missouri grasses up-to-date, covering six subfamilies, eighteen tribes and eighty-seven genera. Included are working keys, species descriptions, line drawings, comments on state distributions (but not individual county maps), glossary and bibliography.

Grasses are generally ignored by most citizen wildflower observers, due to the tiny and somewhat less-than-spectacular grass flowers. However, to botanists, professional and amateur alike, not only are grasses unique and interesting plants, but also offer real challenges in identification. For an amateur botanist, perhaps the most difficult part of identifying grasses is to determine the proper genus. My favorite key has been the “Grasses” section of *Illustrated Flora of Illinois* by R. H. Mohlenbrock (1972), where genera are separated into six groups, based on number of florets per spikelet, inflorescence type (spike, panicle, raceme or digitate) and presence or not of spikelet awns. Kucera's book does essentially the

same thing, but uses eighteen tribes instead of six groups. I ran a comparison test on a grass growing alongside our driveway and came up with the same answer using both keys: *Muhlenbergia schreberi* (nimble will).

Illustrations of species are very good, but I would have liked more detail in the Introduction section covering inflorescence type and especially on floret/spikelet definitions, as number of florets per spikelet is a significant diagnostic tool and often confusing to the non-technical user. *Panicum* (panic grass) is an important genus in the grass family with some species placed in the subgenus *Dicanthelium*, based mainly on presence of basal leaves and whether plants are annual or perennial. Kucera's key requires an early decision based on these two characteristics, which are not always easily determinable. I prefer Mohlenbrock's approach which omits this step, combining all species together.

Otherwise, I found *Grasses of Missouri* a very good addition to my other grass texts. The book should be useful to persons serious about grasses, but may be too technical for the casual wildflower observer. For instance, I wonder how many copies have been sold at the local Barnes & Noble bookstore, where the book was recently seen on display. ∞



our website

<http://levee.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/>

Volunteer Training at the Litzsinger Rd Ecology Center of Missouri Botanical Garden

The Litzsinger Road Ecology Center (LREC) of the Missouri Botanical Garden is recruiting adult volunteers to be trained as Master Ecologists. Participants will learn about ecology, field research techniques, and the art of teaching in the outdoors. Master Ecologists assist the LREC staff during educational activities.

"We are looking for people who enjoy being outdoors and who want to help students build a foundation in ecology. If you are curious and enthusiastic, if you like to learn, and if you can be relied on to nurture students and the environment, then you are just the person we are looking for," said Celeste Prussia, director of the LREC.

The next training class is scheduled for consecutive Mondays, 9:00 AM–3:00 PM, February 22 through May 17, 1999. Trainees will have opportunities to practice under the mentorship of veteran Master Ecologists, working with students doing field studies at the LREC. To qualify for certification, all trainees are required to complete the course plus 50 hours of volunteer service at the LREC. Personal enrichment opportunities are offered to all participants throughout the year.

Interviews for positions in the spring 1999 training class will be held in January. For more information or an application, call Cindy Bruns at (314) 577-9424. ∞

State Parks Listed Species Inventory Update—Volunteers Needed

Jack Harris

The WGNSS has received an invitation from the State Parks Division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to assist them in performing an update inventory of state-listed species(see summary table below) that may occur in our state parks. They are particularly interested in individuals or groups, both experienced and avid amateurs, who would be able to visit certain parks/historic sites and confirm existing records or contribute to the data base of the flora and fauna by discovery of new occurrences.

The following sampling of listed species summary data is extracted from the complete table contained in the Missouri Department of Conservation's *Wildlife Diversity Report* July 1996–June 1997.

GROUP	E	R	WL	SU	EXT	XTNT	TOTAL
Flowering Plants(2503)	169	63	41	100	58	---	431
Insects(1000*)	3	31	6	15	4	---	59
Birds(173)	10	12	9	8	12	2	53
Reptiles(82)	6	6	2	2	2	---	18

E = endangered; R = rare; WL = watch list; SU = Status undetermined; EXT = extirpated; XTNT = extinct.

(The value after the group name = total species in the data base; and * = estimated)

In particular the objective would be to assist the Parks Division staff, independently or in concert, to: (1) Engage in quantitative natural resource inventories to document the occurrence of flora & fauna species of special concern; and (2) Update all records older than 10 years and confirm the status of undated records by the year 2000.

Volunteers would be expected to fill out prepared forms and review the status of old records. In limited circumstances, permission to collect voucher specimens may be prescribed or photos may be required. Priority attention would be focused on those parks where current records are known to be the most in need of update.

Mike Courier, Resource Steward, State Parks Division first discussed this proposal last summer. Mike will be coordinating the research authorization and notification of the individual Park Superintendent. For this activity he will need to know: (1) who is available for what time period, and (2) which Parks/Historic Sites would be considered within the traveling range of those who are volunteering.

As WGNSS members may know, included in the mission statement of our State Parks Division is the commitment "...to preserve and interpret the state's most outstanding natural resources..." Our Parks include a sampling of some of the highest quality remnant ecosystems and habitats in the state. Thus the above proposal is fitting, has strong ecological merit, and deserves the assistance of all who can contribute.

For more information call Michael P. Currier, Resource Steward at (573)-526-2990, or by e-mail: (mcurrier@services.state.mo.us); or: Jack H. Harris, Botany Group; (jahar@stlnet.com); 314-894-9021 ☺

Brother Dan

Marjorie Richardson
WGNSS has lost another of its valued members. Brother Dan McEnery died on Dec. 2 at Christian Brothers College community residence. He had been a mathematics teacher, administrator and most recently, director of the Learning Resource Center at Christian Brothers High School. In 1990 he was honored by Christian Brothers as a distinguished teacher. He was an avid bird watcher and seemed to thoroughly enjoy the time he could take from his busy schedule to join the Thursday or Saturday birding trips. His quiet enthusiasm and gentle presence will be missed.

Contributions may be made to the Brother David McEnery Scholarship Fund, Christian Brothers College High School, 6501 Clayton Rd., Clayton, MO 63117. ~

Jim Rathert to Speak at Joint Audubon/WGNSS in February

Jim Holsen

Jim Rathert, widely known wildlife photographer for the *Missouri Conservationist*, the publication of the Missouri Department of Conservation, will discuss photography from a naturalist's point of view at the February joint meeting of the St. Louis Audubon Society and Webster Groves Nature Study Society.

The meeting will be held on Friday, February 12, 1999, at 8 PM in the large auditorium of the St. Louis County Library Headquarters building on Lindbergh Boulevard.

Every reader of the *Missouri Conservationist* is familiar with Jim's wonderful photographs. He has covered every aspect of Missouri's wildlife and scenic wonders—just look for his acknowledgments in any issue of this popular publication.

Birding Festival—Preparing for Spring

We are all looking forward to spring when the songbirds return and the flowers start to bloom. Birdwatching is one of the fastest growing outdoor activities in America today. Join us for a special program, which is the joint effort of the St. Louis Audubon Society and the Missouri Department of Conservation at Powder Valley.

The program will be held on Thursday, January 28, 1999, 7 to 8:30 PM at Powder Valley Nature Center Auditorium (limit 200). No cost, but reservations are required: call 314-301-1500; reservations taken starting January 14, for ages 10 and up. Topics include:

- How to start watching birds and improve existing birding skills—including
- finding birds, recognizing field marks, using field guides and binoculars
- effectively
- Where to go birding—best locations around St. Louis
- What birds to expect each season
- Many free handouts and answers to your questions ~

November 1998 Birding Report

Jim Ziebol, Yvonne Homeyer &
Kevin Renick

November proved to be an interesting month for bird watching in spite of the record-high temperatures.

The first Common Loons reported were at Horseshoe Lake on 11/8 (FH), and 4 were seen at Creve Coeur Lake on 11/18 (JS). Late in the day on 11/13, Jim and Margot Holsen spotted a Western Grebe at Horseshoe. Also at Horseshoe were 58 Pied-billed Grebes on 11/6 (FH). Over 100 Homed Grebes were found at Carlyle Lake (DK) and 51 were at the Dredge on 11/25 (FH). A late surprise was an American Bittern found at Riverlands on 11/14 (MT). Great Blue Herons were numerous at Horseshoe and 7-10 Great Egrets were in that area until 11/29 (FH). Eight Great Egrets were high-flying migrants at Carlyle

Lake on 11/21 (DK). A late Snowy Egret was at the Borrow Pit on 11/1 and 7+ Black-crowned Night Herons were at the-railroad tracks on Layton Road on 11/15 (FH). Paul and Barbara Johnson had an immature Black-crowned Night Heron there on 11/7. A Ross's Goose and 3 White-fronted Geese were at Heron Pond on 11/13 (KL). A few winter ducks arrived in the first ten days of November, with Red-breasted & Hooded Mergansers at Horseshoe, Riverlands, and Innsbrook Lakes (CM, Mary Ann Auer, and Sue Gustafson). Many thousands of ducks were seen at Riverlands on 11/11 (JS). Black Duck, Gadwall (several hundred at Horseshoe), Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Bufflehead, Canvasback and Hooded Merganser were seen at Riverlands and Horseshoe on 11/19 (KR, FH, et al.). Six Common Goldeneye were at Horseshoe on 11/9 (J&CM), a bit earlier than normal. Three Black Scoters were seen at Carlyle Lake on 11/7 (KM). A Black Scoter was hotlined from the dam at Riverlands late in the day on 11/19 (CA, KL). In high wind and choppy water, 12 Surf Scoters were observed on 11/22 at Carlyle (DK). The Reiter Lagoon Sewage Pond at Carlyle produced an Oldsquaw on 11/14 (DK). On 11/30, at Busch, there were 3 Muscovy Ducks (J Mo).

Eight to 10 Harriers were patrolling Wise Road on 11/15 (L&MW). Accipiter sightings for November included many of Cooper's Hawk on 11/8 at Horseshoe and Riverlands. Excitement was generated at Riverlands by a Goshawk (perched and in flight) on 11/8 (J*&CM et al.). A Goshawk was also seen there that afternoon (DB* et al). Sand Prairie Lane was the location for a Harlan's Hawk on 11/14 (BW, Viola Buchholtz). A Western Red-tailed Hawk (*B. f calurus*) has been frequently observed at the Borrow Pit (m. ob.) A Krider's Red-tailed Hawk was reported from the east side

of Carlyle Lake on 11/27 (OK). Mark Peters had a slow day counting hawks on 11/10, but he did observe a Rough-legged Hawk near his home. Rough-legged Hawks were widely reported from Carlyle Lake, Mark Twain and the east side (m. ob.). A Merlin was observed on 11/17 at Riverlands (G&TB). On 11/19, a Peregrine Falcon attacked and apparently ate a Ring-billed Gull at the Borrow Pit (CA, KL). This Peregrine is keeping the gulls from resting there; it was seen buzzing the Borrow Pit on 11/28 (CM). A Golden Eagle was observed several times at Mark Twain (11/8 HW). On 11/1, the following were seen at Carlyle Lake: 10 Black-bellied Plovers, 8 Long-billed Dowitchers, 5 Stilt Sandpipers, 20 Greater Yellowlegs, 3 Dunlin, 16 Least Sandpipers, 3 Common Snipe, and 50 Killdeer (OK). Shorebirds lingered into November, with 12 Least Sandpipers at the Borrow Pit on 11/18, 11/9 (J&CM), and 6 on 11/15 (FH). A Least Sandpiper was also observed on 11/21 and 11/26 at Carlyle (DK). Two Black-bellied Plovers were quite late at Carlyle on 11/27 (DK).

Four Franklin's Gulls were seen at Riverlands on 11/14 (JS) and one at the Borrow Pit on 11/29. There were about 80 Bonaparte's Gulls at Horseshoe on 11/8 (FH) and the California Gull was relocated that day at the Borrow Pit. A large flock of wintering gulls arrived at the Borrow Pit on 11/6, including a first-winter Thayer's' 5 and assorted Herring Gulls; Lesser Black-backed was represented by a first-year bird and an immaculate adult *graellsii* (FH, JZ). Frank Holmes took excellent photographs of these birds. Two adult Lesser Black-backed were on the beach at Carlyle 11/26 (OK). He reported that they are very light in color, not unlike California Gulls. There is a very apparent size difference between these two Lesser Black-backed—one is quite large and the other is much smaller.

An early first year Great Black-backed Gull was also seen at the Borrow Pit on 11/11 (KM). A Screech Owl was calling from the woods behind the JCCA in Creve Coeur on Nov. 11 (KR). A sighting of 4 early-arrival Short-eared Owls was made on 11/15 at Riverlands (L&MW). A dead Saw-whet Owl was reported near Hazelwood Central High School on 11/17 (KP, MT). The Saturday group found a Great Horned Owl on Wise Road on 11/21 (KR) and the crows found one near the Cypress Circle of Tower Grove Park on 11/24 (JZ).

A West coast *Selasphorus* hummingbird appeared at Anne McCormack's feeder in Kirkwood on 11/14 and was there 11/27. Jeannie Moe observed a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at her home on 11/13, the first time she has ever seen that species in her yard. Both Kinglets were fairly common by the second week of November. A Tree Swallow was seen well out over the water at Carlyle Lake on 11/27. Conspicuously absent again this fall was Palm Warbler, with just 2 reported; this species was a common fall migrant only 5 years ago. Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen throughout the area. Orange-crowned were reported at the dredge and the Borrow Pit on 11/1 (FH, BW); in addition, a possible *Lutescens* Orange-crowned Warbler was seen (JZ). An apparent Audubon's Warbler was at the Borrow Pit on 11/8 (DB* et al.). A Common Yellowthroat was observed at the Dredge on 11/21 by the Saturday Group and at Marais Temp Clair (MTC) on 11/29 (KR). Of all the breeding warblers, Yellowthroat is the most likely to winter here. Connie Alwood found a second Spotted Towhee, this one at Carlyle on 11/21, later photographed by Al Seppi. Savannahs were plentiful on 11/8 at Riverlands (YH). A late Chipping Sparrow was seen on 11/21 at Carlyle (OK). Song, Junco, and a few Fox Sparrows made a strong movement on 11/15 at the Borrow

Pit, Horseshoe Lake, and Tower Grove Park (m. ob.). A large mixed flock of Juncos, Swamp, White-throated, White-crowned, Song and Tree Sparrows were found in the woods at MTC on 11/29 (KR). One Harris' Sparrow was seen in a mixed feeding flock near the Dredge on 11/16 (JZ). A flock of 100+ American Goldfinch was seen near the dam at Riverlands on 11/8 (YH). Purple Finch first appeared at Busch on 11/3 (CM). At Carlyle, Dan Kassebaum observed 1 Purple Finch on 11/8 and 1 on 11/27, for a total of just 3 individuals this fall. A male and female Brewer's Blackbird were seen on Red School Road on 11/19 (T Br). 200+ Eurasian Tree Sparrows greeted Connie Alwood and Kent Lannert at Riverlands 11/19. A feeder on Mardel in South St. Louis is currently attracting flocks of 50 or more ETS daily.

Comments: Chipping Sparrows were reported sparingly this fall, with the most found at Hazlet (DK). Vesper Sparrow went almost unreported. Fox Sparrows were seen in low numbers this fall. Purple Finch may have been reported in their lowest numbers ever. An apparent Eurasian Wigeon was seen at St. Francois State Park Sewage Lagoon by Steve Vogel on 11/21 but was not relocated. In the latest *Field Notes*, there is a striking photograph of a row of Laysan's Albatrosses at the airport on Midway Island, with one Snow Bunting in the line up. This species of the far north has also been documented in Hawaii 3 times.

October Additions: One Barn Swallow (late) was seen on October 30 at Carlyle. A Short-eared Owl (early) was flushed from the gull roost at Honker's Point at Carlyle. (DK).

Contributors: Connie Alwood, Terry & George Barker, David Becher, (T Br) Tory Berger, Rose Ann Bodman, (Tho) Tom Bormann, Dennis Bozzay, Frank Holmes,

Yvonne Homeyer, Dan Kassebaum, Kent Lannert, Jim & Charlene Malone, Keith McMullen, Jeannie Moe, Kraig Paradise, Kevin Renick, John Solodar, Mike Treffert, Larry & Michelle Wells, Bruce Wetteroth, Helen Wuestenfeld, Jim Ziebol, and (m. ob.) many observers. ∞

Conservation Committee Seeking New Members

Yvonne Homeyer

A group of WGNSS members concerned about the decline of migratory birds and the loss of habitat for birds and other wildlife recently formed a new Committee. Originally called the Migratory Bird Committee, it has merged with the Conservation Group and is now called the Conservation Committee.

Its purposes are:

1. To promote the preservation and protection of migrant birds on their breeding grounds, wintering grounds, and in migration.
2. To promote the preservation, restoration, and protection of existing habitat.
3. To share our ideas with other organizations involved with preservation, restoration, protection and management of such birds and habitat.
4. Habitat will also include other jeopardized species besides birds, i.e., insects, butterflies, reptiles, amphibians, plants, etc.
5. To promote a general awareness of the decline of natural features and species of concern and to "promote conservation of wildlife and natural beauty" according to the WGNSS Mission Statement.

Committee members have already outlined several projects and have begun writing letters to the Department of Conservation seeking their help in promoting shorebird habitat at Busch and stopping further habitat change at Busch. Committee members to

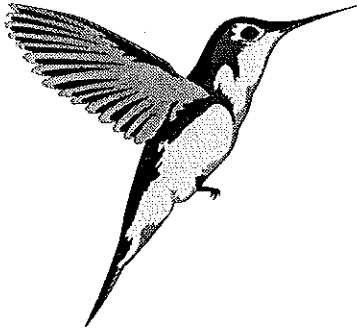
date are: Connie Alwood, Dennis Bozzay, Dick Coles, Cheryl & Don Delashmit, Vicki Flier, Sue Gustafson, Yvonne Homeyer (Chairperson), Dan Kassebaum, Randy Korotev, Marshall Magner, Jim Malone, Anne McCormack, Mark Peters, Kevin Renick, Fr. Jim Sullivan, Linda Virga and Jim Ziebol.

There is much work to be done and many people are needed. The next meeting will be at 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 17, at Yvonne Homeyer's, 1508 Oriole Lane in Brentwood (963-7750). Any interested member is welcome. Hope to see lots of you there! ∞

Rear Window *continued*

were told of battles for control of the feeder. One staff member was even slightly injured when a feather from one of the tiny gladiators hit her eye. Most of the birds were immatures—so varied that I wondered how I'd recognize a new species even if I saw one. That's the advantage of seeing a species over and over—this little one was clearly different.

Over the two weeks she was my guest—Nov. 14–27—I gradually got to see each group of feathers. The feeder on my bedroom window was her favorite, perhaps because of the huge rose that climbs the arch nearby, providing cover. A few mornings before dawn I took my bowl of oatmeal out to the back yard and aimed the scope at my window: rust-colored feathers mixed with the green along the upper tail coverts, and more orange color followed a line along wing to the shoulder. The green feathers of the back were somewhat scaly; that is, each seemed to have a dull margin, suggesting that the bird was an immature. The two central tail feathers were green all along their length, with very dark tips—indicating that this was a female. The light gray throat was streaked—but not too heavily—with darker feathers. Once, with



ideal light, I saw a single iridescent red feather just below center of the throat. One morning I sat inside under the feeder with a flashlight to see the undertail coverts; off white, mixed with rufous. Any morning that I stayed in bed long enough to see the first light peak through the blinds, I could watch her shadow as she drank her breakfast.

Lots of people joined in—an estimated 50 visitors, beginners and experts. We eventually achieved a consensus that the bird was an immature female—but an immature female *what?* A Rufous Hummingbird has been seen in Missouri almost every fall since the early 80's, though usually not this far east. One arrived in the Alton area last fall and returned in January! Or was she an Allen's—a first record for the state? Females of these closely related species are not distinguishable in the field. Enter the hummingbird-bander: Troy Gordon. Troy and his wife have been conducting a study of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds from their home in Columbia, MO. He left home before dawn, hoping to band the bird and determine the species.

Picture a pith helmet, covered with rolled up mosquito netting—that's the trap. Inside hangs a feeder. A string triggers the netting to fall, surrounding the bird as it feeds, but not enmeshing it. Troy and I hung the trap by my rear window. Then we waited; Troy holding the string like a kid with a very strange kite. He showed me the measurements that would determine

whether our bird was *Selasphorus rufus* or *S. sasin*: a hatching-year female Rufous' outermost tail feather (rectrice 5) measures a relatively broad 3.3–4.7; a hatching-year female Allen's outermost tail feather measures 2.4–3.3. Wing chord measurements also differ: 42.6–46.6 for Rufous, 39.5–43.3 for Allen's. Tough to call in any case. Two Saturdays we tried to put salt on her rectrices, but she eluded us.

Well, unsolved mysteries are by far the most interesting. What was she doing in Kirkwood, when she should be in central Mexico (if Rufous) or California (if Allen's)? What prompted her to leave when the weather was still unseasonably warm? Will she return next fall, as hummers sometimes do? I hope so because my dog and I had a great time entertaining birding friends and meeting new folks. Thanks to Bill Rowe, David Becher, Troy Gordon, Jim and Charlene Malone, Mary Ann Auer, Bob Kleiger, Lanny Chambers and many others who helped describe, photograph and access resources for this adventure. ∞

References consulted: "*Selasphorus* Hummingbirds," Arnette Heidcamp, in *Birding*, Feb. 1997, *Hummingbird Gardens*, Nancy Newfield and Barbara Nielsen, *Hummingbirds: Their Life and Behavior*, Esther Quesada Tyrrell, *Birds of Missouri*, Mark Robbins and David Easterla, *Birds of the St. Louis Area: Where And When To Find Them*, and a really great website: <http://www.derived.com/~lanny/hummers/>

St. Louis Area Birder Skewers South Polar Skua!

John Loomis

from Delray Beach, Florida, Dec. 9

Yesterday when I went to the nearby beach wearing my "bins," a man came up to me and asked if I had seen the skua. He said an article had appeared in the morning paper about it. So we walked to the nearest life-guard shelter and asked if he knew where the bird might be. The guard said about a half mile down the beach was the last he had heard. We started walking in that direction and soon through our binoculars we spotted a large, dark bird standing on the sand all alone a few feet from the water. We got within 20 feet of the bird and he seemed unafraid. We were joined by the man's wife and we looked and noted all the field marks. Then since the bird seemed "put," I walked the half mile back to my car and got my camera, walked back to where the bird and the two birders from Rochester, NY remained. I got off 3-4 photos taken from 10 feet, 7 ft. and 5 ft. Then an oncoming shell collector disturbed the Skua and it flew away, allowing us a good look in flight. What a thrill! A life bird where and when I least expected one—and such looks and photos too!

Here's a quote from the front page of the 12/8 *Palm Beach Post*, by Robert P. King:

Ocean Ridge—This winter's rarest snow-bird is really a *snow bird*.

The chocolate-colored, hawk-like seabird from Antarctica is luring bird-watchers from across the state as it wanders the beach north of Hammock Park.

The species, the South Polar Skua, has never before had a confirmed sighting on land in South Florida, Audubon Society bird-watchers said Monday. Statewide, the said oceangoing skuas have been spotted

once before on land and about 10 times off shore.

Nobody knows how the bird got here or how long it plans to stay, but it has landed top billing the Audubon Society's state-wide hot line of rare birds, available by phone or the internet (below).

Ocean Ridge environmental activist Kim Jones said she discovered the bird Nov. 11 behind the Inlet Plaza Condominium south of the Boynton Inlet.

"He was first sitting and then lying on the beach," said Jones... Since then it seems to have strengthened, flying and even scaring other birds into dropping their food—a typical skua stunt. "Today I saw him attack a couple of terns," she said. "That's a real positive sign."

The Audubon Society's web site is:

<http://www.audubon.org/chapter/f/tropical/ftarba.html> or call 516-340-0079.



Jack Van Benthuisen Memorial Fund

The WGNSS board thanks Charles and Grace Koerner and Franklin Moon for contributions to the fund in memory of Jack Van Benthuisen.

Thus far, \$315 dollars have been received. The board solicits ideas from our members on a fitting memorial to Jack. ~

Ityson nature line

Call 935-8432 for a summary of the latest bird sightings in the St. Louis area. Please report any unusual birds to Connie Alwood, 524-8111. ~



Next Deadline: Jan. 8

Submissions—handwritten, typed, IBM or Mac to: Anne McCormack, 587 Andrews, St. Louis MO 63122. Computer wizards: Thanks for sending a printout along with your disk.

Last minute change? Short article? Call me at 965-8091, voice mail 965-7205 or e-mail: finearts@mail.stjosephacad.com

Need directions?

Busch Wildlife Area

- Take 40 west toward St. Charles Co., left on 94, right on D, follow signs

Riverlands Environmental Dem. Area

- From 1-270 in north St. Louis County, take Hwy. 367 north to Alton.
- Turn right into Riverlands at the Fisca service station, just before the approach to the Clark Bridge over the Mississippi River.
- We usually meet at Teal Pond, on right.

St. Louis Co. Library Headquarters

- The membership meets on the second Friday of the month, at 8:00 pm.
- All are welcome. Bring a friend!
- 1640 South Lindbergh in Frontenac. We usually meet on the East Rm.
- Take 40 to Lindbergh south, left at the second light into library.

West County Shopping Center

- Located at 270 & Manchester.
- Meet at the south (lower) parking lot, near Penney's, at lamp post #1.

Sigma Xi Seminars

Sigma Xi Science Seminars are co-sponsored by the St. Louis Zoo and the Academy of Science, on Wed. evenings, 7:30–9 PM, at the Living World, on the north side of the zoo. Free parking is available in the zoo's north lot. All events are free. For further information, call 768-5466 or 533-8083.

Jan. 13: "Sustainable Forestry in the Ozarks: Results of 45 Yrs. of Experience & Research," by the staff of Pioneer Forest Management Plan.

Feb. 10: Textile Conservation

March 10: "Paddlefish: Biology of a Freshwater Whale," by Dr. Lon Wilkens, UMSL. ∞

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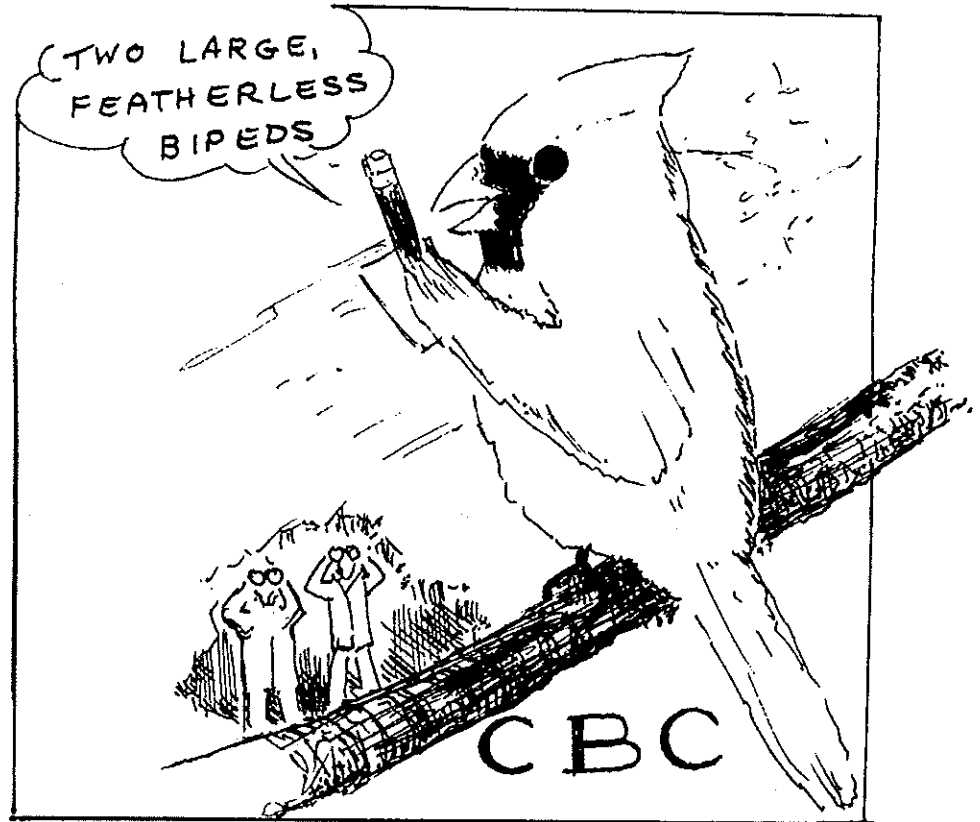
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internet address

<http://levee.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/>

Don't forget the Christmas Counts!



W ebster G roves N ature S tudy S ociety

Meetings

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 6

7:00-8:30 PM Board meeting at Kirkwood Library on Jefferson in Kirkwood. All members welcome.

FRIDAY, JAN. 8

WGNSS general membership meeting Friday, Jan. 9, 8 PM at the St. Louis Co. Library HQ on Lindbergh. Our guest speaker is Tim Morrison, 1997 WGNSS-sponsored attendee at the Audubon Camp in the Rockies. He will discuss his experiences and his involvement with area high school students in trail construction and wild grass restoration at Lone Elk Park. See you there!

Entomology

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24

7-9 PM at Magner's, 516 Bacon Ave. Webster Groves MO (961-4588). James Trager Entomologist/Naturalist Missouri Botanical Garden Arboretum will present the program "Ants Of The Tall Grass Prairie."

Botany

Beginners are welcome. Bring lunch, drink, & weather gear.

THURS. DEC. 3, 10, 17 & JAN.

Field trips usually meet at 9:30 AM; trip is normally 3-5 hr. plus travel time. Led by Fr. James Sullivan. Call Catherine Filla, 481-5298, after 5 PM Wed. for location.

Conservation

SUNDAY JAN. 17

6:00 PM at Yvonne Homeyer's, 1508 Oriole Lane in Brentwood (963-7750). Any interested member is welcome.

Birding

Open to all. For more information, call David Becher 576-1146.

THURSDAYS IN DEC. & JAN.

8:30 AM West County shopping center, south lower lot behind Penney's, lamp post #1.

SATURDAY JAN. 16 & 30

8:00 AM West County. See above.

MONDAY DEC. 28

Xmas Count at Lake Carlyle! Call Dan Kassebaum at 618-233-5451. \$5 fee.

SATURDAY JAN. 2:

Orchard Farm Xmas Count! Call Randy Korotev, 935-5637, and leave message. Fee \$5.

SUNDAY JAN. 3:

Busch Xmas Count! Meet at HQ at 8:00 AM. Bring lunch. Call Tom Parmeter 921-6017. Fee \$5.

SATURDAY JAN. 16


9 AM WGNSS/Audubon birdwalk at Riverlands Environmental Demo. Area, West Alton, MO. Meet at the Teal Pond parking lot. Dress for cold & windy weather for extended periods of time! Bring binoc, scopes & field guides. Target birds: eagles, raptors, waterfowl, gulls and wintering sparrows/finches. For more information Paul Bauer, 314/921-3972 or Jim Malone, 314/536-1119.

DEADLINE for *Nature Notes* is **JAN. 8.**

Check WGNSS website!

<http://levee.wustl.edu/~rlk/wgnss/>

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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Membership: Linda Virga, 9734 Antonia Dr., St. Louis MO 63123

The objectives of the society are: To stimulate interest in nature study on the part of adults and children; to cooperate with other organizations in nature study; to encourage amateur research in the natural sciences; to promote conservation of wildlife and natural beauty. Open to all with an interest in nature.

established in 1920