

Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

General Meeting Minutes

May 10, 2022

Submitted by Kris Rash

Feeling a bit like Rip Van Winkle having awakened from a very long sleep members of Prairie Rapids Audubon Society met in person for the first time in over two years. The fifty-one people in attendance were looking around and trying to recall everyone's name as President Tom Schilke called the May 10, 2022 meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. Francis Moore, treasurer, reported that our general account contains \$7,721.34. The bird feed fund remains at \$5.13. Ken Heiar conducted a very successful silent auction with \$265 raised. Members and friends donated books and other nature related items to be sold to the highest bidder. Are you downsizing or cleaning your closets? Our next auction will be held at our September, 2022 meeting. The "Little House" donation box crafted by Harlan Wittmayer made a return appearance and collected \$65. Donations are always appreciated but the "Little House" is not for your Bird-A-Thon contributions.

During our time away from seeing all of you the PRAS board has continued to meet to carry on the business of the local chapter. We are currently fifteen members strong with President Tom Schilke agreeing to serve another year as our leader. He would like to step down next year so if any of you have a calling for this position let Tom know. He will be there for guidance.

Each of our board members has a job that they perform so no one person is responsible for everything. We also bring ideas for the programs you enjoy at each general meeting. Your input is always welcome especially if you have a specific suggestion.

Two members are leaving our board of directors. Tom Stone is retiring as a charter member. He probably deserves a gold watch or something but being a non-profit we can only give him our biggest thanks. Still wanting to be of service he will continue to fill the feeders at the George Wyth State Park bird blind.

Jim Welch is also bidding us farewell after a much shorter but very productive time. A move to Ohio for him and wife, Joann, to be closer to family is a loss for us but a gain for them.

We welcome two new individuals to the board, Tom Moon and Barb Sanders. They have both been active members and will have much to offer.

In addition to funding grants and locating programs our board members participate in a number of other conservation activities. Some of us have been active with local cities in becoming Bird Friendly Communities. A group of us volunteer with the DNR and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in regular surveys involving eagles, frogs & toads, nesting and bluebird counts. You may also find us giving presentations to elementary school kids or leading them on field trips. As you can see, we're a dedicated group.

Although this general meeting occurred during Bird-A-Thon week activities back in May, you will receive the Red Tail in September. If you have intended to make a contribution there is still time. See or call Craig Rash.

Our program to end the 2021-2022 year had been postponed since Covid left us without a meeting place. Tonight, we were transported back in time to the office and drawing table of Jay Norwood Darling, more commonly known as "Ding". Mr. Darling made his appearance from the back of the room talking to us about the happenings of the day as if each of us were the only one in the room.

Before his 45-minute soliloquy was over the audience had learned of the numerous accomplishments Ding Darling had made to the conservation movement. Although he was born in Michigan his family moved to Iowa when he was 10 years old and Ding called this state home for most of his life.

After graduating from college, he began work as a journalist for the Sioux City Journal. During this time, he also exercised his talent as an artist and gained attention as a cartoonist. A position as editorial cartoonist at the Des Moines Register and Leader followed in 1913 and also led to a 10-year syndication contract with the New York Herald Tribune in 1916. Two of his cartoons went on to win him Pulitzer Prizes in 1924 and again in 1943.

Darling had a great deal of respect for nature and was always working to save wildlife and protect our natural resources. He had wonderful relationships with other conservationists including Teddy Roosevelt and Aldo Leopold.

In 1931 Darling was appointed head of the Iowa Fish and Game Commission (now known as the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources). An appointment as chief of the Biological Survey (currently the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service) soon followed in 1934. That was also the same year that the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act (or Duck Stamp Act) went into effect. Waterfowl hunters have been required to buy a stamp ever since with a percentage of the sales going into wetland and habitat restoration. Ding designed the very first Duck Stamp and there has been a new, and collectable, one every year since. *(To date 1.1 billion dollars have gone into the National Wildlife Refuge system that Darling championed while at the Biological Survey. The refuge at Sanibel Island in Florida where he and his wife spent their later years was permanently named the "J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge". Writer's Note)*

As if those accomplishments weren't enough Darling met with the first North American Wildlife Conference in 1936. There he was elected the first president of the General Wildlife Federation. You know it today by its present name of the National Wildlife Federation. He was truly an Iowan with a great conservation legacy.

By the end of this one-man play many of us felt that Ding Darling had been in our presence. However, Tom Milligan of Humanities Iowa had brought his presentation, "Cartoons and Conservation; A Visit with Ding Darling" to life. Check out the May issue of the Red Tail to see more about Tom and where you can catch another of his performances. Thank you, Tom, for an entertaining and informative evening. Additional thanks go out to avid stamp collector, Jim Welch, who shared his complete collection of National Duck Stamps.