

Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

General Meeting Minutes

November 11, 2025

The November 11, 2025 meeting of the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society was called to order by President Tom Schilke at 7:05 p.m. Forty members and some curious visitors were in attendance. Pres. Tom announced that our January speaker had reluctantly retracted their Zoom engagement. If you are aware of a good replacement presenter, let Tom know. (Great news! We have been able to locate a speaker from Wisconsin. Stay tuned for updates.)

Treasurer, Francis Moore, reported our general account to hold \$38,362.32. The bird feed fund has \$1,627.83 but with many more feeders being filled in the Cedar Valley the fund will soon need replenishing.

More financial news includes PRAS establishment of endowment funds at the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa. Donations to either the Quasi or Permanent funds will enable our money to grow more quickly in the future. We will be able to take on bigger and more influential projects. For more information check out the making a difference page on the gopras.org web site.

Regarding donations, your contributions to our silent auction produced many new book and miscellaneous selections for tonight's sale. Thank you to all who participated.

This year's Christmas Bird Counts will be taking place on December 14th in Bremer County and December 20th in Black Hawk County. Check the Red Tail web site field trip link for details.

One never knows what new knowledge they are going to obtain at a PRAS meeting. Tonight's speaker took us on a different journey by introducing birds to us through language in his soon to be released book, "Birding English: Exploring the history of a Language through 50 Birds".

Jeremy Withers teaches a variety of classes in the English Department at Iowa State University. He admits to being both a word nerd and a bird nerd.

He began by going back to the year 1623 and a man named Henry Cockeram who was the author of the third known English dictionary. He was also the first person to call it a *dictionary*. His dictionary was proclaimed to be the interpreter of hard English words.

A connection to birds evolved with words such as *cruciate*, the cry of a raven or *cucubate*, the cry of an owl. Many more definitions existed and often words were made-up. Referred to as *Mountweazels*, these definitions were included to catch publishers who plagiarized the printing of their own dictionaries. Idioms related to birds also came into common usage. Phrases such as "birds of a feather flock together" and "as the crow flies" remain confusing to non-native English speakers.

According to Jeremy, Cockeram was also a master at defining words pertaining to flight. Nearly all of them are no longer used but he is credited with introducing the word *migrate*, meaning to flit here and there.

Around the late Middle Ages, circa 1450-1500, an interest in collective nouns became popular. With the printing of the Egerton Manuscript in 1450 a "gaggle of geese" and a "murder of crows" were introduced in the

English language. How about a “banditry of chickadees” or a “party of jays”? Collective names often came from the birds’ characteristics, appearance, a comment or a sound.

Other manuscripts followed in the 15th century. One notable work was the Book of St. Albans thought to have been written by a woman. She spoke of hunting and coats of arms among other things. A woman author was unusual for the times. Her collective nouns included a “bevy of quail” and an “unkindness of ravens”, a totally appropriate name.

Jeremy continued on to talk about folk etymology or origin of words and their meanings. In the case of birds, they are adapted to eat many different foods but some species eat mainly fruits. They, or any other fruit eating creature for that matter, are known as frugivores from the Latin word, frug. However, more people are using the word fruitivore which, in English, makes more sense.

Finally, Jeremy asked the question of when a foreign word becomes an English word. Considering that English is a hybrid language being derived from over 100 other languages, new words are coming into usage regularly. The German term, zugunruhe, means “a migratory restlessness, especially in birds” that several audience members had read or heard before. It is quickly becoming an entry in new English dictionaries. PRAS will begin its Wednesday Morning Birding field trips when zugunruhe strikes again in the spring.

I will confess to having to watch the Zoom recording of this presentation to make sense of my own notes. You may want to view it again, as well, for a richer understanding of Jeremy’s topic or, better yet, buy his book when it is released in the spring of 2026. Thank you to Jeremy, for introducing us to this fascinating subject.