

# Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

## General Meeting Minutes

January 14, 2025

January is the perfect month to hold a Zoom meeting and it may just become a habit for the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society. Vice-president Craig Rash called business to order at 7:00 p.m. while our president, Tom Schilke, was in the southern hemisphere birding Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. The board expects a program from him and his travel partner, Scott Garrett, in the near future! Thirty-four people attended from 26 devices from the comfort of their homes. Three people showed up at the church because they missed their emails! I have it on good authority.

Francis Moore gave the treasurer's report announcing a balance of \$8,262.53. The bird feed fund is still in negative territory at -\$454.41. We urgently need donations to this fund as we continue to fill feeder stations at five sites frequently visited by the public. Signs will be displayed at each location indicating that PRAS is responsible for feeder maintenance and providing a QR code with information on how to donate to the bird feed fund.

Tom Moon has been faithfully keeping the Canfield feeders at George Wyth Park filled. If you would be willing to help with this effort, click on the sign-up sheet in the **gopras.org** web site. Any assistance is appreciated and you will be rewarded by many bird visitors as you carry out your duties.

PRAS board member Connie Svobada retired from her wonderful work at Hartman Reserve as of January 3<sup>rd</sup>. She has been editing our online edition of the Red Tail since we've gone paperless and will continue to bring our newsletter to us. If you have contributions to make, please contact Connie.

Christmas Bird Counts were conducted across the country in December with PRAS members participating in 7 county events in Iowa. Our PRAS sponsored counts locally yielded 68 species in Black Hawk and 60 species in Bremer County. This is the 125<sup>th</sup> year since the inception of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count and is a citizen science project that helps track bird populations across the country. Our Bremer birders were treated to a tasty, warming lunch at the home of Darrin and Janeen Siefkin. A big thank you to them for their hospitality. Birders do travel on their stomachs. A complete list of species will be printed in the February's Red Tail.

Want to impress your friends with your bird knowledge? Our word for the day is plumicorns. From the Latin, pluma meaning feather and cornu meaning horn, plumicorns are the feather

tufts on the heads of several owl species. They are not ears and their purpose may be for communication. In Iowa look for great-horned, eastern screech, long-eared and short-eared owls.

Our Zoom connection this night also allowed our presenters to remain in the coziness of their home. Michael and Diane Porter came to us virtually from Fairfield to report on “The Wonderful World of Birding (and Other Wild Things)”.

Michael was first up relating to us the background story of the Porter’s involvement in optics. For many years they tested binoculars and reported their findings in the birding magazine, Bird Watchers Digest.

Testing was always conducted indoors with binoculars steadied on a heavy tripod and focusing on a special chart. Each binocular was checked for smoothness of focusing and how easy the focus knob was to reach. High-end binoculars also went through survivability tests.

According to Michael optics have become about as good as they’re going to get. So, what’s next? He displayed a Swarovski digital 10x32 EL model that is capable of identifying birds and animals through a GPS database. Able to take its own photos it is still rather clunky but Michael assured us that they will continue to get faster and smaller with AI technology. Your sitings will one day be transferred to eBird through your bins. Also recommended: start saving now!

Michael and Diane also have their own business Birdwatching Dot Com.

[www.birdwatching.com](http://www.birdwatching.com) If you’re in the market for new optics, whether it’s binoculars or a spotting scope, give their business a try. They are more than eager to help. Take it from us.

Michael handed the program off to Diane who was delighted to share the details she witnesses in the outdoors on their 69 acres in Jefferson County, IA. With a gift for capturing great images, she presented photos of many butterflies sipping nectar on native plants. Diane is also adept at the use of microscope photography. She displayed photos of ants nectaring on unique glands of the partridge pea. WOW!

While nectar can be obtained from many different flowers Diane emphasized how butterfly and moth species are very specific when it comes to their plant preferences to lay eggs to feed their larva. She reminded us how insect larvae are the main source of food for most baby birds. They provide the needed protein required for rapid growth and healthy fledglings.

Black cherry, Virginia creeper, prairie blazing star, gray-headed coneflower, several species of milkweed, partridge pea and cardinal lobelia are among the native plants found on the Porter property. Diane’s photos included images of warblers, woodpeckers, bluebirds, meadowlarks,

hummingbirds, kinglets, gnatcatchers and other avian species, residents and migrants among them.

For recommended reading Diane brought to our attention the terrific book, “Bringing Nature Home” by Doug Tallamy. His promotion of native habitat in even the smallest landscape would help to support wildlife wherever you live. Do a Google search for his presentation on YouTube. It is well worth your time. (I have heard him speak in person three times in Iowa. I may be a groupie.)

Two Apps to help you identify native plants are Picture This (paid subscription) and iNaturalist (free). Also keep your eyes open for the native plant sales to be held at Hartman Reserve in May and September. Experts will be there to help you choose which plants are right for your garden.

We want to extend our thanks to Michael and Diane for bringing their knowledge as well as sharing their love of nature with us. To get a weekly dose of Diane’s illustrated nature insights subscribe to her post, **[mygaia.substack.com](https://mygaia.substack.com)**