

Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

General Meeting Minutes

November 12, 2024

Submitted by Kris Rash

Perhaps as the birds have migrated south so have some of our members as only 34 individuals attended the November 12, 2024 meeting of the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society. Business was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by President Tom Schilke.

First up was the treasurer's report from Francis Moore. Our general account remains at \$7,351.58 but our bird feed fund has fallen to a -\$649.62. This is a critical time to be making contributions to the fund as winter approaches and all of our feeder sites will be active again. In a sense, these sites are a community service to the people of our area. While a couple sites serve people who are shut in or even experiencing their last days others are located in our parks encouraging visitors to learn more about our avian friends. Board member, Tom Moon, has been dedicated to restoring the Canfield feeding station at George Wyth State Park. New feeders have been built. This drive-up site is extremely popular with birders of all skill levels who then can remain in their vehicles as they watch the birds claim their free meals. Signs will be posted at each of our feeder stations advising people of PRAS sponsorship and requesting donations.

We are also asking you, our members and friends, to contribute to the bird feed fund and perhaps give a week of your time to fill the feeders at George Wyth. Let Tom Moon know at tomdaa.mchsi.com

The Christmas Bird Count for 2024 will take place on December 14th for Bremer County and December 21st for Black Hawk County. Look for the results in the February Red Tail.

Speaking of the Red Tail, our digital edition is saving us more than \$400 a month in postage costs. It also allows us to include much more content and color images from our presenters and talented photographers. Board member, Connie Svoboda, is doing a fabulous job as editor.

The silent auction continues to have a wide selection of books, prints, knick-knacks and other items with nature lovers in mind. Thank you for your donations and purchases. John McCormack donated many photos of shots he had taken with proceeds going to the bird feed fund. Every little bit helps. Our next auction will take place in February, 2025.

While fall migration is behind us keep your eyes open for winter arrivals from the far north such as horned larks, Lapland longspurs, and rough-legged hawks. These birds actually think it's warmer here.

When our scheduled speaker for tonight's meeting had to bow out due to a health concern Pres. Tom didn't have to reach far for a replacement. Board member, David Voigts background as an animal ecologist led him to his work for Florida Power Corporation. There he did research on several avian species including the red-cockaded woodpecker, Florida scrub jay and the burrowing owl. Manatees were also part of his studies. But that might be a program for another meeting. Tonight, David was giving us a foundation to his hobby with an "Introduction to Astronomy".

David began with a look overhead at a canopy of stars that circle around Polaris, the North Star. It appears to remain fixed in its position and neither rises nor sets. In a time-lapse photo this phenomenon is apparent where Polaris is a pinpoint of light in the center surrounded by arced streaks of light from the other stars.

The Greek scientist and philosopher, Aristotle, used several proofs to determine that the earth was round. The observance of the earth's shadow during lunar eclipse was another indication of its spherical shape. The voyages of Columbus and Magellan showed that the earth was round though they thought the planet didn't move. These are a few nuggets of history David tossed in.

To guide us through the seasons David gave us a stellar road map of four constellations to lead us to others. Beginning with the spring sky the easily recognizable Big Dipper or Ursa Major (Big Bear) points to Ursa Minor (Little Bear) and Leo

the Lion. From the Big Dipper's handle, we arc to the star, Arcturus, and speed on to Spica, part of the constellation, Virgo.

The southern horizon during summer allows us to view another very recognizable shape, that of Scorpio, the scorpion, with Antares its red star heart. Immediately to the left of its tail is the "teapot" image within Sagittarius, the Centaur.

As the year progresses into autumn the royalty is easily seen but it is best to use your imagination. Cassiopeia, the queen, is seated in her "W" formation near Cepheus, the king in the shape of a house. Appearing close by to these two is one of the largest constellations in the northern sky, Pegasus, the winged horse. David informed us that the astronomer, Edwin Hubble, first discovered the existence of several galaxies within the Pegasus constellation. He also focused on the astronomer, Henrietta Leavitt, and her research in stellar magnitudes. You may want to Google that!

Winter's arrival brings us to another well-known constellation, Orion, the hunter, in the southeastern sky. His belt points toward the bright star Aldebaran, the eye of Taurus, the bull. Finally, look for the star cluster, The Pleiades, or the Seven Sisters.

David continued to make location of the planets and twelve of the constellations easier by explaining that they move across the sky in a path called the Zodiac. He went on to describe each planet's unique characteristics as well as those of their moons.

Another history lesson was squeezed in when David referred to Copernicus back in the 1400's and his theory that not only did the earth rotate but that it revolved around the sun, as well. Copernicus also discovered the phenomenon of retrograde in which a planet appears to be moving backward in its orbit. (Google has a wonderful visual explaining this.)

Our PRAS has some incredible talent and knowledge in its membership. Thank you, David, for sharing some of yours with us.