

Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

General Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2025

It was a welcome feeling to be together again as President Tom Schilke called the September 9, 2025 meeting of the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society to order at 7:02 p.m. Thirty-seven members and visitors were in attendance as Charlene Heiar reminded them to stick around after the meeting for refreshments provided on this night by the board members. Please consider signing up to bring treats at a later gathering.

Francis Moore reported our financial standings at \$38, 237.04 in the general account and \$1,777.83 remaining in the bird feed fund. Although we have been the fortunate recipients of a large bequest, we need to remember to support PRAS as members. Our Birdathon contributions and other donations this year have totaled \$1,583.00, the lowest we have ever received. Please support your local Audubon Society, if you are able. If you have questions about your membership status contact Francis to see if your payment is due.

A unanimous vote by the membership present confirmed Darrin Siefkin as a new board member. The next time you see Darrin thank him for stepping into this role.

Speaking of thanks, we need to express our gratitude to Charlene Heiar for being our corresponding secretary for several years. She will be passing those duties to the capable hands of John McCormick.

There was a varied collection of books and other bird related items in this month's silent auction. Proceeds totaled \$32.00. The next auction will take place in November, just in time for early Christmas shopping.

The Little House donation box held \$10 this month. This is a good time to recognize member, Harlan Wittmayer, for making the Little House. Harlan died July 2nd at 89 years of age. He attended many PRAS events and was an avid wood carver of bird figures.

The PRAS board has recently approved two grant requests; \$916.57 for the Cedar Valley Preschool and Child Care Center and \$1,500 for the Calkins Nature Center bird blind. The child care center's program "Learning about and Loving Birds" is taught to young children by a very knowledgeable staff to start them off on the right foot caring about nature. The nature center located in Hardin County received considerable damage to their bird feeding area during a derecho. They are spending \$30,000 for extensive tree clean up, replacing trees, and a blind. The PRAS grant will be used to provide feeders near the blind. A future visit to the site will occur when the project is completed.

Our conservation chair, David Voigts, brought an issue to our attention backed by National Audubon and other environmental groups and indigenous tribes called "The Roadless Rule". Passed in 2001, it prohibits road construction and timber harvests on 45 million acres of publicly owned land, mostly in Alaska and the U.S. west. The Trump administration wants to rescind this rule and sell some of the land to private companies. These lands have been important in protecting wildlife including migratory birds and mitigating climate change. You can let the U. S. Forest Service know how you feel about the possible rescission of the Roadless Rule. Call 1-800-832-1355 or write 1400 Independence Ave. S.W., Washington D.C. 20250-0003

If you're a serious birder have you ever thought of doing your own big year? Tonight's speaker, Wendy Van De Walle, decided it was something that interested her so took on an "Iowa Birding Big Year-2023".

Before she started, she had some preparation to do and passed along her tips.

- She advised practicing with your binoculars and spotting scope. The faster you can find your subject the better your chances are for identification.
- Learn migration patterns in your area. There's no sense looking for a bird that has little or no chance of being there.
- Get to know lots of birders and related organizations. They can lead you to hot spots or specific bird sightings.
- Technology is your friend. So much information can be accessed right on your smart phone. Field guides from your location can be uploaded easily and have the advantage of recorded songs and calls. eBird allows you to keep a list of your sightings as well as tracking what other birders have seen. Weather apps can tell you whether it's a good or bad day to go out. Perhaps there was a fallout overnight and you won't be able to count the birds fast enough. *Hallelujah!*

Wendy mentioned that the goal for an Iowa birder is to reach 300 species within the state's borders in a calendar year. That implies that some long vehicle rides will be required in pursuit of migrants heading one way or the other.

Wendy became familiar with the species that Iowans could expect to see in each month beginning in January of 2023. She could quickly list winter visitors and residents to grow her list. By March the first migrants would be arriving as ducks began to flood the marshes on their way north.

By May things are in full swing. Wendy's advice is make "no commitments" to anything else. As the passerines and others bound for their nesting grounds are now dressed in their breeding plumages your only job is birding. She was often happy to have leftovers in the fridge. (Her husband, Terry, was in attendance but reserved comment.)

Activity slowed in the early summer as birds had reached their breeding grounds and got down to the business of raising a new family. Things picked up in August and allowed Wendy to chase rarities around the state. September is another month to make "no commitments" as migrants fly through the state on their way to wintering habitat. She also kept tabs on a peregrine falcon nest at Black Hawk Point, a bluff along the Mississippi River in northeast Iowa. Her photos of the adults and developing chicks were excellent.

The year wound down adding some more of the expected species to her expanding list along with some surprises. Wendy's favorite bird of the year, a Pacific loon, made an appearance at Lake Red Rock in November.

By the end of 2023 Wendy had recorded 306 species on her Iowa list. Notable life birds included a ferruginous hawk, red knot and a pine grosbeak. A painted bunting, whooping crane, ruff and a roseate spoonbill were among the rarities she was fortunate to see far away from their usual range.

To add to her busy year Wendy added a family trip to Costa Rica in July. She also traveled to Texas and Arizona. All terrific places to bird, they brought her 2023 total to 532 species. With so much travel involved Wendy made a donation to Trees Forever for carbon credits.

Her old vehicle suffered several breakdowns along the way prompting her to purchase a new Chevy Trailblazer EV in an effort to fight climate change. To help you become more aware of the changing climate and its effects on living beings she highly recommended reading, "The Sixth Extinction" by Elizabeth Kolbert.

Thanks to Wendy for sharing her Big Year experiences. We admire your effort and perhaps will be inspired to take on our own project.