

# Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

## General Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2026

It has become the tradition for the January meeting of the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society to be held on Zoom anticipating that the weather will be brutally cold, snowy, windy or all of the aforementioned. So, as we were all comfortably seated in our own homes President Tom Schilke called the January 13, 2026 meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. A good turnout of 50 individuals watching 36 devices was recorded.

Francis Moore, treasurer, reported \$40,589.60 in our general account. Much of this is currently invested in our two endowment funds at the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa. If you'd like to know more about this, go to the [gopras.org](http://gopras.org) website and check under the About Us link.

The Bird Feed fund currently stands at \$1,836.44. While this is a healthy sum, PRAS is responsible for keeping a number of feeders filled in public places for the enjoyment of the community. Your donations to this are encouraged and welcomed.

In April the board will be meeting to make a decision on divesting some of our funds. If you know of a grant or project that would be in keeping with PRAS's mission, contact a board member.

This is a friendly reminder that local dues are payable in January. If you are a national member you need to renew each year during the month you originally joined.

Citizen science projects are a good way to help record what's happening to our avian friends. Anyone can participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count scheduled for February 13-16. It's easy to do and doesn't require a lot of time unless you want to really throw yourself into it. Simply go to [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for instructions. Your submissions are valuable. The GBBC has been happening since 1998 sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Speaking of Citizen Science several PRAS members participated in the Christmas Bird Counts in Bremer and Black Hawk counties during December. The results are listed elsewhere in this newsletter. One person gets the most devoted counter award. Francis Moore completed CBC in seven different counties. That's dedication!

Tonight's speaker joined us from Wisconsin through the wonder of Zoom technology. Curt Meine is a conservation biologist and environmental historian. He has taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is actively involved with the Aldo Leopold Foundation and the International Crane Foundation; both located in Baraboo.

As a writer, Curt has written about two of Iowa's most influential conservationists. He has published the first biography of Aldo Leopold's life. More recently he completed a collection of Paul Johnson's writing's titled, "We Can Do Better: Collected Writings on Land, Conservation and Public Policy".

Curt and Paul Johnson were colleagues and Curt considered him to be a mentor. Although Paul didn't think of himself as a writer, he authored many articles and opinions leaving a paper trail over the years.

As Curt noted there were many parallels between another of his guides, Aldo Leopold, and Paul. They each focused on private land owners and the land ethic, in particular. Both men had early experiences working with the U.S. Forest Service which served them well later in life.

Curt's book directed toward Paul begins with a biography of his life. Born in California to a pastor and his wife, the family would later move to South Dakota and then on to Illinois where he graduated from high school. An early interest in aviation led him to get his commercial pilots license and a job at the local municipal airport. A chance meeting there with John F. Kennedy and Eunice and Sargent Shriver during a campaign stop turned his support toward Kennedy and a future stint in the Peace Corps.

Paul found himself in the African country of Ghana from 1962-64. He taught auto mechanics and also studied tropical forest ecology. His time in the Peace Corps was just the beginning of a lifetime of service.

During the following years Paul encountered many changes in his life. He married his wife, Pat, a fellow Peace Corps alumnus. With three children in tow, they followed their desires and bought a small farm near Decorah. Paul loved the rural life he'd experienced years before in South Dakota.

Curt related that Paul wasn't content to remain solely on the farm but jumped into politics during the farm crisis of the 1980's. While serving in the Iowa legislature from 1984-'90 the condition of Iowa's groundwater caught his attention. In 1987 he was responsible for the passage of the Groundwater Protection Act. Contained within the act was the establishment of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University as an agricultural research center.

Another important piece of legislation passed during Paul's term in the legislature was REAP, Resource Enhancement And Protection. This program is still in existence today providing needed funds for numerous conservation related programs.

Curt returned us to the similarities between Paul and Leopold. Along with their concerns regarding water they also cared about the soil, wildlife, and any issue connected between agriculture and conservation. Paul aimed to see farmers as conservationists.

After leaving the legislature Paul was tapped to become the chief of the SCS, Soil Conservation Service, a federal agency begun in 1935 in response to the disastrous soil loss of the dust bowl years. Within a year the agency's name was changed to the NRCS, Natural Resources Conservation Service, to better reflect the scope of its programs. Paul would go on to head positive changes in the service for the next four years. Those accomplishments were recorded in a booklet titled, "America's Private Land-A Geography of Hope".

Curt went to tell us about the rest of Paul's amazing life. Gov. Tom Vilsak appointed him to be director of the DNR, a post he only held for two years. He felt frustrated with road blocks he encountered with an uncooperative legislature.

He did decide to enter politics again with a run for U.S. House in 2002. The decision to not except campaign donations from special interests may have doomed his run and ended his political career.

Paul continued to be a prolific writer following a tractor accident suffered while working on his farm in 2012 that nearly claimed his life. Though he recovered and returned to work his injuries would continue to plague him until his death in 2021.

Paul had wanted to write a book but time ran out. Thankfully, Curt Meine has pursued that wish for him.

You can order a copy of “We Can Do Better” from: [icecubepress.com/2025/02/12/we-can-do-better](http://icecubepress.com/2025/02/12/we-can-do-better)

Discount code: Better10