

Birding Opportunities in Northwestern... continued from page 3

As the visitor ends the wildlife drive at 200th street, he/she can take a left turn and head to the Northwest Minnesota Pollinator Garden. On one recent day in May, Sheila Hoerner, president of the Agassiz Audubon Society was found working on the garden. "We are an advisory board to the Watershed," she explained. She pointed out a couple of plants – wild onion and prairie smoke, a spring-blooming perennial.

Four interpretive signs at the gardens provide information about plants, butterflies, birds, and bees. Four picnic tables, built and donated by 4-H children, are a welcome spot for visitors who have brought their lunches. Access to two miles of walking trails where one can observe birds, wildflowers, ground squirrels, reptiles, amphibians, marshes, swamps, and ponds begins at the garden.

A parade of colorful native flowers blooms from June through September. Don't forget to bring your camera!

The Agassiz Valley Impoundment (one site of the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail and sometimes referred to as the Agassiz Valley Project) and pollinator garden are wonderful, but rustic places. No toilets or water are available. Visitors are advised to take a potty break before coming and bring water (along with a picnic basket, sunscreen, insect repellent, etc.). Pets, tobacco and alcohol are not allowed on the premises.

The two locations are open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. To visit at other times or for other questions, call 218-756-4741.

To see photos of the center, visit the Agassiz Valley Impoundment Facebook page.

While in the area, the birder might also want to visit Old Mill State Park, which is another site of the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail. Located

at 33489 240th Ave. N.W. near Argyle, Minn., it is home to over one hundred species of birds. The park's website lists "rarities seen here" as Clark's Nutcracker and Mountain Bluebird. The website also states that the 406 acre park includes deciduous woodlands, coniferous plantations, aspen parkland, prairie, wet meadows, a river, and lakes.

Visitors at this state park and all other state parks may borrow a birding kit which includes binoculars, a bird checklist and pen, and two books, Birds of North America Field Guide and Peterson First Guide to Birds.

Kittson County birders who prefer to stay closer to home can find three sites of the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail just within the county. One site is another state park, Lake Bronson State Park, located on County Road 28, near the town of Lake Bronson. A recent visit to the park found manager Jenny Eastvold ready to provide visitors with information about birding. Eastvold, who began her duties here in June of 2016, and who loves the "remoteness" and "wide open sky" of the area stated, "The variety of habitat types in the park draw a wide variety of bird species."

She showed the park's variation of the birding kit which includes (besides the binoculars, etc.) a checklist of all the birds (238 of them) to be found at this particular park. She also offered a brochure listing all 45 sites of the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail. (This brochure may be downloaded from www.mnbirdtrail.com/126603_LR.pdf).

A Pine to Prairie Birding Trail sign at the park's visitor center features the Spotted Sandpiper, saying that "it can be seen in various locations near the water's edge."

State Parks are open from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m., 365 days a year. Office hours may vary. Visitors need a state park permit to enter.

Two other Pine to Prairie Birding sites in Kittson County are the Wallace C. Dayton Conservation and Wildlife Area and the Twin Lakes Wildlife Management Area. Jon Eerkes, Land Steward for the Nature Conservancy, is knowledgeable about both of these sites, plus other area birding locations. According to Eerkes, the Wallace C. Dayton Conservation and Wildlife Area is a "true natural site" in that no trails or visitor center exist. He said the site includes "a lot of scattered spots" near the Canadian border. He suggested driving down townships roads in Caribou a little after sunrise with binoculars to see (in grazed areas) Bobolinks, Sharp Tail Grouse, Sand Hill Cranes, and Meadow Larks. If one is able to sit quietly by wet areas, one can "hear (not see)" Rails.

On a drive to the Twin Lakes Wildlife Management area, located six miles east of Karlstad on High-



JENNY EASTVOLD, manager at Lake Bronson State Park is one person visitors may encounter if they go birding at the park. Birding kits are available at the office. (Enterprise Photo by Linda Andersen)

way 11, Eerkes shared some of his knowledge and enthusiasm for birding. He pointed out an eagle sitting in a nest in a tree south of the highway. "It gets bigger every year," he said of the nest which has been there for some years. He related that one year the nest got so big it collapsed and the poor bird had to start building all over again.

He shared that every year in April and May he pays his children ten cents for every bird species they identify. After 30 species, the pay goes to a quarter. "It gives them encouragement to pay attention to what's happening outside," he explained.

While passing the DNR shop, located on the north side of the highway, he mentioned that taking the trail that goes north from the shop across the Twistal Swamp is a good place to see Warblers, birds which he said move around a lot and don't sit still, "like hyperactive children."

At the Twin Lakes Wildlife Management area, one finds a wheelchair accessible observation deck. "It's a really good spot for waterfowl," Eerkes said of the area, adding that Trumpeter Swans are often seen there and that Pelicans sometimes fly in.

"I hear a Rose-breasted Grosbeak," he commented, adding that it "Sounds like a robin, but better."

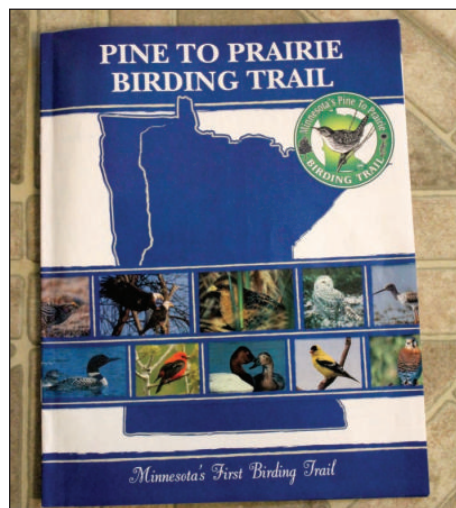
On the return trip to Karlstad, Eerkes explained that Trumpeter Swans became extinct in Minnesota in the 1920's, but were brought back into the state in the 1990's. "Every

bird we see is a descendant of sixty birds that were released in Central Minnesota beginning in 1996," he said.

Need a new hobby? Try birding – not only will you be awed by a wonderful variety of birds, you'll see new and interesting places and meet interesting people.



JON EERKES, Land Steward for the Nature Conservancy, stands beside the Pine to Prairie Birding Trail sign at Twin Lakes Wildlife Management Area near Karlstad. (Enterprise Photo by Linda Andersen)



THE PINE TO PRAIRIE BIRDING TRAIL BROCHURE provides information about all 45 sites and can be downloaded at www.mnbirdtrail.com/126603_LR.pdf. (Enterprise Photo by Linda Andersen)