

Audubon MINNESOTA

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BOBOLINK
CREDIT REBECCA FIELD

Native plants save water

BY MOLLY PEDERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Molly planting native plants next to her driveway.

Your support is helping to transform Minnesota's landscape. Native plants save water and create space for birds in urban places

As a child of the 70's, one of my favorite songs was Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" with her infamous line, "They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

When my husband and I were looking at homes several years ago, that line popped into my head when I first saw a house that the homeowners had paved over almost the entire driveway and backyard, leaving little room for grass or plants.

For many other reasons, we loved and ended up buying the home, thinking that someday we would do something about all of the concrete. But other priorities always seemed to eat up our budget, until this spring when I realized that "paving paradise" was popping into my head every time I pulled into my driveway. Someday is now, I told my husband.

After agreeing on our first step, taking out the old paver stones along our driveway, we had to choose what to put there instead. Native plants were an easy choice.

Native plants are plants that occur naturally in a particular region. In Minnesota, plants are considered native if they were here at the time of the Public Land Survey (1847-1907), which was conducted prior to and during the early stages of European settlement.

Because they easily adapt to our weather and climate, native plants use less water than turf grass and exotic plants, and they don't need pesticides or other toxic chemicals to keep pests away.

I was even more inspired to make this choice when I learned that a 250-townhome association in Denver saved 15 million gallons of water in the first year after they replaced much of their turf grass with native plants and switched to higher efficiency sprinklers. In addition

to benefitting water, native plants provide nectar for pollinators, produce native nuts and seeds for wildlife, and help the climate by storing greenhouse gases. Once planted and established, native plants require less maintenance, saving time and money.

For these reasons, Audubon Minnesota is encouraging homeowners, building managers, cities, schools and businesses throughout Minnesota to consider using native plants in their yards and parks. Our goal is 60 communities and their residents throughout the state taking significant actions like this to protect our treasured lakes and rivers, and conserve our dwindling fresh groundwater supply.

Join us in transforming Minnesota's landscape! Your donation to Audubon Minnesota remains in Minnesota to support local conservation efforts.

With your support, we can soon be singing another one of Joni Mitchell's iconic lines as we drive through Minnesota: "Bring me the birds and the bees!" ■



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Native plants like Butterfly Weed and Wild Bergamot (shown above) attract bugs that birds like the Yellow Warbler love to eat.

With your support, Audubon Minnesota is helping to reinvigorate urban landscapes with bird and bee-friendly plants.

Outdoor classroom conserves water with wildflowers

When Kristin Hall, conservation manager at Audubon Minnesota, dropped her kids off at school every day in Stillwater, she saw a lot of potential in the fallow agricultural lot that the school was built on.

“ I think we have a solid recipe for long-term success.

Kristin Hall
Audubon Minnesota
Conservation
Manager

As a wildlife biologist, working on enhancing prairie and wetland habitat throughout Minnesota, she thought with a little restoration work this field could become an amazing outdoor classroom.

Kristin and another parent Camilla Correll, who is a water resources engineer with Emmons & Olivier Resources, proposed turning the property into a native plant paradise. The process became a reality when Kristin and Camilla worked with the school and established a conservation committee. They then proposed their idea to the school board.

They talked about the benefits of creating a space where students can study birds, plants, and pollinators and highlighted the reduced overall maintenance costs. Fortunately, the school board approved the plan.

“This restoration provides important habitat,” said Kristin. “It will also create a more resilient environment

in the wake of a changing climate by keeping water on the landscape. With the conservation committee and students involved, I think we have a solid recipe for long-term success.”

Last fall, more than 1,170 St. Croix Prep K-12 students, 120 staff, many parents and community partners came together to plant and seed nearly ten acres.

The school used a pollinator-friendly, locally-sourced seed mix that included at least sixteen native wildflower species. St. Croix Prep is located near other prairie Scientific and Natural Areas along the river, making it an ideal location for a prairie restoration project. Collectively, these areas create an excellent corridor of native prairie that conserves water and provides important habitat for wildlife.

St. Croix Prep has also incorporated the prairie into education through activities and prairie ecosystems curriculum, including monitoring the native plants, butterflies, and insect use of the prairie. A prime example is a group of dedicated students who built 10 bluebird boxes with the help of a Girl Scout Gold Award Project. As of this summer, there are a number of nesting Eastern Bluebirds on the property.

The project has been a community effort for the school and was made possible by partnering with Audubon Minnesota, Washington County Pheasants Forever, Washington Conservation District, Emmons & Olivier Resources, Inc., Bayport Fire Department, and Middle St. Croix Watershed Management Organization.

“My hope is that this restored prairie will serve as an inspiration for future generations to show what we can accomplish when we work together for good,” said Kelly Gutierrez, Chief Financial Officer for St. Croix Prep. ■



St. Croix Preparatory School students planted nearly ten acres of native plants on school property. Students will continue to learn about birds, bugs, and prairie through their school's curriculum.



Forester: Native tree saplings revive river watershed

On a crisp fall day last year, Andy Beebe, Audubon Minnesota's forest ecologist, gathered volunteers in a circle. He welcomed them, and then proceeded to show them how to plant a Swamp White Oak sapling. About 30 volunteers – ranging in ages from late teens to late sixties – had come to help plant native trees within a floodplain near the Mississippi River.

“All plants have their place,” said Andy, “but it is vitally important that we help encourage the right plants on the right site. Native plants, especially trees, improve water quality and flood regimes, benefit native insects, and of course, provide crucial habitat for birds.”

Andy has a forestry background and has been working diligently to continue Audubon Minnesota's work along the Mississippi River. His job is an interesting cross of labor-intensive field work, technical computer work, and managing volunteers and contractors to get trees in the ground.

Andy has done several habitat walks and presentations about his work. Recently, he did an interview with Wisconsin Public Radio about the need for floodplain forest restoration. He has a consistent message for anyone who will listen: Planting native tree species like Swamp White Oak, Hackberry, Cottonwood and Silver Maple help to keep invasive species from spreading and provide homes to birds like the Red-Shouldered Hawk and Cerulean Warbler.

Last fall, when volunteers finished their work, they left behind a row of carefully planted trees where there had been none before.

Immediately next to the tiny, new forest, a Cottonwood tree cradled a Bald Eagle's nest and awaited its inhabitants to return. ■



Audubon Minnesota has partnered with the US Fish & Wildlife Service to plant more than 20,000 native trees in Mississippi River floodplain forests.



Andy Beebe demonstrates for volunteers how to plant a Swamp White Oak sapling. These native tree species attract bugs and provide habitat that Minnesota's birds need to thrive.



Volunteers pose in front of an eagle's nest after planting hundreds of saplings to help slow the spread of invasive plant species like Reed Canary Grass.

Future conservationists flaunt bird and water wisdom

On a sunny day at the end of May, more than 500 students attended the EcoArts Fest. A little girl stood in a line with her classmates, preparing to show off art during a parade into the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge visitor center.

She held a large yellow bird made of papier-mache and when she was asked which bird she chose, she said, “A Scarlet Tanager.” With a proud smile, she then added, “A female.”

ArtStart collaborated with Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to teach kids about the Mississippi Flyway. Kids were also taught the importance of clean water throughout the Mississippi River watershed using a combination of environmental education and arts learning activities.

EcoArts Fest was the culmination of a three-month long project involving six elementary schools. Katie Burns,

Your support is helping to ensure that conservation is part of foundational education for Twin Cities' kids.



This spring, hundreds of schoolchildren learned that birds need clean water and native habitat to survive.

Audubon Minnesota’s outreach coordinator, worked with ArtStart to create a unique learning experience with school kids. Katie encouraged the kids to funnel their newfound bird knowledge into creative avian art.

The art included bird replicas that each student created and they held their creations above their heads as they walked into the visitor’s center, proud of their work.

Parents, teachers, and ArtStart staff then helped the students build their own bird feeders, learn more about the Minnesota River Valley, watch a bird banding demonstration, and participate in other activities. Throughout the day, kids participated in lessons that reiterated why birds rely on the water resources that keep remaining habitat healthy. ■



This project was made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

Wildscaping is better for birds

Debbie Reynolds decided to upgrade her yard, but not with the exotic plants you may see lining heavily-manicured lawns. Instead, she decided to use native plants in her landscaping. This has been referred to as “wildscaping.” She’s been able to attract more birds and butterflies to her yard and she even gets some people buzzing about.



By planting native plants, Debbie has attracted more birds to her garden (below) and engaged neighbors in conversation about the benefits of a bird-friendly yard.

“I get a lot of compliments from my neighbors,” said Debbie, Audubon Minnesota’s board chair, as she looked at a patch of Wild Geranium that she planted a couple years ago. “I also see bees that have flown over from my neighbor’s hive.”

Debbie says she enjoys knowing her plants are attracting native birds as well as conserving water. Plants in her yard include Purple Coneflower, Rough Blazing Star, Wild Bergamot, Fragrant Hyssop, Butterfly Milkweed, and Prairie Dropseed.

“I know I don’t have a perfect yard, but it’s a start,” she said modestly. Debbie will continue to set an example for her neighborhood by showing off the beauty of a wildscaped, bird-friendly yard. ■



When you plant native plants, your yard could benefit a number of Minnesota’s birds, including the Eastern Bluebird.

CREDIT: REBECCA FIELD

Lights Out program gets a boost



INDIGO BUNTING | CREDIT DAVID BRISLANCE

Thank you All Seasons Wild Bird Store (ASWBS) for offering customers the opportunity to round up their purchases at five Metro-area stores from June 14 through June 30. Donations benefitted Audubon Minnesota’s Lights Out program. ASWBS matched customer donations, raising more than \$2,600!

“There are many bird-friendly actions we can take, including turning out lights that may confuse migrating birds,” said Dave Netten, co-owner of ASWBS.

Bright city lights lure nighttime migrating birds into urban areas and confuse them by obscuring their navigational aids. This makes it difficult for birds to find their way back out of a developed area.

Audubon Minnesota launched Lights Out in 2007 to encourage building owners and managers to turn off non-essential lighting during peak migration periods.

Lights Out reduces energy costs, lowers greenhouse gas emissions, and saves the lives of countless migratory birds. Audubon Minnesota is working to increase the number of participating buildings. ■



Our thanks to Al and Dave Netten of All Seasons Wild Bird Store for raising donations to help migratory birds make safe passage through urban landscapes!

Visit any of the five ASWBS locations to talk with backyard bird-feeding experts and to purchase wild bird supplies.

The push for proactive conservation policy

Clean water for birds and people

Some lawmakers attempted to repeal or delay implementation of the state's law requiring vegetative buffer strips or alternative water quality practices along lakes, rivers, streams, and public ditches. Audubon Minnesota and a coalition of conservation allies defeated attempts to weaken the buffer law.

The Legislature appropriated \$25 million for the cleanup of the St. Louis River Estuary – the headwaters of Lake Superior. This investment allows Minnesota to access \$47 million of federal support.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a significant source of funding for landowners who want some of their land to provide habitat and clean water benefits. The Legislature's capital investment bill included only \$10 million, far short of the \$30 million in bonding dollars needed to access nearly \$70 million of federal support this year.

Protecting birds from lead

Audubon Minnesota supported the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' attempts to limit the use of lead shot in various Wildlife Management Areas. We are disappointed that the environment bill signed into law by Governor Dayton puts a two-year delay on rules that protect water, people and birds from harmful effects of lead.

Clean energy for a healthy future

Audubon Minnesota supported an increase of Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard so that 50% of our power comes from clean, renewable sources by 2030. Despite a bipartisan slate of authors, the bill didn't get a hearing. ■



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More than 230 bird species rely on the headwaters of Lake Superior including the Common Loon. Audubon Minnesota supported successful legislative efforts to secure funding for the cleanup of this area.

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