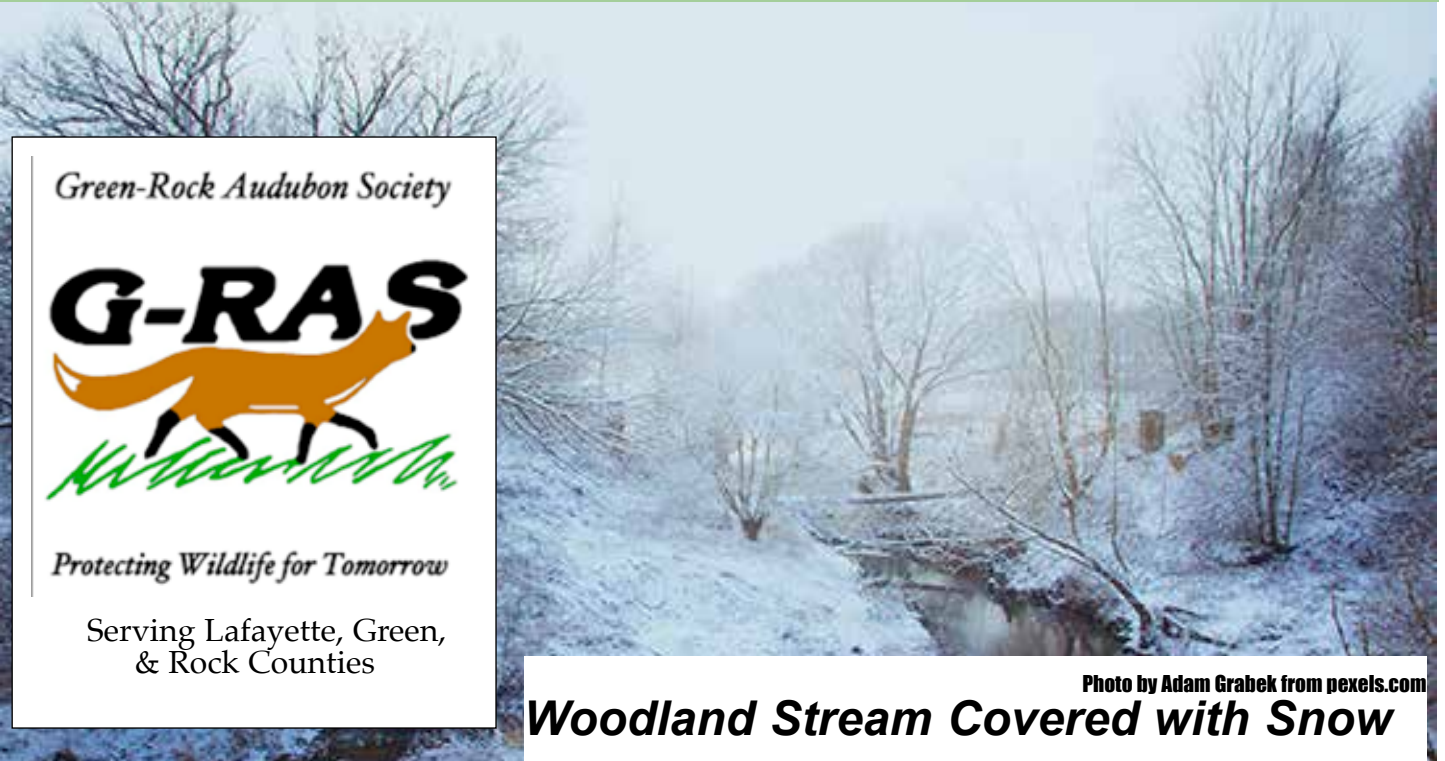


Winter 2020

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Green-Rock Audubon Society

G-RAS



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Photo by Adam Grabek from pexels.com

Woodland Stream Covered with Snow

THE NATURALIST

Audubon Christmas Bird Count

By Neil Deupree
Bird City

This year is the 121st anniversary of the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). It is sponsored by the National Audubon Society as a way to check on long term bird populations. During the three weeks around Christmas volunteers travel a specific area. As they drive or walk, they identify all the bird species they see and count how many of each are present. At the end of the day, the results for each area are tabulated and submitted.



Our area is fortunate to have three CBCs: Janesville / Beloit, Brodhead, and Monroe/Green County. Each has a 15-mile diameter circle where birds are counted.

For Janesville/Beloit, December 19: Different species – 61. Total number of birds – 8656. Unusual species – Eastern Phoebe, Savannah Sparrow. Highest counts were for Canada Geese (2901), European Starlings (1409), House Sparrows (552). There were over 300 each of American Crow, Mallard, Dark-eyed Junco, Tree Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird. The count was coordinated by the Ned Hollister Bird Club, Brad Paulson, manager. Twenty people assisted, drove over 354 miles and spent a combined total of 36 hours.

For Brodhead, December 16: Different species – 62, Total number of birds – 9395. (These were new records!) Unusual species for this time of year - House Wren, Savannah Sparrow, Western Meadowlark, Red Crossbill, Eastern Towhee, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Killdeer. Highest counts were for European Starlings (1992), American Tree Sparrow (1208), Dark-eyed Junco (1158), Rock Pigeon (1071). There were over 300 each of Canada Goose, Mourning Dove, House Sparrow, and Horned Lark. The count was coordinated by Quentin Yoerger.

For Monroe/Green County, December 20: Different species – 54. Total number of birds – 10114. Highest counts were: American Tree Sparrows (1035) and European Starlings (1004) There were over 300 each of Dark-eyed Junco, Rock Pigeon, House Sparrow, and Canada Goose. Notable species, less unusual to more unusual: Northern Flicker, Belted Kingfisher, Robin, Bluebird, Eastern Meadowlark, Pileated Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, Hooded Merganser, Brown Trasher, Eurasian Tree Sparrow. The count was coordinated by John Patterson, long-time G-RAS board member.

If you are interested to participate for next year, follow G-RAS on Facebook this fall, or go to <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>.

You can also participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/about-great-backyard-bird-count>

We also enjoy counting birds with Feederwatch, <https://feederwatch.org/>

Neil & Kay Deupree
Bird City



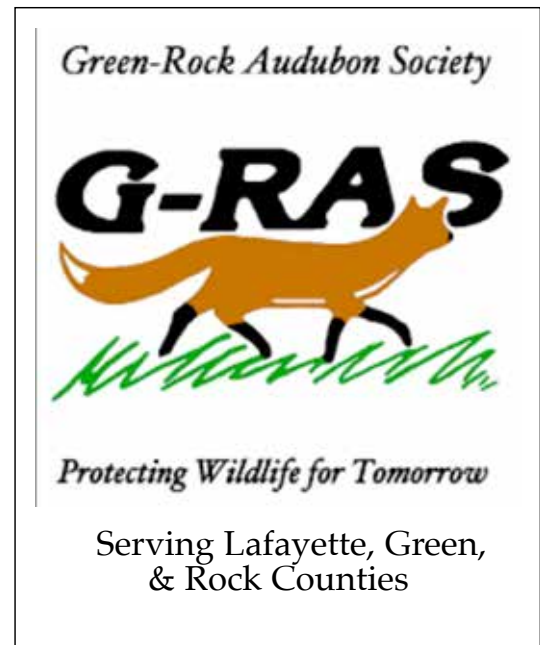
In late August and early September, chimney swifts begin gathering ahead of their migration to South America. Once again this year, they chose local chimneys to roost in. The most impressive display was at Washington Elementary School, where over 1000 birds entered the chimney beginning a few minutes after sundown on September 3. The VFW on Center Avenue was also a favorite spot, where more than 700 were observed on September 6. Two other chimneys had over 100 swifts: Enginaire at West Court and River, and Carriage Works at East Milwaukee and Parker. We started counting on August 28. I wish we had started sooner. Our last count was on September 28, when there were 20 birds at the VFW chimney. The last two weeks the VFW was the most consistent place to see them – ranging from 200 to 500 each night.

Thank for Your Support!

We appreciate your financial contributions and your encouragement for our efforts to protect birds and the places they live. The following people have donated since May 2020.

Thank
You!

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Seeds of Success - *How to start Native Plants from Seed*

Elliott Duemler

Taylor Creek Restoration Nurseries

It's hard to think of growing plants at this time of the year, when there is snow covering the ground and temperatures are well below freezing. But now is a great time to begin the process of turning your seeds into plants. Many people think growing native plants is hard, but most species are not. Mimicking nature's process is all you need to do. In horticulture, we call it "cold moist stratification." Most people call it winter.

The first step to successful seed germination is refining your seed. Clean the seed to the best of your abilities. You want just the seed itself with as little other inert matter, or "chaff," as possible. The inert matter includes things like the floss on milkweed seeds, bits of leaves and stems and the fluffy awn attached to blazing star, aster, and goldenrod seeds. Much of this can be cleaned out

with two simple items: an old window screen and a fan. Rub the seeds over the screen to remove inert matter, this will leave you with a pile of seeds and chaff combined. Then, tip your screen in front of the fan at a low speed, allowing seeds and chaff to fall onto a concrete floor. The unviable seeds and inert matter blow further from the fan. The nice ripe seeds land closer to the fan. Simple but functional. The less inert matter you include with the seed helps reduce the chance of mold and other fungal issues while germinating.

One thing to note about wild grown seed is its viability. As with anything, the weather impacts seed viability and often only a small percentage of what you collect is viable seed. All species should produce a seed that is firm and crushes a nut meat out when you press it on a hard surface with your fingernail. Tiny seeds can be hard to check, but with species like milkweed and blazing star it is easy to see the viable seeds.

After cleaning your seeds, you are ready to put them into cold moist stratification. Do this no more than 8 weeks before you plan to germinate the seeds. If you plan to germinate outside, time it after the last hard freeze. To stratify the seeds, put them in a Ziplock bag with moist sterile potting mix or vermiculite. The moist mix should be damp, not saturated, as that will rot the seeds. To test the moisture level, squeeze a fist full of your seed and vermiculite mixture. If you can squeeze water out of it, it's too wet. Once combined, place the seeds in your refrigerator or an unheated building that will stay below 40 degrees. Freezing is typically not an issue, so do not worry if temperatures get below 32 degrees F. However, the seeds are at risk of germination if temperatures rise above 40 degrees F. Some species require longer treatment, but most need a minimum of 4 weeks but can handle more.

You are now ready to germinate your seeds. Scatter the mix of seeds and mix over the surface of the potting mix you are using for germination. Use a container appropriately sized for the number of seeds you have. The seeds should not be piled up or overlapping. Cover the seeds with more potting mix. Native plants don't like to be buried like vegetable seeds. Small seeds like bee balm or black eyed susan will need no additional covering of mix. Larger seeds like milkweed will need just enough to barely cover the seeds so they don't dry out. Place the container in a warm sunny place and keep the contents moist until you see germination. Seeds should germinate within 14 days and will be ready to transplant into individual pots once they have at least 1-2 sets of true leaves.

Don't be afraid of trying. I have grown native plants for a living the past 13 years and still have experienced plenty of failures and have lots to learn.



What happened When My Wife Gave Me Bluebirds For Christmas

David Burwell

Neighbor of our Gabower-Reilly East Reserve

May 19th, 2020. I had been a little late to the game, I knew, when I went out on our land that morning to check and see if we had a nesting pair of bluebirds. I hadn't put up the nesting box until late April and was hoping this faux pau was a minor one. The nesting box was a very thoughtful and unexpected Christmas 2019 present from my wife, and I was hoping she would be rewarded for her efforts, as much as me for mine. In recent years she had helped me to recognize the bluebirds when we would go for walks in our neighborhood out in the country. We would usually head west on Cleophaus Road, past the Gabower-Reilly prairie preserve, where she would most often see them first. She obviously had taken note of my delight at these times.



Wanting to maximize the chances of attracting bluebirds (yes, we already know I had procrastinated), I went on line and with the information provided by the North American Bluebird Society and the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, I then moved forward. Taking the scrap paper of notes from my research and putting them in the back pocket of my jeans, I headed outside to get started. My apologies to those scholars reading this for using the word "research" to characterize my ADHD style of scanning the internet on my phone, to get my needed information du jour.

I had determined, from my reading, that what I had originally envisioned for placement of the nesting box would not be wise. I had wanted to be able to sit in our sunroom, in a comfy chair and watch the bluebirds flit about the backyard while I was having my morning coffee. I had wanted to be able to show family and friends how I had brought bluebirds to our land! Well, this was not going to be so. Good bye comfort, hello hubris; the bluebirds needed a fighting chance, and they would not get it in the backyard. Sparrows, sparrows were the main reason. They hung around our yard, as did many other species, attracted by our feeders, birdbaths and suitable cover. They were the main avian threat to the bluebirds and the domicile I was putting up needed to be placed somewhere to minimize this threat.

Knowing where the box should be placed, I prepared. Taking the tools, I would need, I headed east, across our backyard, across the horse pasture, across a small spur of our tall grass prairie, to a firebreak area that had a long north-south running tree line that bisected our land. At the far south end of this line, across 50 feet of firebreak, there was a lone black locust tree, maybe three feet in diameter and about thirty feet tall. South of this tree was another 15 feet or so of firebreak, that then ended at a dense grove of large black locust, sitting along the property line between us and our neighbors. For our prairie preservationists, I know that black locust are the progenitors of the evil spawn that try to take over the prairie; but for now, let's ignore this.

The lone black locust had a limb-free trunk for the first 10 feet. With this and its diameter, it was a perfect natural pole for attaching the box. Up on my stepladder I went, notching a flat space on its east side, not quite 6 feet off the ground, so that the box would have a more stable purchase. Drilling two pilot holes in the trunk, I then secured the box to the tree with two lag bolts. Done, I looked around and checked the notes I had placed in my back pocket earlier. Proper height, east facing across grasslands, nearby trees to fly to, a proper social distance (pandemic phrasing) from sparrows and the like. Time to wait and see.

*See BLUEBIRDS, Page 6

* Bluebirds

Continued from page 5

May 19th, 2020. It was time to check the bluebird box. I needed to get out there in the morning. It was my day off, and I had a doctor's appointment in the afternoon. While I hadn't done any small game hunting since my early thirties, I drew upon that knowledge to effect a strategic approach to where I wanted to stage for observation. Bearing somewhat northeast from the backyard I cut across a corner of the pasture into the firebreak and across a spur of prairie; then across more firebreak, through the north-south tree line, across more fire break and back into prairie proper. One hundred yards into the grass, I started to gently break in an arcing east- southeast direction, eventually turning west-southwest, about 100 feet uphill and in-line with the bluebird box. From this vantage I was able to settle into a spot where my silhouette was broken up by the gently moving grass but did not obscure my ability to see the box through the little pair of opera glasses, I had brought with me - eyeroll and laugh; I care not.

With elbows on my knees and knees acting as a steadying tripod, I waited. Still, so still, with only eyes moving, I faded from the impressionism that the landscape is, when we only walk through it, into the realism of the portrait I had now placed myself in. Maybe 10 minutes, I saw something, a shutter snap of flight from inside the house, blue maybe? I could not tell. I tilted my glasses, but not my head, to try and track its path into the grove of black locust - lost it! Perhaps five minutes later and it was back, back inside the house, cat lighting quick. Not so quick though that I thought I was certain, a relative term I know, that I had seen a pointillist dot of blue on this canvas. Then a few minutes later and another flight from house to trees, then again and again. Blue dots were now becoming brush strokes of blue. Then the music started in my head.

Kubrick's 2001 A Space Odyssey, the score of Alex North. With each unconfirmed but more confirmational view, the lone trumpet, then the bursting strings, the kettle drums, I had to move closer, I had to get a better vantage. I stood up, back into the world of impressionism. I moved west-southwest into the trees of the neighbor's fence line, resting to the ground against a dead fall trunk. My human tripod back in place, I faded back into the realism of my surroundings. Cue the music - horn, drums, strings, dramatic key change, another flick; this one I was able to follow to its high perch in a nearby black locust. Nope, just a black silhouette, the right size, closer but not confirmation. Minutes tick by; I need to get going, I have an appointment; two more minutes, five minutes. There it is!

The bluebird landed on top of the house this time, grub in its beak. The third and most dramatic crescendo burst forth, full force, majestic, goose bumps, ending with the fading notes of the organ pipes. The bluebird turned sideways, as if to help me. For at least thirty seconds it stayed that way, me a stone against a tree trunk. Then it flashed into the nesting box, disappearing. I ran across firebreak, prairie, horse pasture, yard, through our garage, up the basement stairs, through the laundry room, foyer, dining room - where was my wife? Aah, there she was. Her eyebrows raised in a question, me like a breathless child wanting to tell a parent some really exciting news. Confirmation, we have a nesting pair of bluebirds on our prairie. I had to get going, I didn't want to be late for my appointment.

May 19th, 2020. That was the day I was told the biopsy had come back positive, a negative to be sure. I had cancer; I was now the member of a club that I never wanted to join. Well, welcome to the club, I guess. Since that day I have gone through my 45 courses of radiation treatment, and the prognosis for a full recovery is good. And, I think, without really knowing, I will be able to deal with whatever happens. I have thought of the lives we build as we get older as a Jenga tower; all the blocks are in place and we are solid. But if we live long enough, those blocks slowly are removed. Most of the time blocks are slid out, and for a while we are solid, just not whole. Then as we go on, more blocks go, then a wobble, then eventually the crash. I don't know at this time if this is just another block that has been safely slid out or if it is the beginning of a wobble. I have built a good life in my almost 63 years, and I think I will be fine, no matter what

The day, that day, the day I was told I had cancer, that was a good day, a happy day, an exciting day: because that was the day, I saw the nesting bluebirds on our prairie, hell yes!

Green-Rock Audubon Society



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Would you prefer to receive the newsletter electronically? ____

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___ I wish to join Green-Rock Audubon Society, I understand that I will not receive the Audubon Magazine, but all dues will go to G-RAS. Dues: \$10 Senior or Student, \$15 Single Membership, \$20 Couple

• To pay by mail, make checks payable to G-RAS, and mail this form along with the check to this address:

Green-Rock Audubon
Attn: Treasurer
P.O. Box 1986
Janesville, WI 53547-1986

• To pay online visit <https://www.greenrockaudubon.org/donate>

___ I wish to join the National Audubon Society's normal membership of \$35 per year which includes the Audubon Magazine. (Please visit <http://audubon.org/> to complete this membership.)

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- ___ Cleophas Reserve
- ___ Spring Creek Reserve
- ___ Gabower-Reilly Reserve
- ___ The Pond (Janesville)
- ___ Sunny Peace Prairie

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I want my donation to support G-RAS's efforts to manage or maintain...

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- ___ Spring Creek Reserve
- ___ Gabower-Reilly Reserve
- ___ Sunny Peace Prairie

Times I can usually volunteer:

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- ___ Tuesday
- ___ Wednesday
- ___ Thursday
- ___ Friday
- ___ Saturday
- ___ Sunday

Volunteer Coordinator:

Victor Illichmann
viccarol@sbcglobal.net
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(Please mail checks according to the directions above or visit our website.)

Membership Form Inside

Green-Rock Audubon Society (G-RAS) membership for one year with quarterly newsletter Green Rock Naturalist from Green Rock Audubon Society (all dues go to G-RAS).

- Senior or Student membership \$10
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Monterey Park Provides Fun Birding

Neil Deupree
Bird City

Since we just live around the corner from Janesville's Monterey Park and the riverfront restoration, we drive by (or walk by) almost every day. We especially look for the birds, of course. This time of year, it's fun to see the Common Goldeneyes in flotillas or convoys. One day we counted 75. There are always Canada Geese – often in the hundreds – either hanging out in the river or grazing in the nearby lawns or making their Vs in the air as they travel. The most exciting thing for us was to see two American White Pelicans on Christmas Day. We guessed that they were late on their trip south. The Ring-billed Gulls often can be seen circling above the river, but we don't see them diving for food. In the summer, the swallows are often flitting over the water to catch the insects. There are five different species, but to identify them, I have to wait till they perch on a wire to rest. And don't forget the eagles. They have a nest at the east end of Rockport across the river from the canoe launch. Two eaglets fledged this year, and the adults are still hanging around the nest this winter. To see other species that have been observed at Monterey Park, go to ebird.org.

