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# Audubon Minnesota News

## December 13, 2007

### Happy Holidays!

#### **Some of the U.S.'s Most Imperiled Birds Make their Home in Minnesota: New Report Identifies Species at Greatest Risk**

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The National Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy have identified 37 birds found in Minnesota as needing top-priority conservation attention to ensure their continued survival. These birds are part of the 178 birds species found in the continental U.S. that have been placed on WatchList 2007, the newest and most scientifically sound list of America's most imperiled birds. These birds are in the most imminent threat of extinction, often due to their rarity and limited range. For many of them, conservation efforts in Minnesota as well as nationally will determine their future health and survival.

"These birds are unfamiliar to most Minnesotans because of their scarcity, and people don't notice how habitat loss or other threats impact their survival," said Mark Peterson, Audubon Minnesota's state director. "They could become extinct in our lifetime without people being aware that they are this close to the edge."

The WatchList is based on a comprehensive analysis of population size and trends, distribution, and environmental threats, informed by extensive scientific review from the bird conservation community along with data from the Christmas Bird Count and the annual Breeding Bird Survey.

"This list will be a useful reference that will be invaluable in helping identify bird conservation priorities," said Carrol Henderson, Supervisor, Minnesota DNR Nongame Program. "It will be used in conjunction with other current sources of bird status at the state and national level to determine how to use our time and resources in the most efficient manner."

Among some of the most imperiled species on the list that regularly breed in Minnesota are:

*Piping Plover.* Historically, Piping Plovers nested in the St. Louis River Estuary on Lake Superior and on Lake of the Woods. Human disturbance and encroachment of vegetation caused Piping Plovers to disappear from the Duluth/Superior area by 1985. Since then there have been only a few nesting pairs seen on Lake of the Woods every year.

*Yellow Rail.* National data show this rare and secretive bird in decline; however data is lacking from Minnesota. Found in only a few marshes and wetlands in the state.

*Short-eared Owl.* A ground nester on western grasslands in the state. Little is known about population numbers in Minnesota, but as prairie and wetland associated habitat disappears, their survival becomes more difficult.

*Golden-winged Warbler.* A rare and declining species. Over 40% of the world's population breeds in Minnesota, although little is known about population trends here as they nest in inaccessible bog areas in northern Minnesota.

*Cerulean Warbler.* A deciduous forest nester and feeder, it has limited breeding range mostly in parts of the metro and southeastern portion of the state. Nationally, it has one of the sharpest population declines of any warbler, averaging a 4.5% decline from 1966 – 2001 due in part to habitat fragmentation.

"The [WatchList](#) is a critical science-based call to action to save species that are teetering toward extinction," Peterson said. "It's a tool to help us prioritize our policies and our conservation investments while there's still time to do more than watch those species disappear."

## Join the Christmas Bird Count Near You!

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The 108th Audubon Christmas Bird Count kicks off tomorrow Friday December 14 and runs through Jan 5, 2008.

This holiday tradition which began on Christmas Day in 1900 has grown into the longest running wildlife census in the world. It provides Audubon's Science team and other conservationists with over a century of unbroken data on bird population trends - information that was instrumental in both the Common Birds in Decline analysis in June, and Watchlist 2007 in November.

Last year, more than 58,000 people counted nearly 70-million birds in all 50 states and beyond. This year, we hope to increase not only our national numbers, but also Audubon staff participation!

## Keep the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest Wild – Write to DNR! Deadline: Jan. 23, 2008

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The Mississippi Headwaters State Forest is of particular concern to people who love the wilderness. It is a magnificent, wild part of the river, a hidden treasure alternating between

boreal forests and vast wetlands rich in the history of north central Minnesota. The region is habitat for trumpeter swans, red-shouldered hawks, bald eagles, wolves, fur bearers and an incredible diversity of waterfowl in its wild rice lakes, sedge meadows and bog lands. Jack pine and red pine forests intermingle within the wetlands, making for an amazingly rich ecosystem. DNR's draft management plan for Mississippi Headwaters State Forest will allow motorized recreation. Audubon believes this state forest and its narrow sensitive riparian habitat along the headwaters for the Mississippi river is not an appropriate venue for all-terrain vehicles.

[Click here](#) to view the draft plan and associated maps. And, here are some further points to consider in formulating your comments:

1. Three of the five DNR work team members recommended the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest be closed to all motorized recreation, citing the natural assets above and noting that steep hills and sandy soils make the area vulnerable to off-road driving. Significant erosion has already been caused by illegal driving near and through the river. Mike Carroll, DNR Regional Director in Bemidji, acknowledged making the final decision to classify the forest as open for motorized use.
2. Currently, motorized damage in Mississippi Headwaters State Forest is extreme. Camp grounds are rutted and damaged, such as Coffee Pot Landing and Pine Point. All-terrain vehicles are riding in the river in a number of locations, such as Stumphges Rapids 3.
3. Rather than sealing off the historic sites noted above, the DNR Draft Plan has designated motorized routes in these sensitive areas, thereby rewarding illegal behavior by legalizing it.
4. The Mississippi Headwaters Board designated Mississippi Headwaters State Forest as "wild," which created a 1000 foot corridor along the river where all motorized recreation is banned. DNR's draft plan disregards this protection and proposes motorized trails within this corridor, with some dead-ending at the river. As noted, illegal riding has already damaged the riparian zone.
5. By closing the forest to motorized recreation, all-terrain vehicles would still be able to ride through the forest in county road ditches and on township roads.
6. It will be difficult for DNR enforcement to strictly monitor any portion of this area because this part of the Mississippi is so remote. Classifying the Mississippi Headwaters State Forest as closed to motorized recreation would greatly aid in protecting the river itself.
7. In the interest of all Americans, we must protect this last remaining stretch of wild Mississippi for future citizens. The Mississippi Headwaters State Forest is a narrow corridor. It contains the most pristine stretch of the Mississippi River in Minnesota. Minnesotans must set a precedent of good stewardship for this internationally recognized river and migratory flyway.

Contact Information: Bill Johnson, Planner, DNR Division of Trails & Waterways, Box 52, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155

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## **Cranes and Planes** by Val Cunningham

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Seventeen gawky young Whooping Cranes launched themselves into the Wisconsin sky in mid-October, following a large and noisy "parent," an ultralight aircraft piloted by humans involved in an awe-inspiring project to help bring these birds back from the edge of extinction.

The 2007 birds make up the seventh group of young cranes to take part in an audacious project led by the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, an international coalition of public and private groups working to reintroduce this highly imperiled species in eastern North America. The project now counts 52 whooping cranes in the wild in the eastern population, a hedge against many kinds of disasters, natural or man-made, that could strike the 261 wild cranes who winter on the Texas Gulf Coast. Whooping Cranes are among the most endangered of all the world's birds.

The 17 youngsters spent the summer building flight muscles and learning to flap behind ultralights manned by Operation Migration crews. The humans are getting good at it, but for the birds it's a brand-new experience. Each year brings new challenges as the aircraft and cranes cover 1,250 miles from Wisconsin's Necedah National Wildlife Refuge to Florida's Chassahowitzka NWF. It generally takes about 23 flying days to cover the route but winds, fogs and other unfavorable conditions interrupt such days. Last year's trip took 76 days, with much time spent on the ground, to cover the distance.

This maiden flight is tough on the young birds in several ways. For one, they're not following real cranes, who'd demonstrate how soaring with thermals would reduce the physical energy required. Instead, the young birds must flap their wings across the entire distance. Nearly every day a cranelet or two wanders away and must be located by ground crews, packed up and brought into the nighttime pen. And there are dangers on the wintering grounds: in February 2007, the entire class of 2006, all 18 young cranes, died in a powerful storm that swept Central Florida.

The goal is to establish a self-sustaining flock of 25 breeding pairs of cranes that winters in Florida and breeds in Wisconsin. Progress is slow with these birds that take years to reach maturity and raise only one or two chicks at a time. Everyone involved in the reintroduction project celebrated when a pair of cranes, dubbed the First Family, successfully raised a chick in 2006 that flew with them to Florida and returned to Necedah in 2007, the first wild Whooping Crane hatched and raised in the Midwest in more than 100 years.

For more information, check out [info@savingcranes.org](mailto:info@savingcranes.org)

## **Deadline for 2008 Audubon Minnesota and Chapter Collaborative Funding Friday, December 15 – Send us your idea!**

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Audubon Minnesota is accepting proposals from chapters for FY08 Collaborative Funding grants. Proposals should support conservation projects (defined broadly to include education, citizen science, policy, restoration, etc.) Ideally, proposed projects provide an opportunity to engage your members and the public, to promote our shared mission, and to align national, state and chapter priorities. Requests for endowment, general operations, administrative costs or staff salaries are not eligible for funding.

Keep in mind that Audubon works through 3 strategies (conservation and science, policy/advocacy and education) towards these over-arching goals:

1. Works to conserve "at-risk" species of birds (see our WatchList).
2. Works to conserve vulnerable common native birds.
3. Protects and restores essential habitat, especially Important Bird Areas.
4. Improves and protects the health of landscapes that support native birds.

Proposals must fall into one of the following five general categories in order to be considered:

*Birds and Habitat Restoration/Enhancement, and/or IBA project*

This category is designed for proposals that study, protect or enhance significant habitat or protect targeted species of birds. Examples could include monitoring or studying birds in an Important Bird Area or other significant local site, implementing habitat improvements or a restoration project, developing a conservation plan for an IBA or other site, adopting an IBA, or dedication of an IBA. Programs will be designed to pursue species protection or a habitat objective.

*Education Project*

This category is designed for proposals that undertake educational programs on a local level. Activities can range from in-school programs to on-site programs to broader public educational efforts. Chapters are encouraged to partner with other Chapters, park districts, school districts, arboretums, natural history museums, foundations or other stakeholders, with each of the partners sharing in the costs related to the joint project. Projects may be for an ongoing education program or a special single event.

*Advocacy Project*

This category is designed for proposals to organize grassroots action in support of conservation policy positions. Possible projects include pursuit of a state legislative/agency priority; a national priority; or a local project that protects birds, other, wildlife and/or their habitats in your community. Workshops would be eligible for these funds to help train new volunteers to be activists.

*Capacity Building*

This category is designed for proposals that enable a chapter's leadership to learn and build capacity together. Projects should be designed to build the skills necessary to effect change on an issue of shared concern and to strengthen the chapter's ability to fulfill its mission. The project could involve, for example, efforts to recruit and train volunteers for conservation, education or advocacy projects. Proposals must identify the skills to be developed and the outcome(s) that the chapter expects to produce.

*Communications Project*

This category is designed for proposals that expand a chapter's visibility in the community. It could be an expanded publication, special addition of a newsletter with a conservation/education project theme, publicity for public events and activities, media outreach program, development or enhancement of a web site and other communication related activities. Proposals must clearly state how the communication activity(s) will promote conservation. Ongoing communications projects such as funding regular issues of the Chapter newsletter are not eligible.

To apply for funding, contact Jenny Vitale at [jvitale@audubon.org](mailto:jvitale@audubon.org) (or 651-739-9332) for application. Deadline is end of the day December 15, 2007.

## **Amp-Up Your Action in 2008 – Volunteer with Audubon Minnesota!**

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Audubon MN has two advocacy committees that need your help!

The **Environmental Issues Committee** is a core group of Audubon activists. Serving as both a social hour and organizing opportunity, we focus primarily on our state legislative priorities.

Many members select issues to specialize in and work with our contract lobbyist (Gary Botzek) and myself to monitor and advocate on our issues. This year, our focus is on smart investments in forests, prairies and biofuels, permanent and increased funding for our Minnesota's natural resources and protecting our forests from unmanaged motorized recreation. The Environmental Issues Committee, aka "EIC", meets bi-weekly during the legislative session at the Café Amore in St. Paul (near the corner of Milton and Grand) every 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday (5:30 pm) and 4<sup>th</sup> Friday (9:30 am) of the month.

The **Global Warming Task Force** follows the current broad array of state and federal global warming legislation. The task force is closely following the [Minnesota Climate Change Advisory Group](#)'s policy recommendations and the federal cap and trade and energy bills. Audubon is a member of [Clean Energy Minnesota](#) and work within that coalition to build climate change state policies to scale. In addition, Audubon offers a volunteer speakers bureau and organizes outreach and media events around the state. This committee generally meets once a month on Friday mornings.

If you are interested in either committee, please contact me (Susan Solterman) at 651-260-7040 or [ssolterman@audubon.org](mailto:ssolterman@audubon.org) for more information on meeting times and locations.

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Audubon Mission: Working with others to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats,

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