

**MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS
AUDUBON SOCIETY**
A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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We're on the Web!

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Your resource for environmental education and resource protection in Northern Minnesota

The Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society's mission is to foster personal connections to and stewardship of our natural world.

A Note from the MHAS President

Another great year for the Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society has passed! We've got a fresh new board with great ideas and big shoes to fill. So many great people are out there doing good things for environmental advocacy and education in the Bemidji area, we're happy to be a part of it!

You can get involved too! MHAS has a lot of big ideas up our sleeves, but we need your help. We're looking for folks to help organize simple, small events at the Neilson Spearhead Center. Friday night hikes, moonlit canoe rides, candle light snowshoe, or name your activity! Email us at headwatersaudubon@gmail.com, or call Jaime at 225-810-5591.

We're one piece of the greater movement. There are several other movements and organizations: attend a Sustainable Tuesdays event organized by BSU Sustainability Department (<http://greenlivingbemidji.areavoices.com>), provide input on the Greater Bemidji Comprehensive's planning effort (<http://www.jpbgba.org>), help the Headwaters Science Center's persistent efforts in science and environmental education (www.hscbemidji.org), and follow the State of Minnesota's Mississippi Headwaters Watershed project (www.pca.state.mn.us/water, "watersheds" and find your watersheds).

Volunteer your skills and show us where you shine! We have plenty of room for you to spread your conservation wings!



Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society

The Source

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A Vision for the Future of the Neilson Spearhead Center

Can you imagine Neilson Spearhead Center (NSC) serving as a regional destination for schools, families, non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals that seek opportunities to re-establish a nurturing connection with nature? An educational center dedicated to outdoor learning, recreation and environmental education nestled along the undeveloped shoreline of Spearhead Lake and surrounded by old white pines, spruce, and aspen-oak woodland intertwined by an interpretive trail system. In this vision, lies a place-based environmental learning facility open year-long and accessible to organizations and the general public; a facility offering

nature-based outdoor education and opportunity to revive a healthy bond with our natural world.

In the next several issues of the MHAS newsletter, we will illustrate each component of this vision outlined in the NSC Development Master Plan completed in 2008 through the generous financial support provided by the George W. Neilson Foundation.

Support this vision! Member and community support is needed. For more information, please email headwatersaudubon@gmail.com.

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37th Annual Bemidji Christmas Bird Count



The 37th Annual Bemidji Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held on December 20th, was a flying success. Eight teams and fourteen volunteers scanned skies and snow-covered roadsides, woods, pastures, fields, lakes and rivers to help track the status of our local area birds from one year to the next. As these sightings are compiled throughout Minnesota and the rest of the US, they are compared to the information gathered from previous year to create a broad picture of the health of bird populations.

BSI Biology students, faculty, and alumni took part in the CBC.

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37th Annual Bemidji Christmas Bird Count Continued.....

There were no "surprise" bird species seen that were not counted in previous years, but this year's count included the second Wild Turkey recorded during the count day since 1978! Not surprisingly, the Black-capped Chickadee remains the most common bird seen by Bemidji CBC volunteers tallying 403 chickadees for the day. Other bird species recorded include the Black-billed Magpie, Trumpeter Swan, Northern Cardinal, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-bellied and other woodpecker species, and a suite of various sparrows and small finches such as the Hoary Redpoll. CBC volunteers counted a grand total of 36 different species and 1,778 individual birds. A number of local bird feeders also took part, adding birds that occur in lower numbers during the winter such as the Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco, White-throated Sparrow, and the American Goldfinch.

Did you know that more than 8.5 billion birds and 201 species have been counted by CBC volunteers across Minnesota since 1905?

Stay tuned for more results to be posted in a future newsletter once the 2014 count data has been officially posted by the MN Ornithological Union. The Bemidji CBC is just one of over 70 organizations that count statewide in Minnesota. There are 2,300 counts across the U.S. and other countries, all part of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count, a citizen-science program providing critical information essential to monitoring our bird populations.



Common Redpoll (Image by Keith Carver)

Citizen Science: A Way for Everyone to Help!

Citizen science is people making observations and sharing as part of a collective goal. Some examples include watching the weather and recording changes, counting birds at a feeder, noting the depth of snowfall, noting seed germination in a garden, or taking measurements of fish during catch and release. People participating in scientific activities happen every day, but is rarely thought of as science. Often we assume that science only happens in a laboratory, carried out by men and women in white lab coats. Citizen science makes important contributions to many areas of science, including the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, a citizen science activity since 1900 when Dr. Chapman, founder of Bird-Lore the precursor to Audubon Magazine, encouraged the first count as an alternative to a holiday bird "side-hunt."

Bird observations and data collected during the Christmas Bird Count is useful in identifying birds needing conservation and coupled with mapping technology, provides new levels of habitat detail not available in previous decades. For more information about citizen science, visit SciStarter.com or scientificamerican.com/citizen-science.

Last summer we began our open-ended project to record all species of plants and animals that call Spearhead home. Using the project page "Natural History of the Neilson Spearhead Center, MN" that we've set up on www.iNaturalist.org, anyone can list species seen or upload pictures or just describe what they've observed within the 460 acre preserve surrounding Spearhead Lake. You can find us by searching for the Neilson Spearhead Center on the iNaturalist website, download the app onto your smart phone and join our efforts! We can't wait to see your observations!

Snow Bugs: Insects and Spiders in Winter?!

During the long winter, temperatures of 32F and above bring everyone outdoors. But people aren't the only ones who take advantage of these warmer winter days. A close look at the snow and ice on these days may reveal very unlikely winter wildlife. Insects and spiders! There are quite a few species of insects and spiders that are adapted to tolerate the near-freezing temperatures thanks to natural antifreeze in their tissues and blood. 'Snow Fleas' are a more familiar critter that you might find. These tiny jumping insects are in the family Collembola, or Springtails. Despite their misleading common name, they are not related to blood-sucking Fleas and only graze on microscopic goodies on the snow's surface.

Other insects you might find are Snow Flies (a type of wingless Crane Fly), Snow Scorpionflies (A wingless variety of Scorpionfly, a scavenging insect), and Winter Midges, to name a few. Quite a few of the insects have lost their wings because walking saves more energy. Spiders can also be found wandering on the snow and ice. These are mostly young-

sters from the previous Fall. Species may include Wolf Spiders, Orb Weavers, Cobweb Spiders, False Wolf Spiders and many others. Wolf Spiders are the most commonly seen. Less predators, competition and easy travel give these winter critters a head start. Some take the time to mate and do not feed as adults. Others hunt or simply travel to better locations. Once the temperature falls again, they find places to go into a lighter hibernation until it warms up again. So as you head out on these warm days, don't forget to take a closer look to see who else is enjoying the warmth!

By Cassie Novak



False Wolf Spider (Ctenidae) Photo by Cassie Novak

'Herd' of Snow Fleas (Hypogastrura) Photo by Cassie Novak

Snow Sparkles: Winter Wonders at Spearhead

Monday, Dec. 29th was a clear and cold day but an excellent time to explore with eager young naturalists. Thanks to all the children and their parents for showing up for this event and special thanks to Hannah Marty for being a tremendous help! The eight brave winter explorers experienced views of Spearhead's landforms by going where other trekkers had never gone before! All this was revealed to us with our denuded plant life and scarcity of snowfall. We were able to traverse to three different cattail swamps, the porcupine tree, overnight campsite, Wanagitchie trails and up the otter bridge slough to discover trails of weasels, mink, wolf, cattail deformities and even otter scat frozen in the ice!

We discussed the benefits and downfalls of little

snow cover for wildlife, the environment as well as ourselves as we warmed ourselves near the roaring bonfire. After a quick "story", some roasted (burnt) marshmallows we went across the lake skating our "snow snakes". Many kids got theirs to go 60 to 70 feet away! We even had a human snake race and left some strange tracks for visitors. Hot cocoa, cookies, pretzels and assorted other treats kept us going with a few more stories at the bonfire. The wind and cold couldn't dampen our spirits. An eagle flying overhead may have been a treat but the best of all was a comment from one of our young explorers as we warmed our bodies in the sunlight up in the cattails. "Look, I have never seen the sky so blue." It was a fun and successful day!

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