



Minneopa Messenger

Newsletter of the Friends of Minneopa State Park
No. 19, October 2002

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GENERAL MEETING, OCTOBER 24

SENATE CANDIDATES FORUM!

The autumn general meeting of the Friends of Minneopa will be **Thursday, October 24 at 7 p.m.** (on the fourth Thursday this time, an exception to the rule) in the Community Meeting Room of the North Mankato Police Annex Building, 1004 Belgrade Avenue, in North Mankato. With elections just around the corner we have arranged to conduct a candidates forum concerned with state park issues, in general and as applied to Minneopa. It is predictable that the discussion will flow over into larger environmental issues and the budget priority questions that cannot be avoided in any Minnesota political debate this year.

We have invited the four principal candidates from Senate District 23. They are the incumbent **John Hottinger** (DFL, St. Peter) and challengers **Mark Friedman** (Greens, No. Mkto), **Matt Kruse** (Ind., Mkto), and **Julie Storm** (IR, St. Peter). The discussion will be moderated by Friends President-Elect LaVonne Craig.

As always, there will be coffee, tea, and snacks. We hope to see you there!

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PARK MANAGER'S CORNER

Last weekend I attended the retirement party of Charles Mitchell, long-time Region IV Parks Manager. Perhaps some of you may have seen the article on Charles in the Mankato Free Press. With his retirement goes 40 years of

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well, it seems that road work is slowing down and will soon be done -- so it must be about time for Minnesota's second season. I just returned from visiting Minneopa State Park (Oct. 7) and even though it was a bit windy, cool, and cloudy, it was a wonderful place to be. Fall is my favorite season. A Minnesota October in the outdoors is hard to beat. This is a time of change for Mother Nature. Just as we are putting away our shorts and short-sleeved shirts, Mom is following suit. During the past two weeks the trees have gradually been turning from their summer green to shades of yellow, brown, red, and gold. Before long our landscape will be in the full glory of its fall wardrobe.

Another change we notice is that we are not being pestered by the swarms of mosquitoes that we were fighting just a few weeks ago. And the woolly bear caterpillars are searching for protected areas where they can spend the winter. The ones I have seen have a wide brown band (coat), which tells us that we should be prepared for a cold winter.

If we are lucky, we might still get a glimpse of a Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel or an Eastern Chipmunk, both of which have been putting on fat (maybe I could use this for an excuse) and storing some larder in their burrows in preparation for some six months of hibernation.

We are seeing a change in our bird populations. Our summer species have left us already, or are

preparing to do so. The last time I saw a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at my feeder was
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remembered and missed by all Park Managers who had the privilege to work under his guidance. His replacement is Steven Kirch who had been Region V Parks Manager prior to realignment into the new Southern Region. Steve has a huge job ahead of him trying to get to know the issues in 13 new parks and manage an area that stretches from the South Dakota border to Wisconsin. If you have an opportunity to introduce yourself to Mr. Kirch I'm sure he would be very happy to hear from you and listen to your ideas about Minneopa.

As you know, 24 state parks were closed to camping after Labor Day this year to partially address budget shortfalls. Minneopa was spared this unfortunate action based on the numbers of campers using our facility during the month of September. Beginning October 1 we will be draining our water systems and converting to rustic camping with an associated reduction of park staff. Meanwhile Division of Parks staff as well as DNR Managers in all disciplines are preparing fiscal year 04 budget scenarios based on a 12-½ % reduction over current levels. Bear in mind that many things can change between now and July 1. Unless additional funding can be found, however, we should be prepared for additional reductions in public service.

The 2003 annual state park vehicle will go on sale October 1 of this year. The price remains the same at \$20.00. This year's featured park is Lake Louise. The permit depicts a scene of two bicycle riders traveling down a wooded path, an appropriate scene for Lake Louise, which now has a new 9-mile long multi-use trail connecting it with the town of Le Roy. Check it out as an excuse to enjoy our beautiful fall weather.

Minneopa State Park Manager Howard Ward

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September 29, so I would guess that they have left. Today while at Minneopa I noticed that we still have flocks of American Robins and I counted 20 Eastern Bluebirds in flocks of four to six individuals. There were lots of sparrows flitting from the path to conceal themselves in the tall grasses.

Then there were large flocks of Dark-eyed Juncos flitting around in the underbrush. This is our true snowbird. When we first see the juncos here we can expect snow in the near future. In reverse, when we see the junco flocks leaving in the spring we know that our snow season is nearly done.

Another bird that caught my attention was the Blue Jay. They are beginning to form small flocks and were flying around yelling, "Do it! Do it!" I think that they were telling us to put on our walking shoes, drive to Minneopa and "Do it!" -- enjoy the beauty and brightness of fall before Mother Nature puts on her wardrobe of the beautiful white purity of winter.

If you don't have a park sticker, buy one. It's only costs \$20 and it's good for a year. If you put this on a daily basis, it is only 0.0547945+ cents a day and even less for leap year. Where could you get a better deal than this. ENJOY!

President Merrill Frydendall

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BLUEBIRD TRAIL -- 2002 RESULTS IN

The 50 bluebird houses placed across the Minneopa prairie were well used this year. The best news was that 80 new Eastern Bluebirds fledged and added their color to the prairie. The Tree Swallows who "borrow" bluebird houses did almost as well, producing 76 new little swallows, and the House Wrens reared 73 baby wrens. The fourth user on the Bluebird Trail, the Black-capped Chickadees, fledged 18 new birds. Merrill Frydendall, who maintains and studies the trail, says that 2002 was certainly a good

year, though not the best. If the bluebird is indeed the bird of happiness, as they say, Minneopa was a happy place this summer.

West Nile Virus

Probably all of you have heard or read about West Nile Virus (WNV), a viral disease transmitted to people, birds, and horses through the bite of an infected mosquito. WNV, usually found in Africa and southern Europe, was first reported in North America during a 1999 outbreak of encephalitis in New York City. Since 1999 the virus has moved rapidly through all of the lower 48 states (California, the last state, confirmed its first case of WNV in mid-September) eastern Ontario, and the Cayman Islands.

This spring (before mosquito season) it had not yet been detected in Minnesota (closest reports had been in south-central Wisconsin and east-central Iowa) and there was an alert for people to be on the lookout for dead birds, especially Blue Jays and Crows, and report them to the MN Department of Health for testing. Infected birds were found in the Twin Cities area in early summer, and now only four counties (Hubbard, Itasca, Lake, and Cook) have not recorded any cases in humans, horses, or birds. Our closest case of WNV in humans was an individual from Watonwan County (still in the hospital). There have been 286 cases in 19 different species of birds and 19 human cases, none fatal, in 17 Minnesota counties. The virus appears to be most severe in birds, wild and caged. In many avian species it is 100 percent fatal, but possibly does not affect other species. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, bird populations through the United States are being ravaged by the heavy outbreak of WNV this summer. Since the virus first turned up in New York City in 1999, it has been known to kill birds from 111 species. The virus has already killed Whooping Cranes (endangered), Bald Eagles, Great Horned Owls, and Red-tailed Hawks, to name a few. At present there is great concern in California for its possible effect on the captive and recently-released endangered California Condors. In Florida bird experts are worried about the endangered Florida Scrub Jay.

Since the virus affects humans, we are concerned about what response we should

make: should we venture out of doors or stay locked up in our house? This choice is for each to make; however, I will continue to go outdoors and try to guard against the risk of encountering WNV-carrying mosquitoes. Use normal protection such as mosquito repellents, avoid being outside at peak feeding times for mosquitoes (dawn and dusk), and wear long-sleeved shirts and pants. Probably after October the cold temperatures will take care of the problem for this year, but it will return next spring.

Most people infected with WNV will either have no symptoms or a very mild illness. A small percentage of people, especially elderly, may develop encephalitis. Approximately 13 percent of these cases are fatal. Most of the severe cases of WNV encephalitis begin with sudden onset of fever, headache, stiff neck, and vomiting. This quickly progresses into confusion and other mental changes. In humans there is no treatment for WNV encephalitis other than supportive care. However, there is a vaccine for horses and recent tests have shown that the vaccine is "94 percent efficacious" in horses. Several species of birds in captivity have been given this vaccine and it appears safe for them. However, there is no proof that it will protect them as it does horses. Possibly in the new few years a vaccine that is safe and effective for humans will be developed.

Merrill Frydendall, Ph.D.

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TRUMPETER SWANS SHOT

The 2002 duck and goose hunting season in Minnesota began on Saturday, September 28, and very soon after the sad news came in that two trumpeter swans had been killed by shotgun pellets, one near Elysian and the other by Sleepy Eye. Lisa Gelvin-Innvaer, DNR non-game wildlife specialist in New Ulm, and others made valiant efforts to save one, but to no avail.

The Trumpeter Swan is a threatened species in Minnesota, and Lisa indicates that they are especially uncommon in Southern Minnesota.

It is against the law to harm any non-game bird, and despicable to shoot a swan. Anyone with information about these crimes should contact the DNR in New Ulm, 507-359-6000.

TALES OF MINNEOPA -- HISTORY

As Gordon Herbst has gone about collecting information about the history of Minneopa in preparation for the park's centennial in 2005, he has talked to many people about many different aspects of the story. One of the stranger things he was told was that there were graves in the park, or at least stone grave markers. They couldn't tell him exactly where they were, so Gordon went looking.

And indeed, he found two old stones in one place and one in another. All were fairly close to the Minneopa Cemetery, but within the State Park boundaries. It was a weird feeling to see them, and it raised difficult questions.

Gordon says there is no practical way, after the passage of so much time, to determine whether bodies lay buried beneath the stones. He assumes that there are no human remains beneath them. The writing on the stones is legible, so the ages of the stones could be determined. They were about 130, 110, and 60 years old. It was also possible to check the cemetery records for the names on the stones. All three names were in the records, as persons buried in the Minneopa Cemetery.

Checking the actual cemetery, Gordon found that two of the names were also on graves in the present cemetery. The third name (in fact, a

relative of Gordon's) is not found on any current stone, but there is a family plot for the last name with one space unmarked.

So Gordon's tentative conclusion is that two of the stones were replaced with newer ones and the old ones were simply discarded in the woods, while the third, belonging to his relative, probably came from the "unused" space in the family plot; i.e. it was used. But how the headstone got to a place a quarter-mile away is, and likely will remain, a mystery.

RANDOM NOTES

-- Don't forget the 2002 **Minneopa Photo Contest**. Closing date is November 31, for recent photos taken in the park. Contact any officer for entry details.

-- Do you have a **new postal address**, even though you haven't moved? I do, and I am sure many of our subscribers have the new 5digit street numbers, no matter how far out in the country they live. Let us know, please, so the Messenger will be delivered correctly.

The Minneopa Messenger is edited by Brand Frentz, who is responsible for any unattributed material. If you have comments or questions or want to submit material, call Brand at 947-3268.