

The Rectrix

A seasonal newsletter of the Missouri River Bird Observatory Volume 9 No. 1. February 2019



rectrix [rek-triks] noun. (pl. -trices) any of the larger feathers in a bird's tail, used for steering in flight.



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On the Cover & Right:
Flying at the Dawn by
Jun Zuo. Taken at Loess
Bluffs NWR. Grand Prize
winner of the “Hope is the
Thing with Feathers” 2018
photography contest!

On the Back & Right
Play Time by Hang Chen.
Taken at Longview Lake.
1st place winner.

Hope is the Thing With Feathers Photography Issue!

Dear MRBO Supporters and Friends,

Welcome to our most beautiful newsletter of the year – the photo contest issue! Since we began our *Hope* photo contests in 2016, we have always devoted the first issue of the year to publishing all the photos we receive. This year, we had 136 entries from 42 photographers. We were happy that the number of photographers was exactly split between 21 new contest entrants and 21 that had submitted photos in previous years.

The 2018 *Hope is the Thing With Feathers* contest raised almost \$3,000 for MRBO’s education program. This is a significant 10% of the entire program budget for the year! As important as the funds raised, the awesome photos from the contest can be used in MRBO presentations, reports, social media and events – so thousands of people will see the beauty and diversity of Missouri’s bird life through these pictures.

We are extremely grateful to all of the photographers who entered photos and to our local Wood and Huston Bank, which provided all of the funds for the contest prizes.

Enjoy!

Dana, Ethan and Paige
MRBO Directors and Education Coordinator



*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all*

*And sweetest in the gale is heard
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm*

*I’ve heard it in the chilliest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me
-Emily Dickinson*





2nd Place: Short-eared Owl by Bill Blackledge (also on back cover). Clinton County near Smithville Lake.

The Short-eared Owl is a Species of Conservation Concern in Missouri as a result of declining numbers. These beautiful owls require large, undivided tracts of open grassland which are disappearing across North America. This loss of habitat in Missouri has resulted in this species, which once nested in the State, to now be considered an uncommon winter resident and migrant.

3rd Place: Mama Wood Duck and Babies by Amy Watts. Shoal Creek Water Treatment Plant, Joplin.

These are, in my opinion, the most beautiful waterfowl. They depend on tree cavities and nesting boxes to raise their broods. Leave old snags in place unless they are likely to damage property. If providing nesting boxes, make sure they are in place well in advance of nesting season. We want to keep these beauties thriving!

Youth Winner: Red-bellied Woodpecker by Amy Watts (age 14). Backyard in Joplin.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers are of low concern. They are common to home feeders and are a great way for young birders to observe bird behaviors.

Director's Choice: Barred Owl by Clay Guthrie. Big Oak Tree State Park.

I went one late evening to Big Oak Tree State Park in search of owls and found this fellow snoozing on a perch that worked awesome for a photo. I parked and watched him for about 45 minutes as he began hunting in a ditch below this perch. It was a cool experience to watch, even though I couldn't get any action shots due to limbs and low light. I'm blessed to live within six miles of an awesome wetlands area and within 12 miles of this great woodland. In a time where habitats seem to shrink daily, our state parks provide great opportunities for wildlife to take up residence.



Below: *American Avocet* by Amy Watts.
Shoal Creek Water Treatment Plant, Joplin.



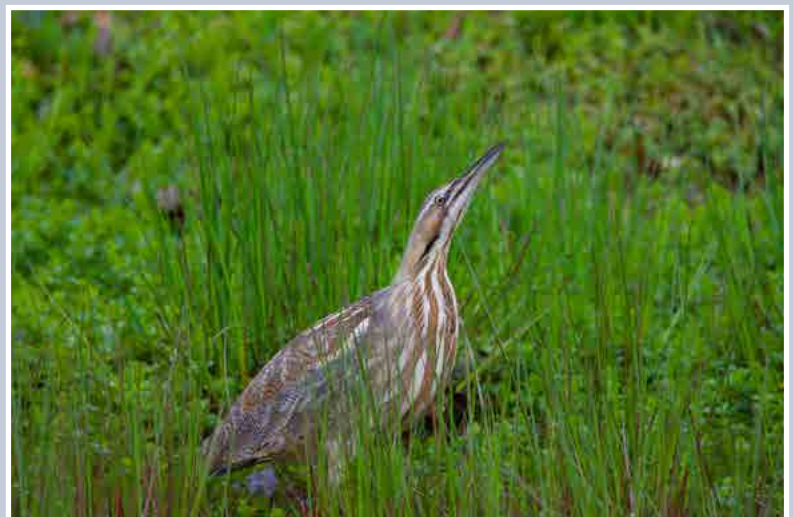
Above: A "Couple" of *Wood Ducks* by Buddy Woods.
Katy Trail at Weldon Spring.

Left: *American Avocets* in Central Missouri
by Paul Winn. Binder Lake.



Below Left: *American Bittern* by Andrew Reago
and Christina McClaren. Clarence Cannon
NWR.

Below Right: *American Bittern* by Amy Watts.
River Road roadside ditch, Joplin.
*These gorgeously patterned herons depend on
freshwater marshy areas to survive. They are
dependent upon us to preserve managed wetlands,
conservation areas and national wildlife refuges
to name a few. It is important for us to do our
part in keeping litter, pollutants and invasive plant
species out of their habitats. Plant native and
volunteer at your local conservation department.
It is always welcome.*



Right: *American Goldfinch Brightens a Raining Day* by Shirley Piggott. Springfield.



Below left: *American Kestrel (Male)* by Bill Blackledge. Clinton County near Smithville Lake.
The American Kestrel is the smallest and most common falcon found in North America. It is also one of the most strikingly beautiful birds of prey. This species has been on the decline throughout much of its range, including here in Missouri. As a result, the National Audubon Society has placed the American Kestrel on its Blue List, meaning the species is undergoing population or range reductions.



Above right: *American White Pelicans* by Buddy Woods. Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Below right: *Bald Eagle With a Fish* by Buddy Woods. Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Below left: *Bald Eagle* by Jun Zuo. Loess Bluffs NWR.





Above left: *Barred Owl* by Barbara Marshall. Chesterfield. Above right: *Barred Owl As The Snow Begins* by Jerlyn Jones. Jasper County.



Left: *Barred Owl With Fall Leaves* by Kristine Colburn. Platte County.

Above, Lower Right and Lower Left: *Birds of Winter* by Cathy Schafer. Backyard in Jefferson City.





Above left: *Black-necked Stilt* by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren. Confluence Point State Park.

Above right: *Bluebirds in a Mulberry Tree* by Marvin DeJong. Rural property in Christian County.

For successfully arriving at maturity, food sources for fledgling Bluebirds are very important. The adult Bluebirds use the mulberry tree as a food source for baby Bluebirds and for fledglings. In an era of declining songbird populations, it is important to provide abundant natural food sources for these birds. This little family is waiting for a parent to show them what to do.



Left: *Bonding Time* by Jacob Walter, age 13.

Simpson Lake by kayak.

The Bald Eagle picture was important to me because these are some of the only wild Bald Eagles I have ever seen. This is a really sad reality to me. People might not have or will not ever see these amazing birds as I got to see them. People won't see how these animals communicated and interacted with each other. It was good for me to see something like that in a wild setting. If others got to see these birds in their natural environment, then maybe people would be more appreciative of them.



Above: *Broad-winged Hawk* by Linda Williams. Watkins Mill State Park.

Left: *Bright-eyed Beauty* by Jerlyn Jones. Carthage.



Left: Buzz Feed by Carol Weston.

Forum Nature Area.

The Ruby throated Hummingbird is not a bird of concern yet its numbers are dropping as are other species. Its habitat is being destroyed both in the USA and in central America where it winters over. Climate change and habitat destruction both play a role in its reduced numbers. Here in Columbia, I took this photo at Forum Nature area just a couple weeks before the Columbia Parks and Rec dept, went in and literally mowed down 75-80% of ALL the native plants that were blooming, including all the Milkweed, at the end of August and first of September. So all the blooming natives the Hummingbirds, the Monarchs and other pollinators had depended on for food sources were suddenly gone. the Columbia Parks and Rec dept. does this every year at prime migration time. This is just one small area but an example of habitat destruction during prime migration time.



Above left: Canada Goose Ready For Takeoff. Binder Lake.

Upper right: Canada Goose Calling Others. Binder Lake.

Lower Right: Cardinal In Dogwood. Backyard in Centertown.
by Marilyn Belcher

Conservation is defined as the prevention of wasteful use of a resource. Birds of all species have been used by mankind since the beginning of time for a variety of reasons. For example, they have been used to protect miners from death due to lethal gas in mine shafts. Also, in the old West, when they suddenly flew up from the ground, they were an indicator of someone (possibly not a "good" person) coming. Birds' songs calm and cheer people. Each bird having its own song sound. I have never seen a depressed bird. Whether they are Canada geese, beautiful red cardinals, or multi-colored finches, they accept who they are and who the other bird is. They do not delineate over color or size of other birds nor do they feel less worthy when molting. They may argue over who gets the perch on the bird feeder, but they do not hold a grudge if they lose their spot. It would be nice if people could learn this. Even the "plainest" of birds such as a wren, has beauty in the shading of its coloring. If I could be any creature made by God, it would be the bird who is able to soar above the ground (what a view!) and float on the updrafts of the wind. We should enjoy, learn from, and protect these amazing creatures made by God in his infinite wisdom.



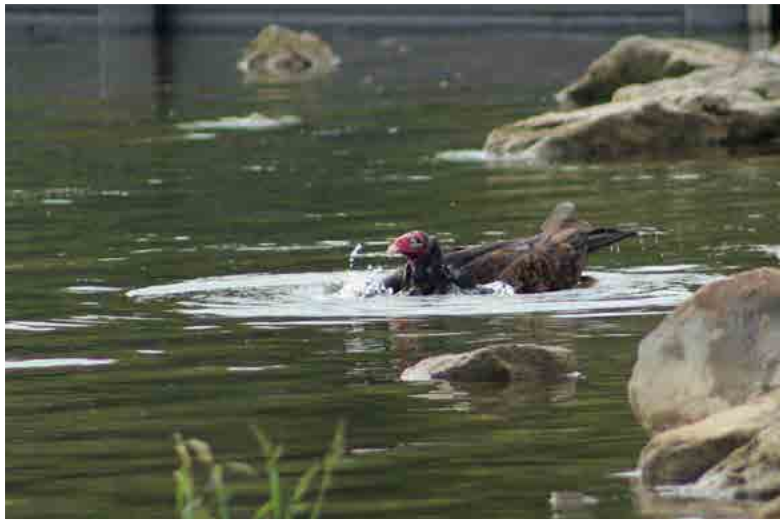


Left: *Cardinal Refuge* by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

During Missouri winters, it's beneficial to leave enough ground cover and bushes within which birds can harbor. I like to suppose that Northern Cardinals intentionally seek red berries, which in turn brightens their hue. Indeed, research indicates brighter males have higher reproductive success and territories with greater vegetation density, so we hope we're contributing to that support.

Right: *Chillin' Amongst the Calming Purple Berries* by Janet Duckett. A doctor's office, Cape Girardeau.

Plants are an integral part of the eco system for birds. The birds forage for food and berries from plants. Birds eat these things and then discreate them and during this process spread more plant life. They also use the plants as a hiding place from predators. My photograph depicts a bird just chillin' amongst the calming purple berries (look like flowers).



Above left: *Cleansing* by Dianne Van Dien. Fleming Park.

*The turkey vulture is often thought of as a creepy bird with gross and dirty habits. It might seem ironic then, that its scientific name, *Cathartes aura*, means "purifying breeze." It was so-named for the fact that it not only removes dead things from the world but also diseases that may lurk in the rotting meat. Rabies, anthrax, and botulism, which might sicken mammalian scavengers, all die in the vulture's super-acidic stomach. By eating things no one else can, vultures help clean our environment. They keep themselves clean too, spending hours each day preening to care for their feathers—and they take baths. Vultures have excellent hygiene: they cleanse the earth, and themselves. Just one of the many reasons we are lucky to have them around.*

Left: *Contemplating the Flight South* by Lauralyn Fry. Backyard in Boonville.





Above, left to right: *Crane Family* and *Cranes At Sunset* by Howard Arndt. Loess Bluffs NWR.



Left: *Delft Winter* by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

In animal symbolism, Blue Jays resonate truth, faithfulness and solidarity because they are vigilant in their tasks. We admire how Blue Jays don't seem to allow harsher Missouri weather days to stop them from surveying our neighborhood.

Below: *Downy Woodpecker* by Julia Anielak. Backyard in Sedalia.



Left: *Doves* by Dianne Van Dien. Fleming Park.

For years after becoming a birdwatcher I never paid much attention to doves. Sure, they are a symbol of peace and hope, but to me they just seemed drab and docile. But fast forward several years to a new home where doves regularly gathered under the feeder and spent hours sunning on the patio. As I observed them up close, a new attitude emerged. Doves not only have interesting behaviors—but my gosh! They are beautiful! If only we'd take the time to pay attention, we'd all see the beauty and value that all of nature has and keeps in plain sight.



Above Left: Eagle Landing by Scott Villmer. Neier.



Above Right: Eagle Sunset by Howard Arndt. Loess Bluffs NWR.

Right: Eagles by Donna Perry. DC Rogers Lake.

This photo of a pair of bald eagles was taken on December 12th, 2018. The DC Rogers Lake has become a part of my every day life. A friend and I take our dogs there every morning to let them run as we drive through the park. We had the privilege this year of watching this pair of eagles successfully raise two youngsters.

The park is run by the Department of Conservation and the City of Fayette and is a beautiful nature area teeming with wildlife. We see bald eagles, herons, pelicans, turkeys, all sorts of geese and ducks, vultures, crows, blackbirds, cardinals, meadowlarks, bluebirds, killdeer, cedar wax wings, and many other birds. We also see deer, fox, groundhogs, rabbits and squirrels.



Above: Eastern Towhee by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren. Tower Grove Park.



Above right: Elsa the Snow Queen by Mark Ramsey. Chariton County, west of Keytesville.

I took this photo Jan 21, 2018. This owl stayed with in about a mile of where I first spotted it for almost a month, which just happened to be on the way to and from work. I started calling it Elsa; this was a special day because it was my wife's birthday and we got to see her on that day. Here is what MDC had to say about it: Missouri birders are getting a winter treat. Snowy owls are being spotted in the state and throughout the Midwest. But the visit from this owl species from the Arctic is not good news for the birds, as likely a food shortage in their natural habitat has pushed them farther south than usual, experts say.



Above Left: *Empty Handed* by Hang Chen.
Longview Lake.

Above Right: *Enjoying a Sunny Afternoon at the Lake* by Tom Tucker. Lake Jacomo, Fleming Park.

Left: *Finch on a Limb* by Marilyn Belcher.
Backyard in Centertown.

Below Left: *Favorite Bird* by Paul Moffett.
Columbia Bottoms CA.

Below Right: *First Day Spring Marches in For Titmouse* by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.





Top left: *Glistening Shoveler* by Amy Petersen.

Top right: *Frozen in Time* by Paul Moffett.

Right: *Golden Sunshine* by Nikki Madole, age 16. Clinton.

Every summer my family plants a garden with sunflowers, and it is always a joy to see these Finches come and feast on the many different types of sunflowers. Any seeds we do not use to plant for next year's crops goes into food for them in the winter.



Lower right: *Good Morning Sunshine* by Carol Weston. Near Columbia.

Meadowlark populations are still declining rapidly and in some states they are listed as a bird of concern because of that decline. The Meadowlark, both Western and Eastern have seen habitat destruction as primary cause of their decline. Also heavy use of farmland as well has heavy grazing of cattle which disrupts the nesting process. In some cases, the grasslands have been allowed to return to wooded areas which does not provide needed habitat. Also use of pesticides kill the food sources that the Meadowlarks depend on. They are, in effect, a Canary on the Grasslands as to the health of a prairie or grasslands area.





Top Left: *Gotta Rest Just a Few More Minutes* by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

Top Right: *Great Blue Heron* by Clay Guthrie. Ten Mile Pond CA.



Left: *Grasshopper Sparrow* by Linda Williams. Paint Brush Prairie CA.

This photo of a singing Grasshopper Sparrow male was taken at Paint Brush Prairie in May just before sunset when many individuals were present, some presumably to stay and nest and others to continue migration.

I have chosen both Grasshopper Sparrow and Henslow's Sparrow (page 16) since these prairie-obligate birds are target species of MRBO's Grassland Bird Monitoring Project. My hope is that your extensive work in monitoring these and other target grassland species will provide invaluable information that will help form future successful and thoughtful conservation policies for Missouri and other states struggling with the rapid disappearance and fragmentation of native grasslands and prairies. I am optimistic that the project will help equip public land managers and private landowners with the scientific data needed to make informed choices on management techniques.

Below Left: *Great Egret Taking Flight* by Chelsea Mostellar, age 14. Eagle Bluffs CA.

Below Right: *Hawk in Tree* by Jerlyn Jones. Stella.





Great Blue Heron Catching and Eating Turtle Series. Shoal Creek, Newton County.

The Great Blue Heron catching and eating the turtle was a amazing sight! I spotted it as I was hiking along Shoal Creek. It was an spectacular sight to see!

Hawk and Snake Huddle Series. Carthage.

The Hawk Snake Huddle was the beginning of quite a standoff between these two. It was a learning experience for us. The Hawk and Snake Standoff was very interesting to witness. The hawk "danced" around the snake as it preyed on it.

by Jerlyn Jones



Right: Great Horned Owl - Do Not Disturb by Amy Petersen. Highway 152 and Shoal Creek.

Just off of Hwy 152 & Shoal Creek is an apartment complex on a creek. In the back of the complex (not accessible) was a Great Horned Owl Nest you could see from the road. I stood on the edge of the grass and captured what I can only interpret is this owl stating with his eyes, "Please leave me alone," and so I did. I didn't go back after finding out the babies were born because it would only bring more disturbance to the owl family. Others would find the nest but stay their distance as this was a sacred time between parent and fledgling that should be left in peace. I am grateful to have seen this magnificent owl in it's elements.





Top Left: Great Horned Owl With Prey by Jim Gorski.
Walter Farm, Clay County.

Top Right : Humble Little Blue by Paul Moffett. Riverlands
Migratory Bird Sanctuary.

The little blue heron is a welcome visitor to the marshes and estuaries of Missouri. It is often found fishing with its friend the snowy egret. Their lack of aigrette plums helped them survive the plum hunting frenzy of the millenary days. The little blue heron is the only large heron where the young are white and the adults blue. Beautifully blue colored, which changes depending on the light.

Left: Henslow's Sparrow by Linda Williams.
Paint Brush Prairie CA.



**Right: Henslow's Sparrow on Prairie
Blazing Star** by Emily Sinnott.
Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie CA.

Millions of acres of prairie across North America's Central Great Plains have been converted to cropland and cool season pastures. Grassland specialists are especially sensitive to loss of prairie habitat. Henslow's Sparrow call Missouri's tallgrass prairies home during the summer breeding season. Males sing a short, simple song "tsi-lick" through summer and pairs build nests near the ground in thick grasses. Over the past 50 years, Henslow's Sparrows have experienced a 54% population decline. Remnant prairies, like Wah'Kon-Tah, provide important summer habitat for these small, secretive songbirds.





Above left: Heron by Donna Perry. DC Rogers Lake.

Above right: Hooded Warbler by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren. Willmore Park.



Left: House Finch by Amy Watts. Backyard in Joplin.

These feathered friends can be found at almost any backyard feeder. Keep your feeders clean and full of black oil sunflower seeds to keep these finches around. Set a cleaning schedule for your feeders and birdbaths. Wet seed can mold easily. We definitely don't want to spread disease to our beautiful feathered friends.

Below Right: Hungry Jay by Buddy Woods.

Backyard in St. Charles.

Wildlife conservation and management of birds is very important and relevant. Without it there could be generations after me not be able to experience the pleasure of shooting a lot of different kinds of birds (with a Canon not a gun). The relevance of wildlife conservation and management are very high in my book. It would be awful to lose more wildlife to extinction because we don't manage and preserve what we have.

Below Left: Hummingbird by Donna Perry. Backyard in Fayette. *This hummingbird photo was taken in my yard on September 9th. I try to keep my feeder filled for these tiny creatures as they make their long journey south. The last straggler this year showed up on October 14th!*





Top Left: *Immature Bluebird* by Marvin DeJong.
Rural property in Christian County.

Top Right: *In Hiding* by Barbara Marshall. Chesterfield.

Above: *It's So Cold I Turned Blue* by Tom Tucker.
Backyard in Kansas City.

Above: *Keeping Watch Over the Gaggle* by Nikki Madole, age 16. Windsor.

This goose was keeping watch over the whole gaggle. This goose was like a shepherd over a flock of sheep. Watching these geese and the way they protect their goslings and fellow geese resembles a big loving family.

Left: *Kentucky Warbler* by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren. Tower Grove.

All birds and all things wild are under threat, whether declared so, or not. Wild places for bird species to thrive is being increasingly encroached upon by development, pollution, human overpopulation and more. If the human species does not curb its appetite, there will soon be nothing left for the birds. They will exist no more. However, if we recommit ourselves to a passionate love affair with the wild, we may have a chance to declare in our local communities, through things like the community rights movement, that birds, water, land, trees, other species and more have rights, not just humans - and do what we can to give them back their rights, as the clock ticks. Wishing for a miracle never hurts, either. In the meantime, let yourself be enchanted - and enchant right back. May the birds leap from our photos into your heart, awakened by a beauty that is not superficial, but explodes from deep within the cosmos.



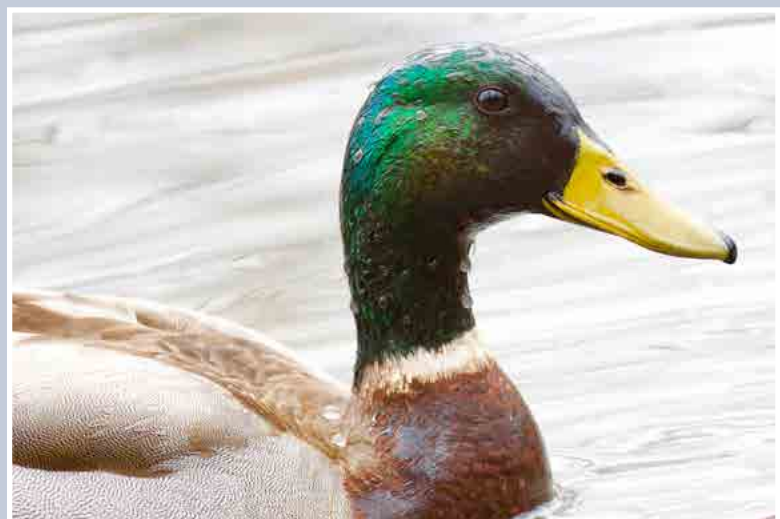


Top Left: Le Conte's Sparrow in the Autumn Prairie by Emily Sinnott. Prairie State Park.
Millions of acres of prairie across North America's Central Great Plains have been converted to cropland and cool season pastures. Grassland specialists are especially sensitive to loss of prairie habitat. Le Conte's Sparrow is a grassland obligate, breeding in the northern Great Plains of Canada, and then migrating south to winter in Missouri and the southern plains. Over the past 50 years, Le Conte's Sparrow has experienced a 73% population decline. Remnant prairies, like Missouri's Prairie State Park in Barton County, provide important habitat. On a crisp winter stroll, keep a sharp eye low in the grasses for this petite, yellow songbird.

Top Right: Loggerhead Shrike by Bill Blackledge. Clinton County near Smithville Lake.
Also known as the "butcher bird", Loggerhead Shrike populations have been decreasing in North America since the 1960's. The reduction of this species in recent years has been most significant throughout portions of the mid-west, including Missouri. The reasons for this decline are not clear but are likely the result of habitat loss, pesticide contamination, climate change and human disturbance. As a result, the Loggerhead Shrike is listed as a Species of Conservation Concern in Missouri.

Bottom Left: Mississippi Kite by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren. Clarence Cannon NWR.

Bottom Right: Mallard Drake by Emma Watts, age 14. Springfield Lake.





Top left to Moon Over Heron by Tom Tucker. Smithville Lake.
Top right: Morning Dove Morning Bath by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

Right: Move On by Carol Weston.

City of Columbia wetlands area near Eagle Bluffs CA. During the Spring and early Summer 2018, I monitored 5 Eagle nests for MDC and this young juvenile was the last of 11 juveniles in total, to leave their nests and nest trees. I had gone to check to see if it had left the tree yet since its sibling had left several weeks prior. I saw the juvenile at a distance directly across from its tree then it flew closer and then past me and then I watched it through my telephoto lens and noticed a Red-Winged blackbird starting to fly at it. Then the Bird just kept flying into the young Eagle. The Eagle did not seem to even notice, however, the Blackbird was beginning to show the wear. It was obvious as I stood there watching, from a distance, the Blackbird was trying to protect its nest from this giant intruder. Eventually the Eagle flew back to where it had been originally and blackbird flew after it.



I always look at the Bald Eagle as the quintessential success story of conservation and preservation in the USA. From the brink of near destruction in the lower 48 to a place of monumental nesting success today, it shows what is possible. This Juvenile Bald Eagle is a representation of that success story here in MO. I watched 11 Eaglets fledge but of those 11 the facts are only a few will make it to adulthood. We are seeing many threats still, including the delisting of the Bald Eagle to the relaxation of several EPA standards under the current Administration which may have short-term and long-term effects on the environment, habitat destruction, and of course, climate change. So while we have a success story, we cannot in any way, let our guard down and coast on the past. This one juvenile was being bombarded by one small bird but the challenges ahead, it faces, will be greater.

Below left: Nectar Straw by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

While hummingbirds can extend their long, skinny tongues twice as far as the bill, we don't always get to see that. Hummingbirds are important for the entire ecological system because approximately 75 percent of the world's flowers rely on insects, bats and birds for pollination. We enjoy supplying them with homemade nectar each season.





Top left: *New Construction* by Tom Tucker. Backyard in Kansas City. A backyard filled with native plants and trees is important in providing habitat and food for summering birds. Thrashers have now returned for three years in a row to our suburban yard. We love their mating songs, and this year we tried to teach this fellow to whistle the opening bars of *La Marseillaise*. Even though we provided lots of broken twigs for nesting, he refused to learn the new song but successfully stuck to his tried and true medley.

Middle Left: *New Life in an Old Stump* by Tom Tucker. Smithville Lake.

These baby Eastern Kingbirds demonstrate the importance of Corps of Engineer Lakes in providing habitat for the many bird species that summer in Missouri. At Smithville they left hundreds of old trees and stumps that protect the nesting birds from motorized boats, but allow us very quiet non motorized boaters to float up to check out the babies (from a moderate distance with a long lens). I was fortunate to be able to follow these chicks in this image until they fledged a couple of weeks later.



Bottom Left: *Northern Flicker With a Chick* by Buddy Woods . Katy Trail in Weldon Spring.

Bottom Right: *Northern Flicker Seconds* by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

Bottom Right: *Northern Shrike With Captured Prey* by Jim Gorski. Walter Farm, Clay County.





Above Left: Orchard Oriole by Amy Watts. Backyard in Joplin.

These Orioles love shrubby areas full of insects and spiders. Keep native shrubs around to attract not only Orioles but all kinds of backyard birds. While they are in our area during the Summer they will also visit nectar feeders and orange halves or slices. Make sure to keep these items fresh to keep them coming back.

Above Right: Perfect Orchard Oriole by Paul Moffett. Columbia Bottoms CA.

The orchard oriole wears a suit of black and burnished russet instead of the flame orange of its cousin the Baltimore Oriole. The immature orchard oriole males wear a greenish-yellow suit with a handsome black bib. They are fond of insects and build hanging pouch like nest. They migrate a bit late in the spring and leave early in the fall. They are appreciated for their beauty and wonderful song.



Above Left: Optical Illusion by Paul Moffett. Audubon Riverlands. **Above Right: Prairie Warbler at Ha Ha Tonka** by Paul Winn.

Below Left: Pileated Woodpecker With Two Chicks by Buddy Woods. Katy Trail in Weldon Spring.

Bottom Right: Pelicans Fishing by Howard Arndt. Loess Bluffs NWR.



Right: Prothonotary Warbler
by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren.
Eagle Bluffs CA.

Below: Red-shouldered Hawk in Flight by Jim Gorski.
Walter Farm, Clay County.



Above: Quail by Mark Ramsey. Chariton County.

We were driving up our road to the house and we had some quail in the road in front of us so I stopped and let them pass. As they got to the edge of road they could fly and they flew up in a tree; I wasn't able to get the adult and any babies in the same shot but got some nice pictures of dad. We usually have one covey on our place, the numbers are so low I don't even hunt them any more. We try to provide habitat for them and try to manage the predators on our place that make it hard for the ground nesting birds to raise young.

Above Left: Reflection of a Fisherman by Paul Moffett.
Audubon Riverlands.

Left: Red-Eyed Vireo by Marvin DeJong.

Rural property in Christian County.

This bird, along with a dozen other species, is a frequent visitor to our Mulberry trees. Apparently the ripening mulberries attract insects to the tree and the insectivorous birds frequent the tree in search of bugs. He has not been seen eating a mulberry. Songbird populations are declining and rural residents do songbirds a great favor by planting shrubs and trees that provide food and shelter for them.





Top Left: Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Buddy Woods. Backyard in St. Charles.

Top Right: Run Fast by Kathy Yuan. Forest Park.



Left: Rusty Blackbirds by Conor Gearin.

St. Louis County.

The Rusty Blackbird doesn't have a name that motivates the kind of photographers that chase birds of paradise. As a blackbird, it's at a disadvantage compared to warblers in bright primary colors. But I knew that Rusty Blackbirds are undergoing one of the worst population declines of any North American bird, so I was thrilled when I saw these birds in my front yard during fall migration. What's more, they're beautiful birds on closer inspection. These two individuals, a male and a female, appear in their "rusty" fall plumage. Molting after the summer breeding season in Canada, the new feather tips come in a reddish-brown. As the birds pass through Missouri in the fall, the unique rusty-edged look remains. The feather-tip pigments rub off in time for the next breeding season, leaving the birds with a glossy black finish more like other blackbird species.

The species seeks out wet woodlands and bottom-land forests. The birds flip wet leaves and search for arthropods scuttling beneath. Losing large tracts of bottom-land forest, especially in the Southeast, could be an important factor in the Rusty Blackbird decline. I felt proud that these two birds found what they were looking for right in our front yard. Watching the Rusties flip our damp fallen leaves, I realized that raking and mowing autumn leaves right away could deny migrating birds the chance to forage for their food during their long journey south. Through small urban habitat improvements like spacing out fall leaf removal, maybe we can play a small part helping this and other declining species recover over time.



Above: Safely on the Nest by Carol Weston. Texas County.

This Woodcock was on our family farm in southern Missouri. The Woodcock is a bird of concern with its numbers on the decline primarily because of habitat destruction, drainage of wetlands and decline in food supplies, primarily due to pesticide use. This Woodcock was one of a few that nested on our family farm in the valley close to a small stream that flows through the farm. I took this with my 500 mm lens so as not to disturb the bird. It was well camouflaged. You can see the American Woodcock in many areas in the springtime as they do their courtship rituals as dark sets in and hear their "peents".

Right: Scouting by Jacob Walter, age 13.
Backyard in Glendale.

I think the hawk picture is important because it reminds me that I don't have to go to a far away park to see amazing nature. I can see amazing things in my own back yard! Nature is all around us and that is an important thing to remember in a day in age where everybody is too sucked into their own devices and actions. It is cool for me to know that I don't have to travel a far distance to see amazing things like the hawk.



Above: Shake It, Shake It, Shake It Baby by Tom Tucker. Lake Jacomo, Fleming Park.



Above Right: Sleepy Barred Owl in a Snowy Window by Jerlyn Jones. Jasper County.
Bottom Left: Snow Geese Panic by Howard Arndt. Loess Bluffs NWR.
Bottom Right: Savannah Sparrow by Betsy Garrett. Boone County.





Top Left: Snow Bunting by Betsy Garrett.

Long Branch State Park.

Snow buntings breed in the arctic tundra and are occasional (scarce) visitors to Missouri in the winter months. My personal experience is that they are only seen here on particularly cold and blustery days! They eat grass and flowering plant seeds as well as spiders and insects. Their populations declined 38% between 1970 and 2014. They are rated as 8 out of 20 in the 2016 State of North American Birds and are not on the Watch List as a species of high conservation concern.

MRBO Directors' note: We find it quite sad that a species is not Watch Listed, and is ranked of low concern, because it "only" lost 38% of its population in the past 45 years. This speaks volumes about the dire state of species that rank high on the concern scale.

Left: Snow Puff Junco by Julie Brown Patton. Wildwood.

Although we feel sorry when we see Juncos foraging in the snow, they also seem to be able to puff up themselves to the point where the cold touch of snow must not hurt them too much. We provide seeds for them, and enjoy how their soft simplicity blends into winter landscapes.



Below: Summer Tanager by Marvin DeJong. Christian County.



Below Left: Take Wing by Hang Chen.

Longview Lake.

One cold morning, I spotted a hawk on top of a cedar tree. Turning the engine off I took a few shots and waited. It suddenly took off surprisingly towards my direction. A bird-watcher (eBirder) was walking up to me and educated me with some facts about red-shouldered hawks. She talked to me about Audubon which I joined right away.



Top Left: *Taking Off At The Sunset* by Jun Zuo. Loess Bluffs NWR.

Above Right: *These White Ones Are The Tastiest* by Tom Tucker. Backyard in Kansas City.

Right: *The Greens In The Morning Sun* by Amy Petersen.
Loess Bluffs NWR.

I cherish the opportunities to drive around Loess Bluffs, NWR whenever I get a chance. On this particular day the refuge was alive with activity and even though there were many visitors, the Green Heron didn't mind as it was on a quest, a mission I would gather. Sitting in my car close enough, yet far enough away as to not interfere with the Green Heron's actions, I was able to capture this moment of intense concentration; or at least that's my impression.

Lower Right: *Trout Dinner For One* by Freddie Hargraves.
Shepherd of the Hills Hatchery, Lake Taneycomo.

This heron stalks the waters along the headwaters of Taneycomo. It has a damaged foot that affects the way it walks, but as you can see not the way its able to hunt. This photo is a perfect example of the importance of barbless hooks, and keeping fishing line cleaned up. His cause of injury is not known, but many fish in the fall have multiple flies attached in them as they successfully break off a fisherman's line. The different species who feed on these trout and other fish present, are not picky, they will take a fish with multiple hooks attached. Once ingested those hooks can cause many issues and even death if they get hung up in the bird. If fishing and conservation of nature are to exist side by side, we need to make sure we as conservationists do all we can to protect the innocent.

Below: *Uncommonly Beautiful* by Paul Moffett.
Columbia Bottoms.





Left: Tufted Titmouse Seeks Peanuts by Alison Hughes. Backyard in Jefferson City.

I was able to capture this photo of a tufted titmouse when I happened to be on our deck with my camera during one of his/her 'peanut runs' to one of our feeders. Tufted titmice cache a lot of their food in the winter months in tree cavities and bark crevices, so we provide raw split peanuts for the birds in our area (including this delightful tufted titmouse) to help support a protein rich diet in the harsher months. In addition, our back yard and woods are full of native plants and undisturbed habitat, which also provides cover and food sources essential to our avian populations.

Right: Two Double-Crested Cormorants by Kristine Colburn. Smithville Lake.

After suffering declines from pesticides in the past, these birds have made a come-back. Unfortunately in some areas they are seen as a threat to fishing stocks and have been shot.



Above: Turkey Trek by Logan Hutchison, age 16. Grandview.

Below Left: Virginia Rail by Andrew Reago and Christina McClaren. Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary.

Below Right: White-Crowned Sparrow by Julia Anielak. Backyard in Sedalia.



Right: Virginia Rail by Linda Williams. Loess Bluffs NWR. These secretive birds nest in northern and western parts of the US and in the southern prairies of Canada. They migrate through Missouri and this one was on a stopover at the refuge on its way south for the winter. Although classified as a species of low conservation concern, inadequate research exists about these and other wetland birds and we are fortunate that MRBO has made them the focus of research and monitoring. Humans tend to not recognize the importance of wetlands to birds and many other species and drainage and development of wetland areas is a threat to any of those species.

Middle Right: Whoo Are You Looking At by Buddy Woods

Below: Watchful Eye by Carol Weston. Eagle Bluffs CA. The Dickcissel is the bird of the Prairie to me. It is the harbinger of the summer. It is also one of the birds that is the Indicator of the health of a region. When a prairie or farm area is healthy, the Dickcissels will be in abundance, when the soil, is saturated with chemicals, when the area is unhealthy, you will notice an absence of this bird and its song. They are barometers of a region and its health.



Below: Wild Turkeys by JoAnn Casner.
Bottom Left: Winter Survival by Mark Ramsey.





Top Left: Wood Ducks by Mark Ramsey. Chariton County.

We have a pond back in our timber that Wood Ducks like to frequent. It is completely surrounded by oaks that produce acorns; Wood Ducks love acorns. We put up nesting boxes for them to nest but they prefer nesting on the creek that runs through the place. I like to sneak over the pond dam and take a look to see if there are any ducks and if there are, try to get some pictures. This day the plan came together.

Top Right: Yellow-Crowned Night Heron by Linda Williams. Kansas City.

This image of a pair of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons was taken in a Kansas City North neighborhood in April while the pair was in the process of constructing their nest. The large sycamore tree was located behind a home next to a small creek in a neighborhood near a wetland and lake located across a large interstate highway. Even though these birds sometimes live and nest very close to humans, they are still wetland birds vulnerable to habitat loss and degradation. Their populations are difficult to determine since they will not be detected by most general broad survey techniques and they, like most birds, need to be monitored.

Bottom Left: Young Barred Owl by Betsy Garrett. Boone County.

Barred owls are resident, nonmigratory Missouri birds. They live in mature mixed forests often near water and need large dead trees for nest sites. Thus, they can be used as an indicator species for managing old forests. Other birds recognize Barred Owls as predators and may band together to mob them. They are rated as 7 out of 20 in the 2016 State of North American Birds and are not on the Watch List as a species of high conservation concern.

Bottom Right: Youth by Dianne Van Dien. Fleming Park.

"Today's youth are the promise of tomorrow," so the saying goes. This is just as true for animals as it is for humans. Without the annual addition of offspring, animal populations will fail. Turkey vultures are six or seven years old before they start having families, making it take much longer for them to rebound from a population crash than for faster-maturing species.

Every year in late summer fledging turkey vultures, at about ten weeks old, join the local roost with their parents. In the mornings while the adult vultures quietly preen, young vultures explore. They pick up sticks, play with abandoned water bottles, sidle up to herons and geese, and squabble with one another. When the sun warms the earth enough to create the wind or thermals needed for soaring, the young vultures are the first to take flight. They glide back and forth over and over, testing out their wings, and sometimes they come quite close to stare at the human who has been sitting at a distance, watching and waiting with a camera. Young vultures embody the energy of youth and the promise of the future.



~ Our Thanks To ~

Contest Judges

David Stonner, Photographer, Missouri Department of Conservation
Noppadol Paothong, Photographer, Missouri Department of Conservation
Karen Avery Miller, Artist, The Little Studio & Gallery
Steve Garr, Owner~Birds-I-View and Founder~Missouri Bluebird Society
Tina Casagrand, Publisher, The New Territory

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Amy Watts, Joplin
Andrew Reago & Christina McClaren, St. Louis
Barbara Marshall, Chesterfield
Betsy Garrett, Columbia
Bill Blackledge, Plattsburg
Carol Weston, Columbia
Cathy Schafer, Jefferson City
Chelsea Mostellar, Columbia
Clay Guthrie, East Prairie
Conor Gearin, St. Louis
Dianne Van Dien, Raytown
Donna Perry, Fayette
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Emma Watts, Joplin
Freddie Hargraves, Springfield
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Mark Ramsey, Salisbury
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