



An Essay in Celebration of the Inauguration of

A CATALOG OF BIRDS

by

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THE COLLEGE OF ST. SCHOLASTICA, a beautiful gem in the heart of Duluth, is steeped in the traditions of the best liberal arts colleges. Take a stroll on campus, indoors or out, and luxuriate in the college's richness of architecture, art, music, literature, language, history, and landscaping. The natural beauty of this 186-acre, largely wooded campus is enhanced visually and aurally by its wealth of birdlife, an integral element of the campus environment that inspires study and contemplation.

Also of a piece with the College's finest traditions is *A Catalog of Birds at The College of St. Scholastica*. Sister Donna Schroeder's original list of birds seen on campus with her students from 1978 through 1996 forms the sturdy foundation onto which the *Catalog's* structure is taking form, enhanced in the scientific and natural history disciplines with both more recent bird reports and now a digital library of photos and sound recordings. To make this resource truly multidisciplinary as befits a strong liberal arts college, the *Catalog* integrates the arts, literature, and music as well.

A cursory glance at the *List of Bird Species* will inform students, faculty and staff, and the greater Duluth community of the wealth of birds in our midst. Bird diversity depends on habitat diversity, and the campus provides an excellent sampling of habitats, from pastoral garden areas through both deciduous and coniferous woodlands.

The list includes 107 species of birds reported since 1978. Eight common species, from flickers to Song Sparrows, have been reported in every single year data was kept, and 32 species have been seen in at least 10 of those years. The dates of the reports of two southern species that are working their way north due in part to climate change are reflected: Northern Cardinals were first noted on campus in 1989, when sightings in Duluth were still few and far between. That was the only year cardinals were reported here until after 2005; sightings of them promise to become regular in coming years. The Red-bellied Woodpecker first appeared on campus in 2019 and turned up again in 2020. Both of these species are now nesting in Duluth, quite possibly on campus.

The sad loss of the Evening Grosbeak, a bird once abundant in Duluth but now seen very seldom, is also reflected in the data. It was reported most years through 1989, but not once since. Common Nighthawks once nested atop some of the buildings on campus, as well as at the University of Minnesota-Duluth and in downtown Duluth; they were last reported on campus in 1995, at about the same time their nesting elsewhere in Duluth was coming to an end.



Lists seem to stir an impulse to fill gaps. The moment I started looking through it, I found myself ticking off in my mind the birds I've seen on campus. This list should inspire a lot of local birders to check out the good spots on campus where they can see these birds and add new species to the list. Sister Donna was focused primarily on birds attracted to the campus itself, rather than birds flying well above campus, and bird identification was usually taught in spring, when birds are singing and in their finest plumage rather than in fall when they're quiet and secretive. So this list is rather short on hawks, considering the campus is right on Duluth's famous autumn hawk migration flyway. That's hardly a shortcoming—it's an enticement that may lure students and local birders to start paying closer attention to migration over campus.

Beyond the List, the *Catalog's* Gallery will also inspire many of us to grab our cell-phones, cameras, and recording equipment to contribute to this growing body of work. This bodes well for everyone. Bird photography is challenging fun; students in many disciplines may be inspired to hone their skills with birds as their subjects. And the closer tabs we keep on birdlife, the more likely we are to notice environmental problems affecting them, and the more solid information we will have to help.

During the spring of 2020, when the pandemic kept so many of us entirely at home, a great many people started paying attention to the birdlife in their own backyards. *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and other mainstream news sources detailed the simple joy and satisfaction so many people were finding in birdlife during this stressful time. As people slowly get back to the business of "normal life," some of this interest may subside, but once our eyes and ears are opened to the birds around us, they tend to keep noticing birds, and to start making an effort to find and enjoy more birds. The value of this catalog will grow as more people contribute sightings and photos to the database, and as more people discover the many ways birds have enriched language, literature, and art. *A Catalog of Birds at the College of St. Scholastica* promises to be a durable, lasting treasure.

LAURA ERICKSON is the author of 13 books about birds including *The American Birding Association Field Guide to Minnesota Birds*, the *National Geographic Pocket Guide to North American Birds*, and the forthcoming *The Love Lives of Birds: Courting and Mating Rituals*. In 2014, Laura was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Award, the highest honor bestowed by the American Birding Association. Her program, "For the Birds," which first aired in 1986, is the longest running radio show about birds in the United States.