

# Mississippi Hills

## Newsletter

January, February, March 2021



The Missouri Master Naturalist program is a community-based natural resource education and volunteer service program for adults, sponsored by the Missouri Department of Conservation and the University of Missouri Extension.

Its purpose is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Missouri. Missouri Master Naturalist volunteers support conservation efforts and natural resource education in their local communities.

FIND US ON THE WEB: <https://www.hills.missourimasternaturalist.org/>

And on Facebook  [@MississippiHills](https://www.facebook.com/MississippiHills)



### Reader's Review

***Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*** by Robin Wall Kimmerer

*Braiding Sweetgrass* is an inspirational account of Kimmerer's journey as an Indigenous Botanist who finds ways to wed science with traditional teachings. She explores the connections between nature and humans, especially as we move towards a more sustainable world. Her belief that we should acknowledge and celebrate the reciprocal relationship between ourselves and the other inhabitants of the world is a motivational lesson to take into our daily lives.

*Reviewed & Recommended.*  
by Anne Coleman

### AN UNLIKELY PASSION Binoculars, Birds, and Winter:

By Bella Erakko

Every December for the past 121 years, thousands of people across North & South America stand outside all day, eyes glued to the sky. They are not standing vigil for Santa; they are counting birds. Flying birds, perching birds, wading, and swimming birds. Nearing Christmas, on a designated day, groups gather with binoculars and bird books in hand—all volunteering for the Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

This year, Hannibal joined in, in large part because George Wisdom, a member of Mississippi Hills Master Naturalists, thought it a spectacularly good idea. He targeted Mark Twain Lake for its varied habitats: water, agricultural fields, open fields, brush, woodlands, and urban areas. "The sited area, 15 miles in diameter, is defined by longitude and latitude." He filled out the lengthy application; Audubon approved; and George began to extoll the benefits of standing in freezing weather counting ... birds. The day, December 19, arrived cold, but at least not sleeting or snowing.

***Binoculars, Birds, and Winter...cont'd on page 2***



### OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

are available for  
the positions of

**Vice President  
&  
Volunteer Service  
Project Coordinator**

## Binoculars, Birds, and Winter: An Unlikely Passion-cont'd

George anxiously waited for volunteers to arrive.

"I was hoping for ten. TEN!"

But then, folks kept piling in. Twenty-five showed up, from amateur backyard bird-feeder enthusiasts to those with decades of experience.

Now why count a bird? Interesting fact from Dennis Foss, retired manager of the Mark Twain Lake ... "Long ago, around Christmas, there'd be an annual bird shoot. One day, someone from New York suggested that instead of shooting them, count them." Thus, began a 121-year tradition.

Counting picks up trends: the health of a species, how changes in habitat affect bird populations, how recovery can happen, often dramatically. Witness the bald eagle, almost extinct because DDT made eggshells so thin, they fractured. Solution? Ban DDT. Missouri went from virtually no nests to roughly 300 in 2020. But extinction goes on at an incredible rate. According to bird lover Kristy Trevathan, the North American avian population in the last 50 years has dropped from 10 billion to 7 billion. Today's tiny Michigan-based yellow Kirkland warbler struggles to survive, according to bird counts. It needs pine groves. The state, by designating certain areas as preserves including private property, is giving this little bird a chance.

But to the tricky question ... how, exactly, do you count a bird? George Wisdom laughs, "Well, you count really fast. You get a flock estimate." Dennis Foss uses the visual-ruler technique: count ten flying geese; see how much "air space" they take up, and multiply by the size of the flock. Art Suchland, a forester, has considered taking a flock photo and counting later. This works for flocks, more or less, but what about woodland birds? Sparrows defeat even the best of birders. Dennis

calls them LBB's—little brown birds. Art admits that just seeing a drab colored bird

in winter woods is hard. "I made two short walks looking specifically for woodland birds. I found one nuthatch." And he adds, "Bird songs don't help much in winter. Birds sing during mating season in spring and early summer."

So, how did Hannibal's Christmas Bird Count go? What did 25 people see? Participants covered 298 miles, counting 3,300 birds—49 species—ranging from an abundance of geese (960) ring billed gulls (467), blue jays (253), European starlings (253), and American crows (144)—to the much rarer sighted golden-crowned kinglet (6), northern harrier (1), and song sparrow (1).

One last question: Why do birds matter? Why should we care? What if all the birds went extinct? Would it affect our lives?

George Wisdom calls it the canary-in-the-mine syndrome. Miners took canaries down with them. If they hit a pocket of dead air, the canary let them know. It was a poor man's life insurance policy. Their world was an enclosed cave; ours is an enclosed planet, protected by a very thin layer of air. Birds, flying to all parts of the world, are our messengers-of-life.

Or, as Dennis puts it:  
"What would the world be without opera?  
Without popular music?  
Without singing?"  
Without birds?

## Environmental Trail Update

As work continued to move ahead on the Environmental Trail and Prairie Restoration project located at The Frank Russell Recreational Area at Mark Twain Lake, Bob Kendrick received word that there was approval for a grant of \$40,000 for the Army Corp of Engineers and \$30,000 for the MO Department of Natural Resources to partner with us to build a 4.2-mile trail for hikers and bicyclists. This will be an 8-foot-wide trail with 5-foot shoulders and a base similar to the MO Katy Trail. The Environmental Trail loops around the area that the Mississippi Hills Master Naturalist chapter has been working on to clear and restore native plants at Frank Russell. Many members have contributed to this effort from clearing land to planting native trees, milkweed, and buckets of native grasses and wildflowers seeds collected for our seed bank project.

This is exciting news for this project at Frank Russell and will create many volunteer opportunities for us in 2021. When finished, the Environmental Trail will be a great asset to the area for both recreational and educational purposes.

**More information on the volunteer opportunities at Frank Russell to come!**

## HABITATS

A habitat is a place where an organism makes its' home. A habitat meets all the environmental conditions an organism needs to survive . The main components of a habitat are shelter, water, food, and space.



### SERVICE PROJECTS

Volunteer Service Projects  
Total: 2647 hours

Program Support  
= 738 hours  
Education/Interpretative  
= 441 hours  
Stewardship Projects  
= 1227 hours  
Citizen Science  
= 241

### BY THE NUMBERS

(rounded to nearest whole hour)

**2020**

ADVANCED TRAINING  
Advanced Training Total  
Hours = 515

CERTIFICATION  
AND ACTIVE MEMBERS  
34 Active members  
15 Annual re-certification  
14 Initial Certification

### CHAPTER PARTNERS

Volunteer service hours donated

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
at Mark Twain Lake  
=1061 hours  
Hannibal Parks & Recreation (139 hours )  
Mark Twain State Park  
MDC (223 hours)  
Stream Team  
(67 hours )  
Audubon  
(94 hours)  
Hannibal Tree Board FORREST Council  
White Tails Unlimited,  
Monroe City Chapter (48 hours)  
Turkey Federation, Hannibal Chapter

# Missouri Master Naturalist

## 2021 Certification Pin

### Eastern Meadowlark



#### Description

A chunky, medium-sized songbird with a short tail and long spear-shaped bill. They are pale brown marked with black, with bright-yellow underparts and a bold black V across the chest. The crown is dark with a light medium stripe; eyebrow and moustachial streak are white; lores (space between eye and bill) yellow; and eye line dark. Though most of the tail is brown and blackish barring, the outer feathers are white and conspicuous during flight and when the bird flicks them while on the ground.

#### Range

Occurs throughout the eastern United States and statewide in Missouri. A similar species the western meadowlark, is a permanent resident in northwest Missouri but rare and scattered in the rest of the state.

#### Habitat

Open fields, pastures, meadows, prairies, airports, and crop fields. Winters in many kinds of natural and cultivated fields. In the Midwest, tends to prefer taller and lush grass than western meadowlarks.

#### Behavior

Walks on the ground, often concealed by grasses or crops. Males sing beautiful, flute-like songs from exposed perches, particularly fence posts. Their flight is a distinctive sequence of rapid fluttering and short glides, usually low to the ground. In winter you may see flocks of meadowlarks hunting insects in the fields.

#### Diet

The sharp, long bills of meadowlarks enable them to hunt ground-dwelling insects such as grubs, crickets, and grasshoppers. Like many members of the blackbird family, they jab their strong, swordlike bill into the soil, then open their jaws, prying open the grass and soil, uncovering spiders, ants, grubs, and other insects. In fall and winter, they also eat seeds and waste grain.

#### Life Cycle

Meadowlarks are ground nesters. The female builds a cup-shaped nest of grass stems, plant stalks, and similar materials interwoven with surrounding growth in a depression on the ground. Sometimes the nests are covered with a roof and have a side entrance. There are usually narrow trails or “runways” leading up to the nest through the grass. From 2-7 white eggs, heavily spotted with brown and purple are laid. The young hatch naked and helpless in 13-15 days. Both parents feed the nestlings. Young leave the nest after 11-12 days, when still unable to fly, and are tended by the parents for at least two more weeks. There are generally two broods a year.

#### Conservation Status

The species probably increased in numbers during the 1700s and 1800s as forests were cleared and turned into farmland. Populations have been decreasing in recent decades as the amount and quality of grassland habitats decline.

#### Human Connections

The buoyant, flutelike melody of the eastern meadowlark ringing out across a field can brighten anyone’s day. They often sing from fence posts or telephone lines, where we can easily admire them. Meadowlarks devour many insects that humans find troublesome.

## Advanced Training Calendar for Jan - March 2021



### Advanced Training

AT Opportunities not listed on our calendar must be approved and added in order for them to count against the required annual AT hours.

Training must be Missouri based, relative to Master Naturalist activities and have an interactive Q & A with the Speaker(s).

If you would like to take training not on the calendar, please contact George Wisdom

Event Date	Event Time	Event Title
1/29/21	7-9 pm	MDC: An Evening with Raptors
1/30/21	10:30 - 11:30 am	MDC--Birds:: Attracting Winter Birds
2/02/21	10-11 am	MDC--Native Plants: Winter Beauty - Virtual
2/02/21	5:30-6:30 pm	MDC--Native Plants: Winter Beauty - Virtual (evening session)
2/03/21	4-5 pm	MPF Webinar: Grassland Amphibians & Reptiles
2/06/21	12 noon - 1:00 pm	MDC--Birds: Eagle Days & Other Conservation Success Stories
2/06/21	1-2 pm	MDC--Birds: Eagle Days & Other Conservation Success Stories (second session)
2/06/21	10:30-11:30 am	MDC--Birds: Owls Are a Hoot!
2/09/21	2-2:30 pm	MDC--Discover Nature: Great Groundhogs
2/10/21	4-5:00 pm	MPF-- Grow Native! Native Alternatives
2/11/21	1 - 2 pm	MDC--Birds: VIRTUAL Bluebirds of Happiness
2/13/21	10-11:30am	MDC--Native Plants: Winter Beauty - Virtual
2/13/21	12:30 - 2:00 pm	MDC--Native Plants: Winter Beauty - Virtual (afternoon session)
2/17/21	10-11 am	MDC--Birds: Winter Birding - Virtual
2/17/21	4 - 5 pm	MPF--Grow Native! Native Predatory Wasps
2/18/21	12 1:00 pm	MDC--Native Plants: at Noon
2/23/21	7 - 8 pm	MDC--Native Plants: Collecting, Harvesting, and Processing Pine Needle
2/23/21	9:30 am-12 noon	MO Stream Team Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring
2/23/21	6:30-7:30 pm	Monthly Meeting--Gloria Straube: Eagles and Peregrine Falcons
2/24/21	10-11 am	MDC--Birds: Winter Birding - Virtual
2/24/21	4 - 5 pm	MPF--Grow Native! Invasive Plant Q & A
2/25/21	9:30 am - 12 noon	Missouri Stream Team --Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring Step 1 / Part B / Session Option 1
2/27/21	1-1:30 pm	MDC--Nocturnal Animals Virtual Program
3/03/21	4- 5 pm	MPF-- Build Your Own Bird Sanctuary
3/09/21	6:30-9 pm	MO Stream Team --Water Quality Monitoring Step 1 / Part A / Session Option 2
3/10/21	4- 5 pm	MPF-- Ants in the Prairie
3/11/21	6:30-9 pm	MO Stream Team --Water Quality Monitoring
3/17/21	4 - 5 pm	MPF--10 Spring Edible Native Plants
3/23/21	6:30-7:30 pm	Monthly Meeting--Reese Worthington: Fen salt springs Spalding, MO
3/24/21	4- 5 pm	MPF--Native Shrubs of the Lower Midwest
3/31/21	4 -5 pm	MPF--Reflections on Urban Native Gardening

**CHECK THE  
WEBPAGE  
OFTEN FOR  
NEW  
ADDITIONS AS  
THEY BECOME  
AVAILABLE**



## Volunteer Opportunity Calendar for January - March 2021

Event Date	Event Time	Event Title
2/07/ 2021	01:00 pm - 02:00 pm	Hannibal Parks & Rec Interpretive Programs :: Wonderful World of Woodpeckers
2/12/ 2021	06:00 am - 04:00 pm	Citizen Science :: Great Backyard Bird Count
2/13/ 2021	06:00 am - 04:00 pm	Citizen Science :: Great Backyard Bird Count
2/14/ 2021	06:00 am - 04:00 pm	Citizen Science :: Great Backyard Bird Count
2/15/ 2021	06:00 am - 04:00 pm	Citizen Science :: Great Backyard Bird Count
2/21/ 2021	01:00 pm - 02:00 pm	Hannibal Parks & Rec Interpretive Programs :: Magnificent Migrations along the Mississippi
2/23/ 2021	07:30 pm - 08:30 pm	Chapter Meeting :: (02) February
3/09/ 2021	06:30 pm - 08:00 pm	Executive Board :: Board Meeting :: (03) March
3/23/ 2021	07:30 pm - 08:30 pm	Chapter Meeting :: (03) March

### Monthly Meetings

Monthly Chapter Meetings are held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of every month  
Bi-monthly Board Meetings are held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of every other month

### Upcoming Chapter Events of Note

### Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12-15, 2021

For more information visit the BirdCount.org website:  
[www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org)



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

## FOLLOW THE LEADERS

### CHAPTER BOARD MEMBERS

**President –**  
George Wisdom

**Vice President –**  
*Opportunity to serve*

**Secretary –**  
Bella Erakko &  
Brenda Weiss

**Treasurer –**  
Kristy Trevathan,

### **Board Members at Large:**

Bob Kendrick  
Keith Cline  
Vanessa Laatsch  
David Mobley  
Anne Coleman

### CHAPTER ADVISERS



Kathi Moore –  
Missouri Department of Conservation

Daniel Mallory –  
University of Missouri Extension



Contact Information for Newsletter or Website article contributions, suggestions and/or corrections

### COMMITTEE CHAIRS

**Volunteer Service Project Coordinator**  
*Opportunity to serve*

**Advanced Training –** George Wisdom

**Hospitality –** Vanessa Laatsch

**Website & Time keeper**  
Anne Coleman

## We'd Love To Hear From YOU!

Name	Position	Phone Number	Email
George Wisdom	President	573-822-6771	gwwisdom@gmail.com
Anne Coleman	Website	573-473-2756	dac22439@gmail.com
Janet Golian	Newsletter	573-267-3729	golian@rallstech.com

