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BLOOMINGTON
Clover Center
816 West 98th St.
Bloomington 55420
(952) 884-4103

EAGAN
Cedar Cliff
Shopping Center
2143 Cliff Rd.
Eagan 55122
(651) 459-0084

MINNETONKA-
RIDGE SQUARE
Ridge Square North
Shopping Center
12981 Ridgedale Dr.
Ste. 103
Minnetonka 55305
(952) 473-4283

MINNETONKA-
WESTWIND PLAZA
4759 Co. Rd. 101
Minnetonka 55345
(952) 935-5892

NORTH OAKS
Village Shopping
Center
121 Village Cntr Dr.
North Oaks 55127
(651) 482-1033

WHITE BEAR LAKE
2703 E. Co. Rd. E
White Bear Lake
55110
(651) 653-8705

DELIVERY SERVICES
(952) 737-6626

wildbirdstore.com

BIRD'S-EYE View

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Female Northern Cardinal
Photo by Katrina Hase

Northern Cardinals **Winter Birding at Sax-Zim Bog** *Seasonal Notes*

SAX-ZIM BOG

By Guest Contributor **KATRINA HASE**

A Winter Birding **Destination**

If you're looking for a winter birding adventure within a day's reach of the Twin Cities, it's hard to beat the Sax-Zim Bog. Just northwest of Duluth, this 300-square-mile patchwork of habitats has become one of Minnesota's most beloved cold-season destinations for birders.

What makes the Bog special is its remarkable blend of landscapes: black spruce and tamarack bogs, upland maple and aspen woods, stretches of pine, open farmland, wetlands, and meadows. Within this mix, birds find reliable places to hunt, perch, and overwinter—especially species that thrive on the quiet, wild edges of boreal country.

Many of the birds that draw people here aren't easy to find elsewhere in the state, particularly in winter. Boreal specialists like Great Gray Owls, Black-backed Woodpeckers, Boreal Chickadees, and Canada Jays make their home

in the deep spruce bogs. As the temperatures drop, the Bog's open grasslands also attract winter visitors such as Northern Shrikes, Rough-legged Hawks, and—if you're lucky—Snowy Owls.

Photographer and longtime friend of the store Russ Sandstrom usually makes the trek at least once each winter. "It's a three-hour drive," he says. "You can go up really early and get there by sunrise at 8am and stay until sunset. Or you can stay overnight in the area and get some birding in over two days. It's a great place to go birding because you'll see a lot of boreal species that come

down from places further north to spend the winter in Minnesota. It's an exciting break from all the common birds we see in the Twin Cities in the winter."

Plan Your Visit

The Welcome Center is open daily from 10am–3pm during the winter season, from early December through mid-March. Before you go, consider downloading the Sax-Zim Bog All Season Birding Map, which highlights reliable birding locations: SaxZim.org/birding-the-bog/birding-map-2018-19/.

Continued on page 2...

Remembering Steve Endres, Sr.

We are saddened to share that Steve Endres, Sr., former manager of our Bloomington store and the first employee hired when the Netten family acquired All Seasons Wild Bird Store, passed away on November 17.

Steve played a foundational role in the life of our company. For more than 31 years, he was the steady, friendly presence customers counted on—someone who greeted everyone with warmth, shared his deep knowledge of backyard birding, and created the welcoming atmosphere that defined the Bloomington store. Many customers knew him affectionately as “the big guy,” a nickname that reflected not only his stature but his big heart and generous spirit.

His dedication to service, his calm leadership, and his genuine care for people

made a lasting impact on generations of customers and staff. Steve helped shape the culture of All Seasons Wild Bird Store, modeling what it means to serve with consistency, kindness, and pride.

Steve's service and celebration of life have already taken place, and we extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and the many friends and loyal customers whose lives he touched. His legacy will continue to be felt in our stores, in our community, and in the



Steve Endres, Sr.

Top: The first crew—Al and Lila Netten, Steve Endres, Diane Kissinger, Lisa Stewart.
Lower: Al and Steve working on the new Bloomington store.



memories we share of his many years with us.

—
Dave Netten,
Co-owner, All Seasons Wild Bird Store

SAX-ZIM BOG (continued from page 1)

The Friends of the Sax-Zim Bog maintain helpful route suggestions and feeders throughout the area, and several roads consistently produce great winter sightings:

The Welcome Center is a must-stop in winter. Nearly two dozen feeders draw an exciting mix of winter finches—Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Common and sometimes Hoary Redpolls, and Canada Jays. An ermine even makes the occasional appearance. If you can't make the drive, their live feeder cam offers a fun taste of Bog birding from home.

McDavitt & Admiral Roads wind through a black spruce–tamarack bog. These are prime spots for Great Gray Owls, Black-backed Woodpeckers, and winter crossbills. The feeders along Admiral Road are perhaps the best place in the state to see Boreal Chickadees up close, along with Canada Jays, Pine Grosbeaks, redpolls—and sometimes a curious Pine Marten.

Stone Lake Road is well known for Northern Hawk Owls and Great Grays,

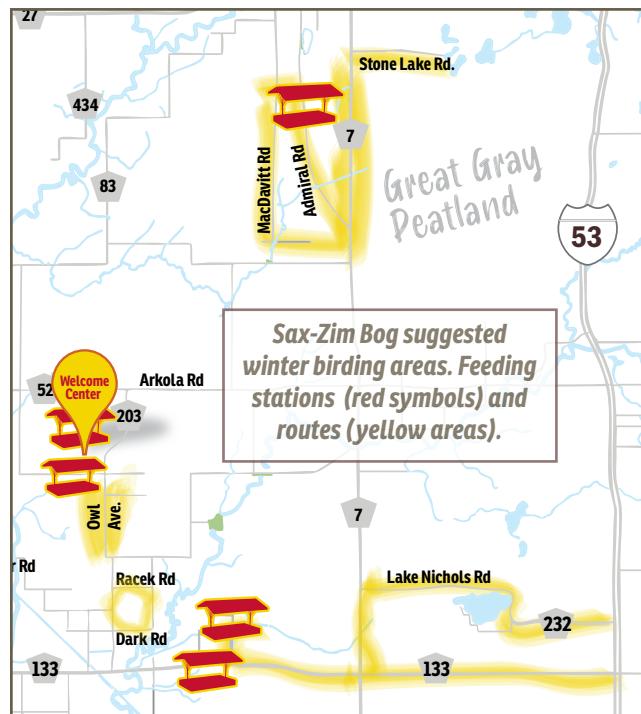
along with Northern Shrikes patrolling the open edges.

Owl Avenue and the Arkola Bog reward patient listening and scanning for Boreal Chickadees, Canada Jays, crossbills, and of course Great Gray Owls.

Lake Nichols Road is one of the most reliable places for Great Gray Owls, especially at dawn and dusk. You may also see Ruffed Grouse, winter finches, and, once in a while, wolves moving along the forest edge.

County Roads 7 and 133 trace the borders of large black spruce–tamarack expanses. These open views make it easier to spot Great Grays, Northern Hawk Owls, Rough-legged Hawks, and winter songbirds like Snow Buntings. Sharp-tailed Grouse are here all year.

Blue Spruce Road and the Warren Woessner Bog Boardwalk offer a quieter, more immersive walk through the spruce bog. Here you might encounter American Three-toed Woodpeckers, crossbills, Snowshoe Hares, and Canada Jays. ■



Beloved Northern Cardinals

Understanding, Feeding, and Welcoming Cardinals to Your Backyard



Fun fact: Many cardinal pairs will mate for life, staying together across multiple breeding seasons.

As we have departed the stick season and entered winter, we enjoy the beautiful plumage of the male Northern Cardinal against the crisp white snow.

Speaking of their beautiful plumage, it may surprise you to learn that a cardinal's diet is responsible for its vibrant red color. Fruits and seeds rich in carotenoids, such as sunflower seeds (black oilers), contribute to their bright red plumage. Although not as flashy, the female is just as beautiful in her own right, with her brownish plumage accented by red tinges.

How to Attract These Beautiful Songbirds to Your Yard

Cardinals enjoy a place to perch where the male often feeds the female. Rather than sitting on a straight perch with the food at their side, they prefer a U-shaped perch, feeder ring, or tray so they can face forward



Cardinal on EZ Feeder

to access their food. Cardinals are often the first and last birds spotted at feeding stations. They enjoy feeding at dawn and dusk. Hanging tray feeders and fly-thru feeders are great options, as well as tube feeders with a tray, such as the Aspects Quick-Clean. If you have

squirrel problems, a good option is the Brome Squirrel Buster® Plus feeder or the new Evolution feeder by Brome.



Above: Cardinal on a hanging tray feeder. Below: Brome Squirrel Buster Plus feeder.



Seed Recommendations

Cardinals love black oilers and safflower. Try seed blends such as the Mahtomedi Cardinal Mix or Songbird Delight, both of which contain these seeds. If you prefer a mess-free blend, Kracker Jax is a nice option, too. You can also include dried mealworms and suet nuggets in your seed blend to offer more protein in the winter, when temperatures are frigid and birds need more energy.

I'm personally excited that the weather experts have predicted a colder and snowier winter than normal. This should make for a beautiful viewing season. Happy birding! ■

January & February

Compressed seed cylinders from Mr. Bird are a low-maintenance bird-feeding solution. The seed is held together with gelatin, which prevents seed loss caused by birds' bill-sweeping behavior. Bugs, Nuts 'N' Fruit is a high-fat, high-protein, no-mess favorite with mealworms, tree nuts, sunflower hearts, raisins, cranberries, and gelatin.



The high metabolic rate of birds burns up fuel quickly. Birds fortunate enough to have a feeding station nearby survive brutal temperatures better. Suet and suet nuggets, dried mealworms, peanut pick-outs, and seed already out of the shell—like Select Sunflower Hearts—help birds refuel quickly.

Deep winter is the best time to see Bald Eagles at the National Eagle Center in Wabasha, Minnesota. During peak season, November through March, volunteers and spotting scopes are typically stationed along the riverfront to help visitors see eagles more easily, and the Center also offers a live "EagleWatch" webcam for viewing from home. Check the hours of operation at nationaleaglecenter.org.

All of Minnesota's species of squirrels enter mating season in February. Increased activity means more squirrels at the bird feeders. Brome Squirrel Buster® Evolution feeder has a weight-activated shroud that closes off access to the seed when squirrels land.



Join in as a citizen scientist by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count (gbbc.birdcount.org).

The goal of the project, according to the website:

"Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days we invite people to spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them to us. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations."



The first migrating American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Wood Ducks, and Canada Geese can arrive by the end of February. Clean out Wood Duck houses and add fresh wood-shred bedding. Use Golden Safflower to avoid feeding mobs of Red-winged Blackbirds and grackles.

Stop in or look online for our squirrel-resistant feeders as well as hot-pepper seed and suet options to deter the squirrels.



January is typically our coldest month; however, there are more bird sounds than in December. Listen for the calls of the Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, hooting Great Horned Owls, and the territorial drumming of woodpeckers. The Merlin bird identification app on your phone will help you learn the birds' calls.



By the second week of February, American Goldfinches begin to molt, slowly replacing their dull winter feathers with fresh, bright yellow plumage that helps attract mates and signal health in the upcoming breeding season.



The third week of February brings more **bird sounds** from House Finches, Mourning Doves, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. As days begin lengthening (even slightly), many birds begin responding to the increasing day length with hormonal changes. That hormone shift — especially in males — helps trigger mating-season behaviors, including singing or drumming to attract mates and establish or defend territory.



Keep the snow off your feeders with weather guards. These also work great with the Mr. Bird seed cylinders.