

Local birder dedicates life to conservation



Mary Korkor of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology birds participates at Jaegerfest last fall. Jaegerfest is an annual extended birding field trip where birders gather along Lake Superior to try to spot jaegers, a predatory seabird that will occasionally be seen during migration on the Great Lakes. On May 10, she plans to participate in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon, observing birds in the Horicon Marsh. Photo By Submitted photo

By Vesna Brajkovic

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When the sun first peeks through the blinds in the morning and a familiar bird chirps nearby, some might wish there were a snooze button to hit on nature's alarm clock, but one Hartland woman has dedicated her life to those bird songs.

Mary Korkor, a wild birder, lives on a 40-acre hobby farm complete with a native prairie, horses, an apple orchard, cherry trees and an organic garden. It's a near-perfect stop for some of her favorite birds: robins and bluebirds.

"I love them because they are gregarious, and they have beautiful songs," said Korkor, development committee chairwoman for the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (WSO). "They are the first birds up in the morning, singing their hearts out and they're the last ones to go to bed at night, singing themselves to sleep."

Korkor's casual love for birds was passed on from her grandmother at a young age, but flourished into a life dedicated to conservation and community service after she joined the Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club in Waukesha.

"Once I joined the bird club, I learned so much and made such great friends who became mentors to me, shared their knowledge and guided me in my journey," she said.

Korkor also serves as vice president of the Wisconsin Public Radio Association, on the conservation committee of the WSO, and as a member of her local library foundation board and the Kettle Moraine Garden Club.

"I do a lot of volunteer work while I try to keep up with the garlic mustard and everything else in my yard," Korkor said with a laugh.

Wisconsin Birdathon

In her most recent effort to help conserve birds and their habitat in Wisconsin, Korkor joined naturalist and wildlife educator Bill Volkert to form a team in the Great Wisconsin Birdathon. The two will observe different bird species in the Horicon Marsh on Tuesday, May 10.

The Great Wisconsin Birdathon is a spring fundraising campaign for the Bird Protection Fund that mimics the concept of a tradition walkathon.

Participants sign up, as an individual or with a team, and for a 24-hour period between the start of the Birdathon on April 15 and its end on June 15, the birders aim to observe as many bird species as possible in their areas.

"People are amazed," Korkor said on birding in local areas. "They don't know what's in their own backyard and how wonderful it is ... how special it is to be living in this community and this state. The Birdathon is an opportunity for people to become educated about those birds, but it's also an opportunity to support a lot of the good causes that are really, really necessary to preserve birds and bird habitat."

Fundraising efforts

Funds are raised through pledges on each team's page at WIBirdathon.org. As of April 29, there has been \$34,087 raised.

Last year, 60 teams found 255 species and raised \$57,000. The goal for this year's event is to raise \$70,000. The money will support a variety of projects.

"It's a grassroots kind of thing," said Birdathon coordinator and wildlife biologist Diana Packett. "It's all the birders of Wisconsin working together for statewide bird conservation. The vast majority of the dollars stay right here, and they really take up ... [the] gaps in conservation funding these days."

The priority projects this year include: protecting endangered Kirtland's warblers; monitoring hawks, owls,

nightjars and marsh birds; restoring stopover habitat for migrating birds; reintroducing whooping cranes to Eastern North America; making towns bird-friendly; protecting the bird wintering habitat in Costa Rica; documenting Wisconsin birds for the Breeding Bird Atlas II; and conserving Wisconsin's southern forests.

"I think it's really important for people to support the teams that are getting out there and taking the time to bird these places, and to help scientists gather the knowledge we need to come up with really good management for habitats in our state," Korkor said.

To join Korkor's team, submit a pledge or learn more about the Great Wisconsin Birdathon, visit bit.ly/1s0hY8m.