

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now It's the perfect time of year to go birding. Here's how to get started
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INTERVIEWER: We've had weather whiplash in the last few days. That's an understatement. Of course, we had that burst of summer heat followed by snow for many of us. But despite the confusing weather, it is still spring. And that means a big influx of migratory birds have made their way back to Minnesota and more are coming. With trees that have not yet leafed out, it's a fantastic time to go birding.

We wanted to catch up with Monica Bryand, who is passionate about getting people of color into birding. She leads the Urban Bird Collective based in the Twin Cities. Monica, did I get your last name correct? Would you like to pronounce it for me? Monica, are you with us? Hi. Monica, I can hear you there. Hi, Monica. How are you?

MONICA OK. Yeah, good.

BRYAND:

INTERVIEWER: Monica Bryand is with is.

MONICA It's Monica-- Yeah, yes.

BRYAND:

INTERVIEWER: Thanks. Nice to have you with us. Say, I got to ask you right off the bat here, what have you seen so far? How many birds have you seen so far just in the past few days? How exciting has it been?

MONICA Oh, well you know what the past few days have been like-- very cold and windy. But as far as the week before,
BRYAND: the birds are coming through, especially the ducks. The ducks have been coming through for the last couple of months. But each day you can go to a lake and each day will be different.

I went to Como Lake one day and there were three loons. And I went back the next day and there were 30 loons. In addition, there were probably 10 different species of ducks that were on Como, a really small lake.

INTERVIEWER: What do you love about birding?

MONICA What do I love about birding. One, for me, I've been a birder for over 20 years, and one of the things that I love is
BRYAND: that I know the calls, a lot of calls now. And so when I hear them, I can visualize them. And then, of course, I'll go look for them.

The other thing is, even though I might go out and look for a particular bird, somebody spotted a LeConte's sparrow somewhere, and I get to that park, and I might not find it, but I'm going to find lots of other things. So just the surprises that I get every time I go out.

INTERVIEWER: I'm thinking when you started birding, you probably didn't see many people of color, like yourself, reflected in the birding community. Am I right about that?

MONICA You are correct. And yeah--

BRYAND:

INTERVIEWER: Go ahead, go ahead. No, no, no, no. Go ahead.

MONICA No, no, no. No, please ask your question.

BRYAND:

INTERVIEWER: What's your pitch to folks in the BIPOC community to get out there, and get a pair of binoculars, and start seeing what's out there?

MONICA Yeah. So I started an organization called the Urban Bird Collective. So I've been a birder for over 20 years. And
BRYAND: like you said, there are not many people of color out there. And so I would go out, and I would post every day what I'd be seeing. And so my BIPOC friends and LGBT friends would say, I'd love to go out, but I'm afraid. Can I go out with you?

And I would be, of course, sure, yeah. But I knew that it had to be more than me. And so what I did was I brought together eight other folks who I either identified as BIPOC or LGBT or both and we started the Urban Bird Collective.

And so the second year we added another eight. And what we do is we hold space for especially our target communities, BIPOC and LGBT folks, to be out in nature with us. Currently we have 22 leaders. We do about 30 events. We just have 30 events scheduled right now up until July. So we do about 50 events a year.

Getting BIPOC folks out last night, I launched a new program, a new birder mentoring program for BIPOC folks. So we're going to take 5 to 7 new birders and give them what I got when I was starting out and that is the mentorship of skilled birders taking them out and showing them what's out there.

INTERVIEWER: A producer of mine was just on a birding excursion and was with a companion who could identify just a ton of birds. And she was really impressed by that. What is the best way for new birders to learn, because it can be intimidating?

MONICA Yeah, yeah. One, go out with people who know a little bit more. So that's how I learned. I was very fortunate to
BRYAND: go out with birders. So did that a lot.

The other is there's all these apps that you can use now. So Merlin is a really great app, which can record what you're hearing and then it gives you the list of things that you're hearing. Once you figure out what the call is, then go to a book or go to an app and identify, connect those to the sound and the photo so that you can actually start.

What I would say is, don't let it overwhelm you. Just go slow. In Minnesota, we have a ton that migrate through. And then we have the birds that stay and breed right here in the Twin Cities. A ton, but not as many as what go through.

INTERVIEWER: And we should say that you can find birds in the city. You don't have to go out too far. Where do you go birding most often in the metro area?

MONICA Absolutely. So that's one of the reasons why we called it the Urban Bird Collective. Because we're so lucky here
BRYAND: in the Twin Cities. You can find parks everywhere.

I love to go to Minnesota River Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Bass Ponds, Old Cedar. In the Twin Cities, I go to Crosby, or Como, or Battle Creek, Murphy-Hanrehan, I mean, there's just tons and tons. And then you have your state parks. I love to go to Fort Snelling State Park. And then all the parks, of course, up north.

But here in the Twin Cities you can walk out your door and see birds. I'm very fortunate I live on the flyway down by the Mississippi on the west side of Saint Paul. And I have birds flying over all the time. Eagles, and great blue herons, and egrets going down my street.

INTERVIEWER: For folks who are not familiar with birding as a passion, what excites you? What thrills you the most about seeing birds?

MONICA What thrills me the most. Before I became a birder I, again, did not even realize what we had right here. And so
BRYAND: right now thinking about a sparrow. Before I was a birder, you'd think the house sparrow. That was it. Right now there are about 16 different species of sparrows that are migrating through. And just the thought of getting those rare ones just makes it so exciting.

Next, the warblers are coming. They're the most colorful little birds that are coming through. And there's 30 species of warblers that can come through. So for me, it's just being outside, being with great people, like the leaders of the Urban Bird Collective and the people that we invite to join us. I couldn't ask for more.

INTERVIEWER: So as we see more birds coming through, which species are you going to be most excited to see? Is there a specific species that you always look forward to every year?

MONICA Yeah, I wouldn't say that a-- not a specific species, but, like I said, the warblers and some of the rare sparrows.
BRYAND: Shorebirds are coming through. I was treated to the ducks that are coming through. Maybe some of the rare ones, like I would love to get a red-throated grebe or a western grebe. So just really looking for the rare ones that I maybe only get to see once every five years or once every ten years. And unfortunately, that is because of climate change and just the loss of habitat for a lot of these birds.

INTERVIEWER: Now folks want to know more about the Urban Bird Collective. Where can they go?

MONICA Yeah, they can go to our website, theurbanbirdcollective.com. And then we're also on Facebook, so you can look
BRYAND: for our Facebook group, the Urban Bird Collective.

INTERVIEWER: All right, Monica. Thank you so much. Happy birding.

MONICA Yeah, thank you.

BRYAND:

INTERVIEWER: Monica Bryand is the leader in the Urban Bird Collective.