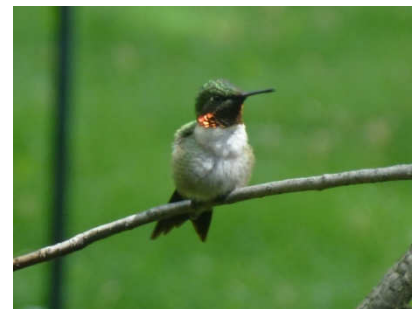


10. Carpenter Nature Center

Carpenter Nature Center is located at the southern tip of Washington County, protecting 425 acres of prairie, woodland, wetland, oak savannah, and St. Croix River shoreline habitat in Hastings, Minnesota. An additional 300 acres of prairie and woodland habitat is protected across the St. Croix River in Hudson, Wisconsin. CNC's Minnesota campus has 15 miles of trails, including 4.5 miles of paved trails, with two observation platforms: one overlooking the St. Croix River and one located in a wooded ravine. Free trail maps are available at the check-in desk at the visitor center. Spring and fall migration are especially active due to CNC's location near the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. A trip to CNC in early spring from April to June will yield Eastern Meadowlarks on the prairie, Baltimore Orioles near the wetland, and occasionally Northern Harriers in courtship flights over the prairie. The Oak Savannah Trail reliably has Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers for a few weeks each spring. The bird feeders and baths around the administration building are always worth checking as they attract a wide variety of birds, including occasional Red-headed Woodpeckers. The CNC apple orchard has a healthy population of nesting Eastern Bluebirds and the paved trail between the apple shack and the wetland hosts interesting birds including nesting Pied-billed Grebes, Sora, and occasionally American Bitterns.

In early fall, swallows congregate in the field northwest of the visitor center. A one or two hour bird hike around the Oak Savannah Trail in early October easily yields at least 30 species, including Golden and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers. The deciduous tree foliage usually peaks around the first week in October. Many of the smaller migrants pass through the treetops at eye level—a great area to spot them is along the Oak Savannah Trail leading to the River Overlook. A relaxing way to enjoy one of the last warm fall days of the year is to sit on the River Overlook and watch the Turkey Vultures and other migrating raptors funneling down the St. Croix River on their journey south.

Winter brings a steady supply of Dark-eyed Juncos and often a Northern Shrike. Brown Creepers, Wild Turkeys, and American Tree Sparrows are just some of the reliable December species seen during the Christmas Bird Count each year. Winter rarities have included Red and White-winged Crossbills, Evening Grosbeaks, Snow Buntings, Pine Siskins, Common and Hoary Redpolls, Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, and Townsend's Solitaires. The feeder area is very active all winter and the bird-banding program continues through the cold winter months. Be sure to take time to walk the Memorial Trail where the thick yews provide excellent cover for many wintering species. The Red Cedar/North Loop Trail has at least one resident Barred Owl and Ruffed Grouse that can be spotted throughout the year with a little luck. The annual winter moonlight snowshoe hikes are great opportunities to bird CNC at night and through the years CNC has been visited by a variety of owls including Long-eared, Short-eared and Boreal Owls.



Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
Photo by Kevin D. Smith



Clay-Colored Sparrow
Photo by Kevin D. Smith



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