

## What It's Like to Be a Bird: From Flying to Nesting, Eating to Singing - What Birds Are Doing, and Why by David Sibley (Alfred A Knopf, 2020) By Lauren Hustung

Did you know that hawks process moving images so quickly that they would see a movie as a slideshow? Or that there is no such thing as blue pigment in birds, but rather an effect of structural light refraction? That larger birds don't have more feathers than smaller ones, just bigger ones?

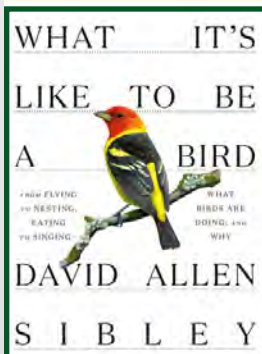
Acclaimed ornithological author and illustrator David Sibley's latest book is designed to pique the curiosity of anyone interested in the life of birds. *What It's Like to Be a Bird* is full of humor and fascinating trivia, packaged in a Choose Your Own Adventure-esque format.

The book starts with an introduction grouping different aspects of bird physiology and behavior into categories that then guides you to different sections of the book, sending you on a journey of ornithological evolution and experience. The bulk of the book collects birds into their families and species, partnered with beautiful art plates created by Sibley himself. I especially appreciated those that showed movement: flight patterns, courtship dances, and peculiar behaviors. You won't find detailed bird identification information in the book;

rather, you'll learn how certain species exemplify the vast diversity of avian life.

Sibley describes the scope of the book as "designed to be browsed casually, so that different topics will spark connections and even a sense of discovery." For myself, I started with each section of the introduction and read through until a fact piqued my interest, and then followed the prompt to a different page with a bird that exemplified the information. In the section about bird bills, for example, the fact that "some details of bill shape evolved specifically for feather care" caught my eye, and I was sent to page 145, the spread on Scarlet Tanagers. There I learned the general preening habits of most birds including that they reach back to a gland at the base of the tail, gather a little oil, and proceed to tend to each feather carefully. The pencil-illustrated preening study on the side of the page showed me all the familiar steps I've seen the little birds at my feeder do a million times, but never knew the real process.

Some of the information may not be surprising to dedicated birders and ornithologists, and it doesn't stray far from common North American birds, but Sibley doesn't claim that the book is the pinnacle of science. Rather, it's a book designed to offer quick and informative glimpses into the winged world around us, and encourage further study and reflection. As a fairly novice birder, I found the book increased my interest exponentially, and I'm itching to take what I've learned out into the field. ♦



### Tanagers

This bird is molting from bright red summer plumage to greenish winter plumage, typical of August. Demanding activities like nesting, molting, and migration usually do not overlap, and birds have evolved an excellent sense of time and a strict schedule to make it all work.

A male Scarlet Tanager in the process of molting



■ Consider how a tanager sees the world as it moves through a lattice of slender twigs suspended above the ground. The bird gives no thought to hopping from twig to twig eighty feet up in the air, then jumping into the open air to catch a passing insect, or flying across a fifty-foot gap to the next twig. Can birds be afraid of heights? Some fear of heights is instinctive and adaptive. Walking off a cliff would be bad, so most animals, including baby birds, instinctively avoid the edge. Once a bird can fly, the cliff poses little danger, and they are comfortable balancing on the edge or even stepping off, knowing that they can spread their wings and come right back.

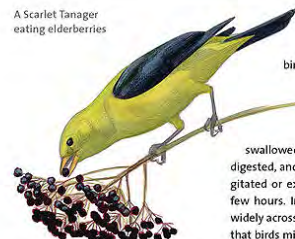
An adult bird must have some understanding of how bad a fall could be, but at the same time confidence that it won't fall.

A Western Tanager perched above the forest canopy

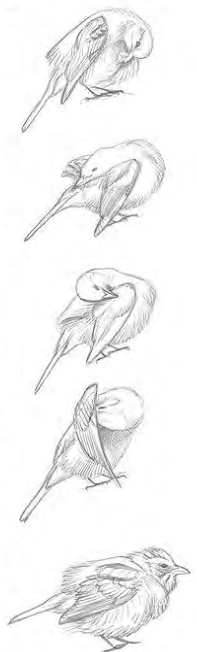
■ Preening is one of the most essential chores a bird has to do, and they spend a lot of time doing it. Typically they preen for about 10 percent of each day, but it can be over 20 percent. Some details of the bill shape of birds have evolved specifically for preening, and a few species have specialized claws for feather care. The main functions are to remove parasites and to clean and adjust the feathers. Birds have a gland at the base of their tail that produces an oil used for feather care. Preening typically involves reaching back to this preen gland, getting a little oil on the bill, and then using the bill to carefully tend to each body, wing, and tail feather from base to tip. This resets all of the barbs and straightens the feather, while also spreading oil across it. A session of preening often ends with the bird leaning forward, raising all of the feathers away from the body, and shaking like a wet dog, sending bits of dust and down floating away.

Typical preening motions

A Scarlet Tanager eating elderberries



■ Many birds eat fruit, and most fruit has adapted to be eaten and dispersed by birds. The nutritious outer layer of the fruit attracts birds, and fruit up to pea-sized or even larger is easily swallowed whole by birds. Once swallowed, the fleshy part of the fruit is digested, and the hard seeds are either regurgitated or excreted, intact, usually within a few hours. In this way birds disperse seeds widely across the landscape. One study found that birds migrating from Europe carry viable seeds to the Canary Islands, across several hundred miles of ocean.





# President's Greeting

By Jennifer Olson



**P**eering into the Garden from the Theodore Wirth trails, I see only shadows and silhouettes.

It's January and the Great Horned owls are hooting their mating duets. In February they will be nesting, following by owlets in March. Nature is transitioning into spring and the Garden will open in April for its 116th season. The blooms are ephemeral, and year-to-year blooming dates vary but the Garden with its familiar walkways is constant. It's why I return.

Lamenting the loss of native flora in the expanding Minneapolis, Eloise organized her three Minneapolis Public School botany colleagues, Clara Leavitt, Elizabeth Foss, and Julia Clifford to collect signatures of prominent citizens, University of Minnesota President Northrup, and other faculty members, including her former student, Josephine Tilden. The signed petition advocating for "a natural botanic garden" in the new Glenwood Park was presented to the Park Board and on April 15, 1907, the proposal was granted.

A generation later Rosalie Edge (1877-1962) appeared as a national advocate for natural spaces. The book, *Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy* by Dyana Z. Furmansky highlights what one person can achieve. She grew up overlooking Central Park but did not become an activist until she joined the women's voting rights movement in 1915. It was the voting rights movement that taught her the skills

of advocacy: organization, publicity, policy and politics. As her marriage fell apart in the early 1920s, she became aware of birds everywhere. Birding in Central Park was visual and auditory, not the conventional killing and stuffing it.

In 1929 she disrupted the National Audubon Societies' annual meeting, by challenging the Society to respond to the accusations of a recent pamphlet, "A Crisis in Conservation" concerned about decline of many native birds and lack of bird protection. She created the Emergency Conservation Committee, committed to protecting all wildlife species. While others wrote, she signed and distributed the ECC pamphlets.



Rosalie Edge. Photo courtesy Hawk Mountain Sanctuary



Broadwing Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*), a common woodland hawk in Minnesota. Photo Bob Ambler

She successfully sued Audubon for their mailing list. She went on to create Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, led grassroots campaigns for the establishment of Olympic and King Canyon National Parks and lobbied Congress to annex 8000 acres to Yosemite National Park to protect old-growth pines. It's an inspiring read of a woman who wasn't familiar with, but did much for conservation.

Oh yes, mailing lists. Our membership mailing list is confidential and will not be sold. 37% of our membership has not shared their email address with us. We were unable to timely contact 78 of you with the Zoom link for the John Moriarty presentation at the annual membership meeting. Please when you renew, document your email address, or send it to our membership committee: membership@friendsofeloisebutler.org. Our emails will be important and few.

With thousands of visitors annually to the Garden, our membership numbers remain static at 210. The membership fees support our mission of funding projects for the Garden. I trust you are inviting and encouraging your friends and neighbors to enjoy the Garden and support the Garden. See you in the Garden.❖

Jennifer Olson



# Garden Curator's Update

by Susan Wilkins

It is early February now and a week of warm weather is forecasted ahead. As the sun sets a little later each evening and the yellow rays feel just a tad warmer in the crisp afternoon air, these February days remind me just how close spring's approach really is.



Fumewort in the woodland at Eloise Butler.  
Photo G. D. Bebeau

Winter is generally a quieter time in the physical Garden for us humans (the trails are full of animal tracks right now). As curator, I am busy interviewing and hiring all of the seasonal staff for 2022 and preparing trainings and schedules for the months ahead. Plants are being ordered, important tree management work is occurring and diseased tree debris is being

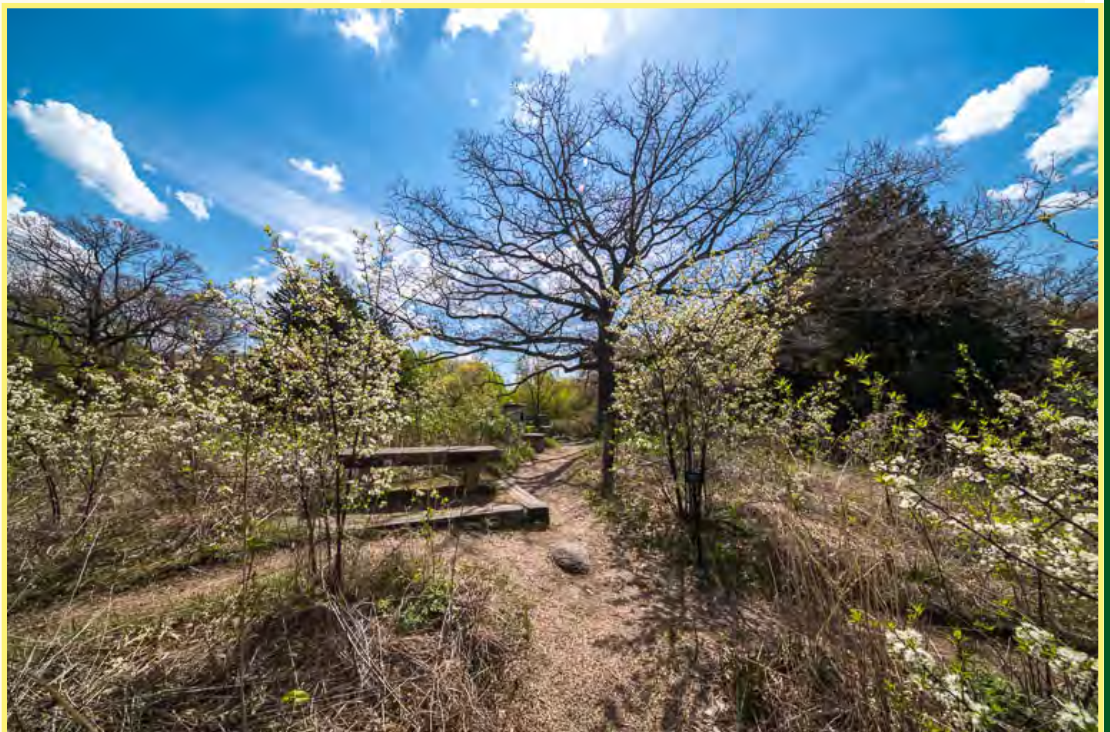
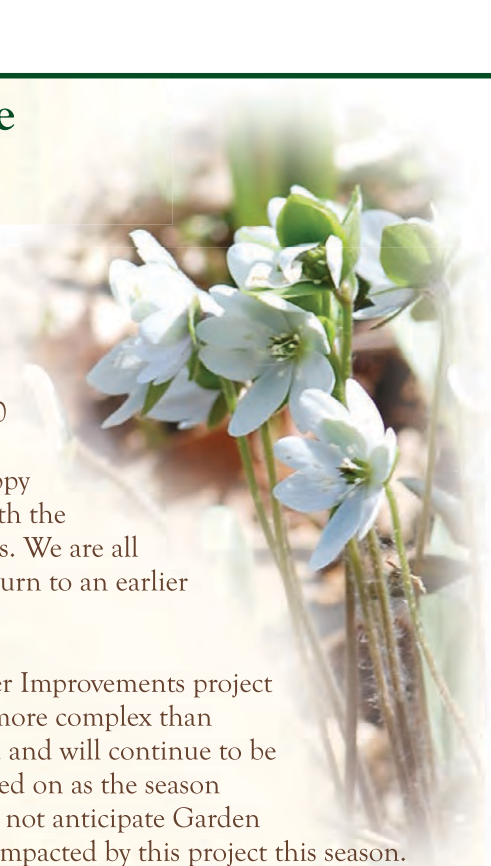
burned all this month by MPRB staff. In-depth programming and plant collection management planning for this and future years is also underway.

Garden staff are planning for a season full of thoughtfully tending the Garden, as we do each year, and providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy and learn about the plants and wildlife of the Garden. We look forward to offering public programs this season for all ages and remain hopeful that we will be able to expand on what is offered this season as compared to the last two years, based on how the pandemic continues to unfold.

We are also delighted to share that the Garden gates will open, once more, at 7:30 AM this season! I imagine many happy birders smiling with the arrival of this news. We are all excited for this return to an earlier opening time.

The Visitor Shelter Improvements project has proved to be more complex than originally planned and will continue to be thoughtfully worked on as the season progresses. We do not anticipate Garden operations being impacted by this project this season.

As we approach that most exciting time of year when the scents of subtle spring things like moist mosses and warming bark emerge and the sounds of water trickling and cheerful birds pop up here and there to our delight, I want to wish each and every one of you the very best for a season of touching down, deeply, on the beauty of nature that lives inside and outside of each one of us. May we all take good care of ourselves, each other and this incredibly beautiful planet, our only home, now and always. Enjoy the start of spring!❖



Right: The Blazing Star Boulevard in the Garden awakens in the Spring.  
Photo Bob Amber.



## Warblers in the Garden by Howard Towle



Spring is the favorite season for many Garden enthusiasts, enjoying the newly emerging ephemerals that carpet the woodland floor.

Spring is also the favorite season for most birders, as winter's hardy residents are joined by throngs of migrants returning from their more southerly winter homes. Among these, the most anticipated for many birders is the return of the colorful and lively warblers. From late April through the month of May, migrating warblers can be encountered on their northward journeys. Twenty-seven warbler species have been reported in the Garden and surrounding Wirth Park. In a typical spring season over twenty of these can be seen in the Garden. Only two of these species, Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler, regularly nest in the Garden with the majority continuing their treks to breeding grounds in northern Minnesota and Canada. Some of the most abundant migrating warblers that can be



Common Yellowthroat Warbler. Photo - Howard Towle



Black and White Warbler. Photo - Tom Burns

found in the Garden are the aptly named Yellow-rumped and Black-and-White warblers, as well as the oddly named Tennessee and Nashville warblers.

While these same birds and their offspring will make a return trip through our area in the fall, spring has many advantages for spotting warblers. First, in the spring all warblers sport their brightest and most colorful plumages, prepared for the annual ritual of attracting mates. By fall, many, but not all, warblers will molt to considerably duller and harder to distinguish plumages. Second, in spring there is often less foliage to thwart efforts to find warblers as they rapidly move about in the trees. Third, warblers and all other birds are more vocal as they prepare for

defending territories and attracting mates on their breeding grounds. Often warblers are first detected and identified once their songs are learned by hearing them rather than seeing them.

Identifying warblers can be challenging for new birders. Most frustrating is the fact that they seldom stay in one spot for more than a few seconds, constantly flitting from branch to branch and leaf to leaf in search of their insect prey. In addition, chances are you may only get a glimpse of your quarry, perhaps only the undersides or a portion of the bird.



Yellow-rumped Warbler. Photo - Howard Towle



*May - when every warbler in the woodland sings a song of joy. Martha Crone*



Nashville Warbler. Photo - Tom Burns

Studying your field guide before heading out helps immensely, as knowing what identifying features to look for is essential. Migration does not occur in a uniform manner but is greatly affected by weather patterns. Look for days with southerly winds, especially following a period of more northerly winds.

Some of my best warbler outings have occurred following a late night or early morning rain, which can interrupt migrating warblers. This phenomenon is known as a 'fallout.' Migrating warblers often follow resident chickadee flocks who know their way around the woodlands. Finding a spot near a stream, pond or lake edge can often lead to highly productive 'warbling.' As you get more experienced, learning the songs of warblers can be a great aid in helping to focus your search for new species.

There are a number of resources that have recordings of bird songs and calls, including eBird, the bird tracking resource of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology at <http://ebird.org>.

You might want to consider joining the Early Birders group that meets each Saturday from April to October to bird in and around the Garden. Having knowledgeable birders to help identify birds can be of great value in learning and more eyes searching often means more birds found. Check with the Garden Shelter at 612-370-4903 for starting times and to sign up. Both experienced and new birders are welcome. ❖

Howard Towle has actively birded at Wirth Park for over 30 years, having seen more than 160 species in the park. Since retirement from the University of Minnesota, he has been a volunteer at the Eloise Butler Garden shelter.

Page corner photos are by David Brisance.

Pg. 4: Cape May. Pg. 5: Blackburnian



Tennessee Warbler. Photo - Tom Burns



Yellow Warbler. Photo - Howard Towle

### In Years Past

Eighty years ago on May 19, 1942 Martha Crone wrote in her Garden Log and her diary - "A red letter day." She recorded 24 other birds and these 20 warblers: Golden-wings, Parula, Canada, Cape May, Mourning, Yellow-throat, Blk-throated Green, Blackburnian, Red Start, Magnolia, Blk & White, Wilsons, Tennessee, Nashville, Myrtle, Chestnut-sided, Black-poll, Bay-breasted, and Connecticut.

A day later Miss Aler was in and logged 86 species, including 22 warblers. Lulu May Aler originated a bird feeding station at the Garden in 1932 and led an earlier version of "Early Birders" in the Park. For more details on Miss Aler and bird feeding use this link:

<https://www.friendsofeloisebutler.org/pages/history/birdfeedstation.html>



# The Trilliums at Eloise Butler

*These early flowers are the most, delicate and the most admired for their beauty.*

**A**pril and May is the time for Trilliums. There are nine species in the The Eloise Butler Wild-flower Garden.

They bloom at different times so you will never see all nine on a single visit. All are found in the woodland part of the Garden. Only four of the nine are native to Minnesota. All the others are native elsewhere in North America but continue to grow here. Over the 115 years of the Garden's history there were six other non-native species experimented with by the Curators, but they have not been survivors and are noted below as "historical."

**O** Trilliums are based on the number 3. There are 3 colored petals, 3 sepals that are usually green but colored on some species. Stamens are in 2 sets of 3, the ovary has 3 united carpels and the big green parts at the top of the stem number 3. They look like leaves but are not, they are extremely large size floral bracts that in the case of Trilliums fulfill the function of leaves. The leafless aerial stem, called a 'scape' is the above ground portion of the rhizome. Most plants with scapes also have leaf stalks rising from the root, but not Trilliums. Most flowers are atop the bracts but Nodding Trillium flowers hang beneath them.♣



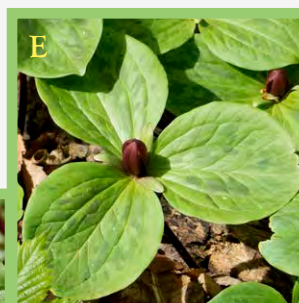
**The native Trilliums & dates of introduction**  
(A) Large-flowered 1908, (B) Snow (or dwarf) 1910,  
(C) Drooping 1931, (D) Nodding, indigenous. Photos - Bebeau



**The historical Trilliums & dates of introduction:**  
(I) Wax , 1918. Photo Thomas G. Barnes  
(J) Red, 1993; Photo Thomas G. Barnes  
(K) Western, 1948. Photo Nevada Native Plants

Early years listed are from Eloise Butler's Log. 1933 to 1959 from Martha Crone's Log. 1993 - Cary George.

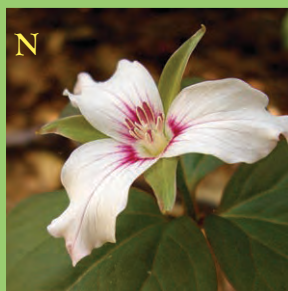
Some of the historical species were planted many times but the habitat or climate was not to their liking. The other non-natives still present have found a sweet spot.



**Non-natives in the Garden & dates of introduction**

(E) Toadshade, 1920  
(F) Purple, 1910  
(G) Sweet Betsy, ?  
(H) Yellow, 1946  
Page top (O) Prairie, 1913

Photos - G. D. Bebeau



**The historical Trilliums & dates of introduction**  
(L) Ozark, 1953. Photo Thomas G. Barnes  
(M) Rose, 1946. Photo G. A. Cooper  
(N) Painted, 1914. Photo Nelson de Barros.

For more details on the Trilliums and for the scientific names, see the website html version of this page.

# Members Page

## Reelected MPRB Commissioners

The newly elected Commissioners of the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) have now taken office. We are pleased to have back in office Commissioners Meg Forney and Stephanie Musich, who are both strong supporters of the Friends, the Wildflower Garden and the work of the Friends Invasive Plant Action Group (FIPAG). Commissioner Forney has also been chosen President of the Board.

## Sign up for Twigs and Branches

A monthly email update from the Friends containing news from the Garden and relevant MPRB projects, as well as access to website content featuring short articles from our Board and membership. These articles are written to highlight connections of the plants, history and lore of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden with different time frames or outside events. The sign-up form is on the website homepage.

## 25 Years Ago

In 1997, the Friends completed funding for the reconstruction of the back gate to the Wildflower Garden, replacing the cyclone wire fence and gate of 1938 vintage. Designed by Brower and Associates for the MPRB, the gate mimics the 1990 front gate in design but with 2 columns instead of 4. The Friends paid LaMere Concrete and Able Fence \$12,895 for the stone and iron work, followed by \$3,649 to Selby Ornamental Iron for the wrought iron fencing. The fencing was just near the gate and did not include the fence section along the north boundary - that was replaced in 2005.

The back gate was the main entrance for years when people arrived by Streetcar or walking. Tamaracks were so prevalent in the early Garden that the path in from the back was known as "Tamarack Trail." Gate photo - G. D. Bebeau



Memberships, memorials and donations to the Friends are tax deductible and are the funds we use for our mission to protect, preserve, and promote the interests of the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary as a sanctuary for native flora and fauna of Minnesota and to educate and inspire all people in relating to the natural world so that the Garden remains a special place for generations of people to enjoy. Details on website.

## New Members

Diane Pederson, Basic; Joanne Patterson, Sponsor; Peggy Spaeth, Benefactor.

## Donations Received

Mark Addicks, Elizabeth Anderson, Michael & Romy Anderson, Rebekah Anderson, Anonymous, Mary Kay Arthur, Richard Baker, Candyce Bartol, Scott Beers, Carolyn Belle, Alan Branhagan, Kathleen Connelly, Pamela Desnick, Maria Eggemeyer, Elaine Eschenbacher, Greg & Sarah Feinberg, Meg Forney, J. S. Futch, Tom Hoch, Elizabeth Kreibich, Dan & Vi La Belle, Julie Larson, Tim & Suzanne Lauer, Sandra Levine, Ruth Miller, Jeremy Nichols, Jennifer Olson, Joanne Patterson, Linda Powers, John & Carol Quinn, Win & Binky Rockwell, Kathryn Sado, Courtney Salvey, Carolyn Sampson, Carol Stone, Evelyn Turner, Susan Warde, Pam Weiner, Jim Wittenberg.

## Memorials/In-Honor-Of

for Warren Johnson from Sheila Leiter.

for Helen Wright King from: Susan Kornhaber.

for Juanita Lussenhop from: Judy Remington & Julia Classon.

for Natalie Tittrington Quinn from: John & Carol Quinn.

I.H.O Howard & Mary Jane Towle from Helen Towle.

I.H.O. Ann Lebens from: Mary Abbott

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Go online at [www.friendsofeloisebutler.org](http://www.friendsofeloisebutler.org)  
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Friends of the Wild Flower Garden  
P. O. Box 3793  
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Interested in writing for the Gentian?  
Send an email to  
[colin\\_bartol@hotmail.com](mailto:colin_bartol@hotmail.com)



The Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary comprises cultivated but naturalistic woodland, wetland and prairie environments, 2/3 mile of mulch covered pathways and a rustic shelter where educational programming and guide materials can be found. It is the oldest public wildflower garden in the United States, established in 1907. The 15 acre site is located within the city of Minneapolis on traditional Dakota homelands and is owned and operated by the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.

The Garden is open from April 15 through October 15, weekends only October 15 to October 31. Current hours: Tuesday - Sunday 7:30 AM to 6 PM; Thursdays - 7:30 AM to 8 PM; Mondays - closed.



Large-flowered Trilliums (above), Snow Trilliums (below), all at Eloise Butler. Photos G. D. Bebeau & Martha Crone



"We have every reason to be proud of this little section set aside to show in years to come what our native area looked like." former Curator Martha Crone



### Can you identify this wildflower?



The flowers in Spring are only 1/2" wide with candy-strip petals. The answer is on page 15 of the Plant Identification Book, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.; page 19 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.  
Or on website home page.

### OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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