

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXI, NUMBER 11
DECEMBER 2014
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Des Moines Audubon Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, December 27, 2014

Des Moines Audubon Society's 2014 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 27 beginning at 8:00 a.m. The annual Christmas Bird Count will take the place of our regular field trip this month—plan for a day of counting birds in the Des Moines count circle. We'll gather in the east parking lot of the Des Moines Art Center—*Dress warm and appropriately*. Bring food and beverage for the day and plan to stay as long as possible. We'll divide into teams to check various Des Moines areas—but please contact count organizer Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or cnthomps@acm.org ahead of time if you plan to participate. If you wish to remain at home but still want to be a part of this count, you may do so by keeping track of the birds visiting your neighborhood, in your backyard and at your feeders. Keep track of how many of each species you see during the day and at the end of the day, report to Denny.

The purpose of the count is to tally all birds within a 15-mile diameter circle and report the results to the National Audubon Society. This is very useful in monitoring bird population trends. The Des Moines circle is centered at 63rd and University and it runs from Saylorville Dam to Lake Colchester (north of Norwalk) and the I-80 rest stop to the fairgrounds. The Des Moines CBC has been held since 1948.

***Please note there will be no December field trip other than the Christmas Bird Count**

"The tree sparrow, or 'winter chippy,' is a neat, trim bird...They often chase one another through the weeds or shrubbery, singing in slight, broken sparrow strains; their notes reminding one of the tinkling of ice-clad weed-stalks -- a delicate cymbal music." (Selden Lincoln Whitcomb)

REMINDER: NO DECEMBER MEETING

**There will be no December meeting for Des Moines Audubon Society.
Programs will continue in January.**

Des Moines Audubon Society's 2015 Schedule of Programs

Tuesday, January 20—Bats by Russ Benedict

Tuesday, February 10—Raptors by Pat Schlarbaum

Tuesday, March 17—Cuba by Dennis Thompson

*Please note that the February meeting is one week earlier than usual

**Dallas County Christmas Bird Count
Sunday, December 21**

Tom Lawson organized a Christmas Bird Count in Dallas County for many years. Tom was a member of the Raccoon River Watershed Association and he was devoted to recording and preserving bird species in Dallas County, but he passed away not long ago and left a big hole among those who knew him and among the birders in Iowa. Lee Searles has stepped up to help with this year's count in the central Dallas County area.

If you would like to participate in the Dallas County Christmas Bird Count, please contact Mike Delaney at mikedelaney1@mac.com or 515-339-0438 for information and directions. Mike's best birds on a Dallas County Christmas Bird Count were Trumpeter Swans flying down the Raccoon River in the morning sun.

**Christmas Bird Count at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
Saturday, January 3**

The annual Christmas Bird Count at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge will take place on Saturday, January 3, 2015. Meet at the Prairie Learning Center at 8:00 am, where volunteer birders will be divided into groups to count birds on the refuge. Birders of all skill levels are welcome and encouraged to participate; an experienced birder will be with each group. Please pre-register by December 31 by calling Karen at 515-994-3400 if you wish to participate.

Come dressed for the weather and wear good shoes or boots for walking. Bring binoculars and a field guide if you have them, snacks, and a water bottle. At noon, groups will reconvene at the Prairie Learning Center for lunch (for those who pre-register) provided by the Friends of Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge and a countdown of birds seen in the morning. After lunch, those who wish will spend a few more hours birding off-refuge sites within the count circle, a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Vandalia.

If you have not yet paid your dues for this year, please do so soon. Your dues help support this newsletter, meeting place expenses, bird feeding stations, and conservation projects. If you don't know if you have paid your dues, please email jrclark@radiks.net or call 515-223-5047. Thanks!

~~~MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE~~~

**Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from June to May.
Dues should be mailed to our Treasurer,
Jim Clark, 9871 Lincoln Avenue, Clive, IA 50325**

**Please make checks payable to "Des Moines Audubon Society"
Membership Levels and Dues:**

- Student (under 18).....\$1.00
- Individual Adult..... \$10.00
- Family.....\$15.00
- Life.....\$125.00
- (May be paid in five annual payments of \$25.00)

- *Additional Contribution for Conservation Projects _____
- *Additional Contribution for Bird Feeding Projects_____

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip Code _____
 Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Bluebirds in the City

By Rogers Shell

**Polk County Conservation and the City of Des Moines, Parks and Recreation
are going to need additional bluebird trail monitors in 2015.**

The Eastern Bluebird is a joy to behold. Many people have never seen one. We find them today in our County Parks and other rural neighborhoods, largely due to the efforts of volunteers who monitor Bluebird trails, but rarely do you see them in the City. We intend to change that, and make Des Moines, Iowa a Bluebird City.

In the 1930's their numbers had been severely diminished in this country due to habitat destruction and the illegal introduction of the European Starling and the House Sparrow, which competed for cavity nests with the Eastern Bluebird and other desirable bird species, such as Wrens, Tree Swallows, Black-capped Chickadee, and others. Bluebird numbers have since steadily increased due to the placement of nest boxes designed for bluebirds, and to the efforts of trail monitors to deny house sparrows the use of those nest boxes.

Over 400 nest boxes, are known to be currently maintained in Polk County by public and private organizations. The City of Des Moines, Parks and Recreation Department installed twenty three such boxes in Grandview Park and Gray's Lake Park during 2014. Many would like to see more bluebird trails established throughout the City.

To make Des Moines a "Bluebird City" requires an aggressive attack upon the house sparrow, because they are bluebird killers. You don't see bluebirds in the cities because house sparrows abound everywhere they find human habitation. Those sparrows were illegally introduced to this continent in the 1830's and have since become one of the most successful bird species in North America. They don't need our help to survive as a species. Bluebird monitoring efforts increase bluebirds and decrease house sparrow numbers.

Our first effort produced 18 bluebird fledglings in two City Parks, and we really think we can increase those numbers in the future. We need new monitors now, and as we expand the program within the City, we will need even more.

Monitors would need to commit to a weekly trail visit of less than four hours, on a day of their convenience, during the nesting season which runs from the first of March until around Labor Day. We have established a "Standby Monitor" program for those who need it for any reason. One call or e-mail will get another monitor to take their trail when they need to be somewhere else.

New volunteers will be provided a two hundred twenty page instructional publication, and will accompany experienced trail monitors until they are assigned their own trail. We have monitors in their 80's. The work is not difficult, and monitors support each other. They routinely drive their own vehicles between nest boxes. Monitoring in pairs is recommended, but not necessary.

If you are interested in this satisfying, responsible, outdoor endeavor, and want to see bluebirds throughout our City, see the contact information below.

Rogers Shell: City Bluebird Monitor Trail Coordinator (515-284-5269, deeshell@live.com)

Dorothy Brown

Paul Brown, son of Joseph and Dorothy Brown wrote to inform us that Dorothy passed away on December 4 in San Antonio, Texas. The service was December 15. Joseph Brown passed away in September 2013. An obituary may be found at http://www.porterloring.com/memsol.cgi?user_id=1476253 . In going through their things, Paul found several old slide programs that his parents had presented at Des Moines Audubon and Iowa Ornithologists' Union in the late 1960s and early 1960s. They also had a number of back editions of Iowa Bird Life and some Iowa-related books. If anyone is interested, he would prefer to pass these things along to people who might appreciate them.

Please contact Jane Clark at 223-5047 if you would like more information.

Chickadee Check-off

Please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off this tax season and supporting wildlife conservation in Iowa!

Since 1982, when the Iowa legislature created the Fish and Wildlife Fund Tax Check-off, Iowans have been able to bring a little wildness into the tax season. The Fish and Wildlife Tax Check-off, known popularly as the Chickadee Check-off was created to allow people to make a charitable donation to wildlife conservation in Iowa out of their tax refunds or by tacking a few dollars on to any taxes owed. When filling out the state income tax form, just look for the contribution line (usually somewhere between lines 55-60) and write in any dollar amount next to Fish/Wildlife.

All proceeds from the check-off support the Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Diversity program, responsible for protecting more than 1,000 fish and wildlife species in the state. Money from the Check-off helps improve wildlife habit, fund research studies, and support the reintroduction or protection of threatened or endangered species, from Peregrine Falcons to Poweshiek Skipperling butterflies. You can learn more about the program on the website: www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity.

Last year marked the fourth straight year donations to the fund have increased, a trend that Stephanie Shepherd, DNR Wildlife Diversity Biologist, hopes to continue in 2014. "The amount Iowans are donating to the fund is growing after a 10-year downward trend," said Shepherd. "Those donations go directly to research and habitat development for some of Iowa's most vulnerable animal species, so the funds are very important for natural resources."

"It is easy to pass over or forget, and many tax preparers may not remember to ask whether a client wants to donate," said Shepherd. "It may be up to the taxpayer to remind their preparer, or check out the completeness of the electronic program they are using."

DNR CONTACT: Stephanie Shepherd at 515-432-2823 ext. 102 or stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov

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9871 LINCOLN AVENUE

CLIVE, IA 50325

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED