

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXI, NUMBER 8
SEPTEMBER 2014
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 FIELD TRIP

Our September field trip will include Voas Nature Area in Dallas County (west of Minburn) to look for LeConte's and Nelson's Sparrows and other migrating species. Meet at Casey's in Granger at 8:00 a.m. Voas is a 265-acre prairie/wetland reestablishment with adjacent woodland. We might also visit Saylorville Wildlife Area north of Granger for warblers. Contact field trip leader Dennis Thompson at cnthomps@acm.org or phone at 515-254-0837 for more information.

A SWIFT NIGHT OUT—FRIDAY NIGHT, SEPTEMBER 12

As summer draws to a close and swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! Keep your eyes to the skies at dusk this fall and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney or similar structure to locate where Chimney Swifts go to roost in your area.

On Friday night, September 12 at 7:00 p.m., Des Moines Audubon members will "congregate" in front of Plymouth Church along Ingersoll. Please contact Karen at k.vistesparkman@mchsi.com or Jane at 515-223-5047 or email at jrclark@radiks.net for more information.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary—Tuesday, September 16 **By Dick and Sharon Stilwell**

Dick and Sharon Stilwell are winter residents of Bonita Springs, Florida where they volunteer at the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary as well as Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge and the Lee County Florida Conservation 20/20 program. Their program will cover the location of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, why and how it became a sanctuary and many photos taken in the sanctuary showing what can possibly be seen there.

The 13,000-acre sanctuary is privately owned by the National Audubon Society and draws about 100,000 visitors a year from all over the United States and many foreign countries. It is also a RAMSAR site, a wetland of international importance, and has the last remaining stand of old growth cypress trees in the US. A 2-mile boardwalk winds through the swamp allowing for up close views of wildlife.

Meetings of Des Moines Audubon Society begin at 7 p.m. and are held in the lower level of Westminster Presbyterian Church, which is located at the corner of Beaver and Franklin Avenues in Des Moines. Parking is available on the north and west sides of the church and an elevator can be accessed at the west door. For information about this program, please contact Jane Clark at jrclark@radiks.net or 515-223-5047.

Hitchcock Hawk Watch Field Trip—October 4

Big Bluestem Audubon and Des Moines Audubon are sponsoring a joint field trip to Hitchcock Nature Center near Council Bluffs on Saturday, October 4. Hitchcock is famous for its annual Hawk Watch, which we will be joining. Every year, from September through December, thousands of eagles, hawks, and other raptors migrate south through the area. The broad expanse of the adjacent Missouri River Valley, combined with prevailing westerly winds that move through the Loess Hills, creates the perfect conditions for migrating raptors as they soar on thermals and topographic induced upward wind deflections in their journey south. Early October is the prime time for Swainson's Hawks, but many other raptor species will be moving through. We may even get to visit the banding station to observe the capture and banding of hawks. Depending on timing and conditions, we may also visit Desoto Bend NWR.

It's approximately a 2 ½ hour drive to the center. We will depart from the Cracker Barrel in Clive at 7:00 a.m. and will head back to Des Moines mid-afternoon. People are encouraged to bring their own lunch, although there is a convenience store in nearby Crescent, IA.

It should be a fun and educational outing. Please contact Denny Thompson at cnthomps@acm.org or phone at 515-254-0837 with any questions. Please RSVP to Denny by Wednesday, October 1st, if you plan to attend.

“Fall Into Birds” Fall Bird Festival October 18

Iowa Audubon and the Des Moines Audubon Society will hold a family birding festival and fundraiser from noon until 4 PM, Saturday, October 18. Location will be Crown Point Community Center in Johnston. Along with programs about birds and nature, exhibitor displays, and a field trip for beginning birdwatchers (weather permitting), there will be a silent auction to help the two organizations raise money for bird conservation and education. This year's silent auction will highlight “Birds in Art”, offering many framed and un-framed bird prints, along with numerous other items focusing upon birds and nature. For more information visit Iowa Audubon's web-site in September: www.iowaaudubon.org .

100 YEARS AGO: MARTHA

It's extraordinarily rare to know when the last of a species takes its last breath and becomes irrevocably extinct. In the case of the Passenger Pigeon we know when that happened with a high degree of certainty. On 1 September 1914 at 1p.m., Martha, the last of her species, died at the Cincinnati Zoo.

At one time, the Passenger Pigeon was the most abundant bird in North America, perhaps even in the world, with a population numbering an estimated three to five billion birds. They were once so common that flocks could literally darken the skies for hours or days at a time. Yet the species was driven to the very edge of extinction in just the last four or five decades of the 19th century. It was an extinction caused by unregulated and unrelenting market hunting and "sport shooting," exacerbated by the spreading technologies of telegraph and modern railroads that facilitated these horrific activities.

While the loss of the Passenger Pigeon became emblematic for the 20th century American conservation movement, it continues to be a reminder of the need for humans to be responsible stewards of birds, wildlife, and nature. For that alone, Martha's departure, 100 years ago this month, should be remembered.

At the end of July, 127 organizations got together and sent a letter to President Barack Obama, asking him to issue a presidential proclamation commemorating the centenary of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon.

To obtain more information about the Passenger Pigeon, the centenary, and the current lessons its departure holds, see: <http://passengerpigeon.org/>

From: The Birding Community E-bulletin, August 2014

Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) **By Doug Harr, President, Iowa Audubon**

In the April, 2014 issue of Iowa Audubon's Newsletter, Doug Harr wrote these comments on the passenger pigeon:

Prior to the late 1800s, Passenger Pigeons were among the world's most numerous species of bird, with estimates ranging up to 5 billion individuals. Around 1860, an English hunter and naturalist at Fort Mississauga, Ontario, observed what may have been the largest flight of these beautiful birds. For 14 hours, a massive flight blocked out the sun almost as if it were night. Using an estimate of 2 birds per square yard, the width of the columns, and a flight speed of 35 to 60 mph over those 14 hours, three different scientists estimated that flight to have numbered from 1 to 3.7 billion birds. But with massive market hunting, killing by farmers to protect crops, cutting forest habitat, diseases and other possible factors, just 54 years later the earth's last Passenger Pigeon died.

We hope that everyone will stop and consider what disaster can befall a wild creature, due mostly to our ignorance or misunderstanding of nature. We trust that with today's increased knowledge and strict enforcement of the Endangered Species Act we might forever prevent any future similar tragedies.

It's worth noting, however, that Congress continually attempts to eliminate the Endangered Species Act or reduce its enforcement. It is thus incumbent upon Audubon members to keep careful watch for all such attempts and contact our elected Senators and Representatives to protest any change in this invaluable law.

Hummer of a Summer **by Margo Hutcheson**

In mid-June a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird (RTHB) was flying about our back garden with "cotton" from the nearby cottonwood trees in her beak. A few days later, movement in a small branch of a maple tree near our deck caught my eye. The RTHB was alternately lifting her legs straight up toward her beak to pull spider webs from her feet. She had wrapped a forked branch with spider webs and in the next two weeks, the nest progressed as she continued building by weaving in more cotton and lichens. Each time she arrived at the nest, she would poke more cotton in it using her beak, then sit in the nest using her legs and wings to push and shape the nest to her body. Finally she began adding lichens from the bark of nearby trees to the outside. June was rainy and for a few days, the soggy cottonwood nest looked abandoned but, the hummer soon returned to fluff up the cottonwood, add more, and continue to mold and shape the nest.

The first egg most likely was laid on July 4; after that Mom began calmly sitting on the nest most of the time. (The second egg was most likely laid 1-3 days later.) She left frequently but briefly to forage for food, gather nectar in the garden and drink from the Hummingbird feeder conveniently located less than 20 ft. from the nest.

On Tuesday, July 22, the first feeding was observed (18 days after the presumed date that the first egg was laid.) On Wednesday, Mom discarded something over the nest edge, possibly, a fecal sac or bits of egg shell. During the first week when feeding the tiny chicks, Mom stood on the edge of the nest extending her beak down into each chick's beak then began brooding by sitting on the nest for long periods of time with feathers spread over the nest to keep the chicks warm. After the first week, the little chicks' beaks could be seen reaching up to Mom's beak for feeding as she approached. Mom returned to the nest to feed about every hour but no longer stayed at the nest after feeding.

On Tuesday morning, August 12 (21 days after the presumed hatching date) the larger of the two chicks fledged the nest; the second chick fledged the following day. During the last few days before leaving the crowded nest, the chicks frequently tested their wings by perching on the nest's edge, then maneuvered around the rim assisted by the rapid wing motion that is characteristic of hummingbirds.

Note: Nectar plants that attract RTHB's in the garden: columbine, violet, bleeding heart, weigela, muscari, lily of the valley, privet, nicotiana, campanula, ajuga, larkspur, salvia, penstemon, hosta, lobelia and more. Nearby cottonwood trees provide nesting material; garden spiders provide webs for holding the nest together.

---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 _____

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Telephone _____ E-mail _____

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED