

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 10
NOVEMBER 2015
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Saturday, November 14 Field Trip

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center on Saturday, November 14. From there we'll venture to various habitats around the lake and in the surrounding area, looking for waterfowl, loons, grebes and other migrating species. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Golden-crowned Kinglets, White-throated Sparrows and juncos are busy flitting among the trees and falling leaves. Bring binoculars, a snack and beverage and dress for the conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact field trip leader, Dennis Thompson at cnthomps@acm.org , or 515-254-0837 for more information.



"In the fields today the red fruit of the wild roses made a pleasant contrast to the autumnal browns...a few crickets were chirping faintly...A solitary hawk was sweeping in low, wide circles over the fields -- perhaps a marsh harrier..." (Selden Lincoln Whitcomb describing the landscape near Grinnell on November 20, 1885)



November 17 Program **Ray Harden--Bird and Plant Life in the Raccoon River Basin**

Ray Harden of Perry defines phenology as the study of periodic plant and animal life cycle events and how these are influenced by seasonal variations in weather and climate. In his program, he will give a photographic presentation of birds in the Raccoon River watershed, while describing their major life activities through the four seasons of Iowa. Ray will describe the changes in the environment and illustrate the various migrations that occur, particularly among the avian species.

Ray and his wife Margaret have traveled to many foreign countries and have done environmental studies in Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Belize. They have also volunteered for environmental work projects in Arizona, Hawaii, and Iowa. Ray has informed Perry readers for two decades with his nature writings, based on his long career as a science teacher in the Perry school system, his work with the Dallas County Soil and Water Conservation District Commission, the Dallas County Conservation Board and the Raccoon River Watershed Association. Ray has a Bachelor's Degree in Biology from the University of Missouri in Columbia and a Master's Degree in biology from Colby College in Waterville, Maine.

Des Moines Audubon meetings are now being held in the lunchroom of the Northwest Community Center, which is located at 51st and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. The Center is just west of Franklin Library and is not far from the church where we met for years. There is ample parking and the building is accessible. If you have questions about this meeting place, please contact Jane Clark at 515-223-5047.

December—no program meeting

**Des Moines Audubon Christmas Bird Count
Saturday, December 26, 2015**

Des Moines Audubon Society’s 2015 Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 26 beginning at 8:00 a.m. The annual Christmas Bird Count will take the place of our regular field trip in December—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 cndthomps@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**

Mark Your Calendar--January 19 Program

Karen Viste-Sparkman and Stuart Sparkman--Off the Beaten Path: Birding in Bolivia

In July of 2015, Karen and Stuart made their second trip to South America. Bolivia is a developing country which is much less visited by North Americans than its wealthier and much more modern neighbor, Peru. This land-locked nation stretches from Amazonia in the east to the high altiplano in the west, and our tour ascended from around 1300 feet in altitude at Santa Cruz de la Sierra to over 13,000 feet near La Paz. A variety of ecosystems supports over 1400 species of birds including 25 known endemics, though new discoveries about Bolivian birdlife continue to be made. Stuart and Karen's two-week trip revealed the spectacular birds, vibrant culture, warm hospitality, and breathtaking vistas of this beautiful Andean nation. A brief stop in Peru for a visit to the glorious ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu culminated the journey. Please join Karen and Stuart as they share stories and photos of encounters with Bolivia and its birds.

**Have you paid your dues this year? Please check with us on the status of your membership.
515-223-5047 or jrclark@radiks.net**

**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 _____

Oxbow Restorations Benefit Bird Populations

By Chris Jones

An oxbow is a remnant meander of a stream that has been disconnected from the channel as the stream migrated within the floodplain, but still contains water throughout much of the year. Soil erosion and flooding cause sediment deposition in the depression over time. This degrades or destroys the oxbow, limiting its potential for flood storage, nutrient cycling, and off-channel fish habitat.

Sand County Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Iowa Soybean Association, and Fishers and Farmers Fish Habitat Partnership (FFP), have been restoring degraded oxbows in the Boone River Watershed near Webster City, beginning in 2012. Sediment, most deposited within the last 100 years, is removed from the depression down to the native sands and gravels of the river valley. The oxbow naturally fills with water from the water table, and connections to the adjacent stream are engineered such that flood waters will intrude every other year or so, allowing colonization by fish species that use backwater habitat. Native perennial plants are restored around oxbow.

The main objectives of these restorations are habitat creation for the endangered Topeka shiner, a fish native to Iowa, and nutrient processing of groundwater and tile water before it gets to the stream. But early on in the project, the project partners were also pleasantly surprised by the number and rich diversity of birds using the habitat.

Doug Harr, retired Iowa DNR biologist and president of Iowa Audubon, volunteered to assess bird populations in the oxbows. Mr. Harr used the timed "point count" method to assess this habitat. Point counts are standardized and employed as a scientific technique that allows for subsequent surveys to be done for qualitative comparative purposes. This allows future surveys that will be useful for observing changes in avian use of these oxbows.

A total of 54 species were observed and/or heard at all survey points during the ten-minute counts at each of the five site surveys in May, June and September. Although some expected species were not observed, many notable ones were. Of most interest were Sora, Bell's Vireo, Marsh Wren, and Swamp Sparrow, all likely summer nesters here.

The September survey included Alder Flycatcher, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Nashville Warbler, Le Conte's Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow. These species were likely attracted to the restored oxbows and associated bankside vegetation, and would not likely have been observed near the straightened streams with no oxbow habitat.

The survey indicates that this restored habitat is beneficial to both passerine and non-passerine species, perhaps increasing species diversity in the immediate area by 20 to 30%. Furthermore, these projects are inexpensive (< \$15,000) compared to most habitat restorations. They have been very popular with the participating landowners because they do not take land out of agricultural production, as the sites are usually too wet for crops, even before restoration.

The project partners here have restored oxbows at six locations, small compared to the 170 potential sites that have been identified in the Boone River Watershed alone. Bird enthusiasts can hope that progress will continue on projects like these that positively impact wildlife populations and our natural resources.

EAGLE RULING

In August, U.S. District Judge, Lucy H. Koh, for the Northern District of California, in San Jose, ruled that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service violated federal laws when it created a final regulation allowing wind energy and other companies to secure 30-year "take permits" for Bald and Golden Eagles. The 30-year incidental take rule for eagles had been finalized in December, 2013. Previous FWS rules had authorized only five-year incidental take permits, allowing for the deaths of these eagles. The wind industry, however, argued that the five-year permits were too short to secure funding for projects that typically operate for two or three decades.

The American Bird Conservancy filed the lawsuit in June 2014, alleging that the new rule was a violation against the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. In striking down the 30-year rule last month, Judge Koh wrote "...substantial questions are raised as to whether the Final 30-Year Rule may have a significant adverse effect on bald and golden eagle populations... The FWS has failed to show an adequate basis in the record for deciding not to prepare an [Environmental Impact Statement] - much less an [Environmental Assessment] - prior to increasing the maximum duration for programmatic eagle take permits by sixfold." The court decision essentially affirms that inappropriate shortcuts were taken in the development of the 30-year rule and that laws meant to protect these eagles were not properly followed, putting Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles at risk. The court decision invalidates the 30-year rule. And you can access the American Bird Conservancy's press release on the decision at:

<http://abcbirds.org/article/bald-golden-eagles-victorious-court-invalidates-30-year-eagle-take-rule/>

From The Birding Community E-bulletin, September 2015

If I Were The Wind

“The wind that makes music in November corn is in a hurry. The stalks hum, the loose husks whisk skyward in half-playful swirls, and the wind hurries on.

In the marsh, long windy waves surge across the grassy sloughs, beat against the far willows. A tree tries to argue, bare limbs waving, but there is no detaining the wind.

On the sandbar there is only wind, and the river sliding seaward. Every wisp of grass is drawing circles on the sand. I wander over the bar to a driftwood log, where I sit and listen to the universal roar, and to the tinkle of wavelets on the shore. The river is lifeless: not a duck, heron, marsh hawk, or gull but has sought refuge from the wind.

Out of the clouds I hear a faint bark, as of a faraway dog. It is strange how the world cocks its ears at that sound, wondering. Soon it is louder: the honk of geese, invisible, but coming on.

The flock emerges from the low clouds, a tattered banner of birds, dipping and rising, blown up and blown down, blown together and blown apart, but advancing, the wind wrestling lovingly with each winnowing wing. When the flock is a blur in the far sky I hear the last honk, sounding taps for summer.

It is warm behind the driftwood now, for the wind has gone with the geese. So would I—if I were the wind.”

From “A Sand County Almanac, with Essays on Conservation from Round River”, by Aldo Leopold, first published in 1949.

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