

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 5**  
**MAY 2015**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



### **May 9<sup>th</sup> Field Trip, 7:30 AM**

Join Des Moines Audubon members on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup> as we celebrate the return of migrating songbirds. Meet in the parking lot of the Visitors' Center at Saylorville Lake at 7:30 A.M. The main species we'll be searching for will be warblers, but there could be a great variety of nesting and migrating birds. Bring a beverage and snack for break and dress for conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact Dennis Thompson at 515-254-0837 for information about field trips.

Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup> is International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD)—a time to celebrate and support migratory bird conservation throughout the Americas. IMBD focuses attention on the nearly 350 species of migratory birds that travel between non-breeding grounds in South and Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean and nesting habitats in North America.

### **MAY 19<sup>th</sup> POTLUCK PICNIC CHERRY GLEN PICNIC AREA AT SAYLORVILLE LAKE**

Our traditional spring potluck will be held on Tuesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> in the vicinity of shelter # 6 in Cherry Glen Picnic Area on the east side of Saylorville Lake. Take Hwy 415 north to NW 94<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Turn onto NW 94<sup>th</sup> Avenue and drive 6/10<sup>th</sup> mile to the campground/recreation area. At the 4-way stop, turn right into the picnic area and then follow the roadway to the left. Drive into the back parts of Cherry Glen Picnic Area to shelter # 6.

We'll begin the picnic at 6:30 p.m. Bring a main dish, salad, and/or dessert to share and your own table service. Come before the picnic at 5:30 p.m. or earlier to view migrating and breeding species around the shelter and along the lake, so bring your binoculars! Join us for a peaceful and relaxing evening in the park! Please note there will be no regular meeting in June, July or August. Contact Jane Clark for details about the picnic at 515-223-5047.

### **Iowa Ornithologists Union Spring Meeting at Algona May 22 to May 24**

The spring meeting for Iowa Ornithologists Union (IOU) will be in Algona May 22 to May 24. The headquarters will be the Water's Edge Nature Center in Smith Lake Park (North of Algona). This should be a good time for migrating shorebirds and breeding marsh birds in a prime spot in the state for them. A bonus will be access to Union Slough NWR, which is normally closed to the public this time of year. Those who love chasing migrant passerines will have the Des Moines River corridor serving as a woodland oasis in prairie pothole country. For more details see <http://iowabirds.org/Meetings/NextMeeting.aspx> or contact Denny Thompson at 254-0837. See more information about the meeting on the next page of this newsletter.

**Keynote Speaker - Joel Greenberg**  
**Hope is the *Thing With Feathers: Americans and Three Birds***  
**IOU Meeting, Saturday May 23, 7 p.m.**

Joel Greenberg has over 25 years' experience working on natural resource related issues in the Midwest. Currently a Research Associate of both the Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and the Field Museum, he has authored four books including *Of Prairie, Woods, and Waters: Two Centuries of Chicago Nature Writing* (2008, University of Chicago Press.); *A Natural History of the Chicago Region* (2002, University of Chicago Press); and *A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction* (2014, Bloomsbury USA). Joel spent four years as a leader in Project Passenger Pigeon which marked the 100-year anniversary of the species' extinction last year. He co-produced with director David Mrazek the documentary, *From Billions to None: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction*. Greenberg has JD and MA degrees from Washington University.

This talk looks at three birds, each representing a different outcome at the hands of people. With a population in the billions, the passenger pigeon was the most abundant bird in North America, if not the world. Yet within a matter of decades, unrelenting human exploitation drove it to extinction. The Kirtland's warbler has since historical times bred in a very limited range and within that tiny area could only breed in jack pines of a certain height and age. In addition, they are heavily parasitized by brown-headed cowbirds. In 1971, there were less than 200 singing males but today, although it costs a million dollars a year, we now know how to maintain healthy populations. The whooping crane was in even more dire straits, having declined to 23 living individuals twice. Extensive conservation work has been devoted to saving this charismatic species, but its fate is still an open question.

## **BLACKPOLL WARBLER PROOF**

A vigorous debate emerged in the 1960s over the exact autumn migration route of the Blackpoll Warbler. Did these boreal nesters head to the southeastern US and proceed southward through Florida, or did they collect in the northeast and proceed to South America over the vast Atlantic? Supporting evidence for the latter theory gradually accumulated, and eventually it became the accepted explanation, remarkable as it was, given the length of migration over the ocean that would have to be undertaken by such a tiny bird.

Now, for the first time, a team of biologists report "irrefutable evidence" that these birds do, indeed, complete a nonstop flight ranging from about 1,410 to 1,721 miles in just two to three days. The tiny warblers leave the northeastern United States and Canada and make landfall somewhere in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Greater Antilles, and from there go on to northern Venezuela and Columbia. Details of their study, which used solar-registering geolocators, appear in the current issue of *Biology Letters*.

Lead author, Bill DeLuca from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, commented, "We're really excited to report that this is one of the longest nonstop overwater flights ever recorded for a songbird, and finally confirms what has long been believed to be one of the most extraordinary migratory feats on the planet."

Miniaturized geolocators, about the size of a dime and weighing only 0.5g, attached to the birds' lower backs made this finding possible. By retrieving these tiny geolocators when the Blackpoll Warblers returned to Canada and Vermont the following spring, DeLuca and colleagues could trace their migration routes.

For this work the scientists fitted geocator packs on 20 birds in Vermont and 20 more in Nova Scotia. They were able to recapture three birds from the Vermont group and two from the Nova Scotia group for analyses.

Chris Rimmer, a team member from the Vermont Center for Ecostudies notes, "We've only sampled this tiny part of their breeding range [20 birds in Vermont and 20 more in Nova Scotia]. We don't know what birds from Alaska do, for example. This may be one of the most abundant warblers in North America, but little is known about its distribution or ecology on the wintering grounds in Venezuela and the Amazon. However, there is no longer any doubt that the blackpoll undertakes one of the most audacious migrations of any bird on earth."

You can find out more from *The Boston Globe* and from the Vermont Center for Ecostudies:

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/03/31/tiny-blackpoll-warbler-makes-mind-boggling-nonstopmigration/xrfuOBZn7uo5NadrZiV1UN/story.html> and

<http://vtcostudies.org/blog/the-blackpoll-warblers-daring-ocean-migration/>

*From: The Birding Community E-bulletin April 2015*

# COMMON YELLOWTHROAT

## A Common Wood Warbler

### By Ray Harden

Every morning in the spring, I hear the call of a yellowthroat coming from the tall prairie plants about twenty feet from my patio. The common yellowthroat is in the wood warbler family. It is a bird that is heard more than it is seen.

It is only four and a half inches long, a third smaller than the house sparrow, and weighs 3/8ths of an ounce. But for a small bird it has a large voice. Its cheerful song is something like "Wichity-wichity-wichity-wich". Frequently I am able to get a quick glimpse of him if he is singing perched on top of a tall plant. The female is harder to locate because she seldom calls.

The male yellowthroat is a handsome bird and his looks are unmistakable. He has a bright yellow chin, throat, and breast. His back and top of the wings are an olive-brown color. The most distinguishing feature is a black face mask that is outlined with thin white feathers. Some ornithologists say that a larger facemask is more attractive to females.

The female coloration is paler. She does not have the facemask, but has a white eye ring.

This species of bird prefers a wet habitat along streams, marshes, and waterways with dense brushy vegetation nearby. Yellowthroats have been reported nesting in every Iowa county and are widely distributed across the eastern two-thirds of the United States.

Yellowthroats are very shy birds; they creep from one leaf shadow to another staying low to the ground. They are rarely seen in high parts of a tree. Some ornithologists have reported that the bird can be called in closer by making a "pshh" sound or a kissing sound. That trick has not worked for me.

The yellowthroats arrive in Iowa in late April. The males establish their territory and begin singing to attract females. When a male finds a female he will impress her by flying twenty-five feet in the air giving a "tching-tching" call and then he will do a parachute-like fall to the ground landing in front of her.

When the courting is over they begin to raise a family. The female will build a cup shaped nest two feet above the ground in small shrubs or dense weeds. She will weave soft grasses and small twigs and then line the inside with a very soft material like dandelion down, cottonwood seeds, or animal hair.

She will lay three to five cream colored eggs with dark speckles in the nest and they will hatch after twelve days of incubation. The parents feed the babies a high protein and fat diet of insects, spiders, and caterpillars. The young birds fledge in eight to ten days. Adults have been observed to occasionally raise a second brood and they will re-nest if there is a nesting failure.

The male shares equally with the feeding of the young. If there is a predator near the nest the male yellowthroat will lure it away by using the broken wing trick.

Their nests are parasitized about 20% of the time by cowbirds. The cowbird egg will be incubated and the baby cow bird will be fed by the yellowthroats. The cowbird grows faster and it will get most of the food and eventually push the baby yellowthroats out of the nest.

The common yellowthroat seems to be doing well, no population changes have been reported and it is not on any special concern list. The major problem facing the yellowthroat is loss of its winter habitat in Central American, Columbia, and Venezuela, as the land in those countries is being cleared for more agriculture.

The next time you are in the woods or by a stream listen carefully for a "Wichity-wichity-wichity-wich" bird song and then look carefully- you might get to see the common yellowthroat.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_  
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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**