

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 10
NOVEMBER 2016
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Saturday, November 12 Field Trip

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center on Saturday, November 12. 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 cdnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837 for more information.

Tuesday, November 15: Iowa's Largest and Tallest Trees **By Mark Rouw**

Mark Rouw will share some of his experiences over the last 40 years of documenting the largest trees in Iowa. Since 1978 he has been a volunteer for the Iowa Big Tree Program, sponsored by the Forestry Bureau of the Iowa DNR. Mark's goal is to obtain accurate measurements of the largest and tallest trees and his photographs will show some of those trees in Iowa. The Iowa Big Tree Program is far from static. Many champion trees are lost due to disease, others are severely damaged or destroyed by storms and some are cut for reasons that are hard to understand. No trees remain the same size, many gain points as they grow and others lose points as limbs are lost. Keeping the Iowa Big Tree Spreadsheet which includes about 900 trees up to date, is no small job for a volunteer with limited time! Most of his big tree hunting has been done in Iowa but he has found state champion trees in Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado and South Dakota. He has also found national champion trees in Iowa, Texas, Colorado and Arizona.

Mark's first interest in trees was climbing them as he spent many hours climbing the large elm tree in the backyard where he grew up in Des Moines. He started measuring trees in 1972 and after he found his first cottonwood over 20 feet in circumference, in Hardin County, Iowa, he was hooked on finding big trees! He also has a passion for art and the natural sciences, studying art at Grand View College for three years and graduating from Drake University with a major in painting and drawing. Since 1986 he has worked at the Science Center of Iowa where he is the Animal Specialist. Among other works he did the illustrations for the field guide "Amphibians and Reptiles of Iowa".

Des Moines Audubon meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. and are 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. 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.

Reminder--no program meeting in December

Des Moines Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Friday, December 23, 2016

Des Moines Audubon Society's 2016 Christmas Bird Count will be held on Friday, December 23 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. Please contact count organizer Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or cnthomps@gmail.com ahead of time if you plan to participate and we'll divide into teams to check various Des Moines areas. *Dress warm and appropriately.* Bring food and beverage for the day and plan to stay as long as possible. 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 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**

Dallas County Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 17, 2016

Join Dallas County Conservation Board and Raccoon River Watershed Association for a day of birding with a purpose. Each year local bird clubs gather around the Christmas holiday to take a “snapshot” of what birds are in their area. This information is sent to National Audubon Society which looks at the long term health of bird populations over the last 100 years. Count participants are divided into groups, each with an experienced birder in a different location in the county. We usually hike in the morning and drive the area in the afternoon. It does not matter if you are a beginning or experienced birder; the day is filled with beauty and opportunities for learning. Registration is required for this free program. To register, contact: Dallas County Conservation Board at 515-465-3577 or conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov

Gone South

By Carol Berrier

We will miss them at our feeders and in our flower gardens. The Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have gone south to warmer climes. A bit over three inches long and weighing about as much as a dime, Ruby-throats have prodigious memories. They can remember the locations of favorite flowers and feeders, and will stop en-route each year. Hummingbirds occur only in the western hemisphere, and most of the 365 species live in the tropics. The Bee Hummingbird of Cuba is the world's smallest bird. Our Ruby-throats are migratory, and with stored fat can fly 1,200 miles without stopping, crossing the Gulf of Mexico on the way.

Male Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have iridescent red throats and green backs. The females and fledglings lack red throats, but have distinctive white spots on either side of their tails. With wings beating 55 times per second, hummingbirds can fly forward or backward, straight up, down or sideways, and hover. In forward flight, wingbeats increase to 75 per second, making a buzzing sound. With heartbeats of more than 600 a minute, the birds have extremely high metabolisms, requiring them to spend most of their waking hours eating. This explains why they so aggressively defend their food sources. The fact that they have no down under their feathers also forces them to seek food and warmth, slipping into torpor when cold to conserve energy.

Male and female hummingbirds come together only to mate on neutral ground, after which they part ways and defend separate territories. The female builds a tiny nest camouflaged with lichens, where she lays two eggs. She sometimes starts a second brood while still feeding the first brood with nectar and small insects. What an industrious little bird!

Editor's note: There is a program on hummingbirds from Iowa Public Television that can be accessed at: www.pbs.org/video/2365861611/ . .

The Snow Birds Are Back **By Ray Harden**

They're back. I have wondered what has taken them so long, last year they were here in late September. This fall I saw the first ones at my feeder on October 12th and as the weather gets colder more will be coming. Just as the American robin is a sign of spring the dark-eyed junco is a sign that winter is on the way.

The juncos are one of Iowa's most common winter birds from October to April. In spring they fly north to nest in the spruce and fir forest of Canada and the northeastern part of the United States.

Juncos in our area have several common names. They are more correctly called dark-eyed junco, but they are also called the slate-colored junco, snowbird, and junco.

They are sparrow sized birds, about six inches long. The males are a slate -gray color on their back, head, throat, and the upper half of their breast. The bottom half of their breast and belly is white. The females are very similar in color as the males, but have a slightly brownish tint on their head and wings. From a distance it is difficult to tell the sexes apart. Both the males and females show white outer tail feathers when they fly and both have a pinkish colored bill.

Because they nest in Canada we seldom get to hear the bird's song. It is a high pitched non-distinct trill. This time of the year in Iowa we do hear their alarm call which is a metallic clicking sound.

William Rowan, a Canadian scientist, used this species in a very famous experiment in the 1920's. He wanted to find out the cause of bird migration and breeding behavior. He used juncos in his experiments to prove that the trigger of these behaviors was the amount of sunlight to which the birds were exposed.

Bird banding studies have also shown an interesting pattern in their migration. The adult females migrate the greatest distance south in the winter. They fly to the southern parts of the United States and into northern Mexico. The juncos in Iowa are probably older males and young females. The young males show the least amount of migration, they stay in the northern part of the Great Lake States. Scientists speculate that the shorter migration helps the young males claim preferable nesting territory when the breeding season occurs.

Juncos exhibit a very strong flocking behavior. Banded birds have proven that the flocks stay together for years at a time. The flock also has a definite pecking order; some members do not eat until the dominant birds have eaten.

They are very useful birds because one-third of their diet consists of ragweed seeds. They also eat thistle, grass, and other weed seeds. At a bird feeder they will eat millet, cracked corn, and bread crumbs. They prefer to eat on the ground, eating the seeds that other birds have spilled from the feeder.

According to several ornithologists the population of juncos has declined over the past few years. This population decline is attributed to the increased use of pesticides and herbicides that destroy the bird's natural food supply.

These handsome winter birds should be appreciated for their role in the environment as consumer of noxious weed seeds. When you see juncos this winter think about those little birds helping to reduce hay fever pollen next summer.

See these websites for photographs and more information: www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/dark-eyed-junco
or www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Dark-eyed_Junco/id



"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)



Birding Polk County with Ames Big Bluestem Audubon **Sunday, November 20**

Despite being our state's most populous and urbanized county, Polk County still has an amazing amount of great birding habitat. The Saylorville Reservoir area will most likely be our main focus with waterbirds being our main query. In Ames, the group is meeting at the parking lot behind Wild Birds, Unlimited for a 1:00 PM departure. NOTE the DEPARTURE TIME. Polk County residents should contact Eric Ollie at uphawkeye@gmail.com or 515-238-3610 for information about where and when to meet locally,

Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from July to June
If you would like to check on the status of your membership, please email jrclark@radiks.net
or call 515-223-5047

**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 _____

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Permit No. 1142
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