

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 2**  
**FEBRUARY 2016**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 13 FIELD TRIP**

For the February 13 field trip, meet at the Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center at 8:00 a.m. for birding around Moeckley Prairie and Big Creek Lake State Park near Polk City. We'll be looking for Gray Partridge, Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs in the open country and check out the cedars and pines around Big Creek for wintering species. Dress for conditions, wear warm boots for cold weather and bring a beverage and snack for break. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! *Please contact Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or [cnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cnthomps@gmail.com) for more information.*

Monthly field trips are usually held on the second Saturday of the month, providing great outdoor experiences for Des Moines Audubon members and guests. Not only are these opportunities to see some good birds, they are also times of socializing with people who enjoy the same things that you do. Beginners are welcome and this is a great way to improve your birding skills by joining a wide range of birders.



**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 7 P.M.**  
**Purple Martins: America's Most Wanted Bird!**  
**By Tim Gedler**

Tim Gedler, Park Manager for Walnut Woods State Park, will present a program on Purple Martins at our February meeting. His program will highlight many aspects of the largest member of the swallow family in the United States. The Purple Martin has had a close relationship with mankind dating back to Native Americans who were among the first people to place natural gourds around their settlements to attract these beautiful birds. The program will focus on the life history of the species as well what it takes in the "modern" world to attract nesting martins. Learn all about the hard work involved as well as the many benefits of becoming a Purple Martin "Landlord".

Tim is a graduate of Simpson College (1986) with Environmental Science Degrees. His past work experiences include National Audubon and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, the National Park Service in Wind Cave National Park and Jewel Cave National Monument in South Dakota. He has worked with Iowa DNR state parks bureau for nearly thirty years at Prairie Rose State Park, George Wyth State Park, and currently at Walnut Woods State Park in West Des Moines.

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 51<sup>st</sup> 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.

## **Trumpeter Swan Soirée A Success!**

Des Moines Audubon member Roy Adolphson reported that the Trumpeter Swan Event at Walnut Woods on January 30 was extremely well-attended. Many families with young kids were in attendance, and the live swan presentation at 11:00 o'clock was "standing room only". The subject swan was being rehabilitated from a collision with a power line, and will be released into the wild in May, probably somewhere like Lake Rathbun in southern Iowa.

Pat Schlarbaum of Iowa DNR reported that "Park Ranger, Tim Gedler hosted a mighty fine Swan Soirée at Walnut Woods State Park south of Des Moines." The lodge was overflowing for indoor presentations. Maffit Reservoir was frozen, so Tim provided access to a private Hallett sand pit on the Raccoon River nearby. There were a hundred or so Trumpeter Swans coming and going with lots of flights leaving and returning between 3 and 4 p.m.. A few thousand Canada Geese with Mallards were keeping the quarry open.

## **Des Moines Bald Eagle Day Friday February 12 and Saturday, February 13**

**Friday, February 12:** Iowa DNR will be hosting a lunch with eagles at Grays Lake, 2100 Fleur Drive in Des Moines. Outdoor viewing and replica nest 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. For information call 515- 432-2823, extension 104.

**Saturday, February 13:** The City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department is teaming up with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Fellowship Baptist Church on February 13th to host Bald Eagle Day on the SE 6th Street Bridge. Between the hours of 10:00 am and 3:00 pm there will be spotting scopes and people on the bridge to assist with viewing some of the wild Bald Eagles in Des Moines and a Bald Eagle nest located along the Des Moines River Trail. Inside Fellowship Baptist Church, you will be able to warm up, relax and listen to presentations by Urbandale author and photographer, Ty Smedes, and wildlife rehabilitation organization, S.O.A.R. Ty Smedes will give a slide presentation at 10:30 am and 12:30 pm that will include everything you ever wanted to know about Bald Eagles. SOAR - Saving Our Avian Resources will present at 11:30 am and 1:30 pm with a live education ambassador Bald Eagle and another guest education ambassador. SOAR will also be discussing the current hazards that Bald Eagles face in today's environment and the steps taken when eagles are brought into wildlife rehabilitation. All ages are welcome, there will be children's activities and the event is free and open to the public. For more information call Joel at Des Moines Parks and Recreation (515) 248 6369.

What: Bald Eagle Day

When: Feb. 13th 10:00 am -3:00 pm

Where: Fellowship Baptist Church 1503 SE 6th Street and on the SE 6th Street Bridge

Who: All ages welcome

Why: Observe wild bald eagles outside, captive bald eagle, activities and presentations inside

Fee: Free

For Additional information: Contact Joel at 515 248 6369 [www.parksEE@dmgov.org](http://www.parksEE@dmgov.org)

---

## **Saylorville Lake Bald Eagle Watch Sunday, February 28, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

Start the driving tour at the visitor's center at Saylorville Lake with eagles at every stop. Attend a special live eagle program at Jester Park Lodge. For more information call 515-276-4656

Each winter, Bald Eagles congregate along the open waters below the dam at the Saylorville Reservoir looking for food, creating an excellent opportunity for viewing. This event provides you with the thrill of viewing eagles in the Des Moines River Valley and educational programming to increase your understanding of these majestic birds. Specific viewing locations and program schedules can be obtained at the Saylorville Visitors' Center on the day of the event. No registration is required for this free program.

---

## **Volunteers Needed**

If you would like to volunteer for any of these events, please contact the numbers provided above or contact Jane Clark at [jrclark@radiks.net](mailto:jrclark@radiks.net) or call 515-223-5047.

## 2015 Des Moines Christmas Count, by Denny Thompson

The Des Moines Christmas Count was held on Saturday, December 26. Temperatures hovered around the freezing mark with foggy conditions. There was no snow on the ground and all water was open. We had 13 participants in 7 field parties and 5 feeder watchers.

Our total of 69 species was respectable given fewer participants than usual. We totaled 18,046 individual birds, which is a bit lower than recent counts. Saylorville being ice-free probably impacted our waterfowl numbers, but 16 species of waterfowl is quite good. Our individual totals were boosted by the large number of gulls on the Des Moines River, but we didn't look for a downtown crow roost this year. The 161 American White Pelicans below Saylorville Dam shattered our previous high. 329 American Robins has only been topped once previously on the count. Otherwise, overall numbers for land birds were generally average to below average.

Mega-highlights included our first ever Summer Tanager (at a feeder near Walnut Woods State Park) and only our second Black-legged Kittiwake. Other highlights included: Red-breasted Merganser, Double-crested Cormorant, Northern Shrike, three species of Icterids, and Pine Siskin. Cedar Waxwing was by far the biggest miss. Thanks to all the participants for making the count a success.

Greater White-fronted Goose	2	Barred Owl	3
Snow Goose	6	Belted Kingfisher	5
Cackling Goose	186	Red-bellied Woodpecker	45
Canada Goose	5028	Downy Woodpecker	88
Trumpeter Swan	12	Hairy Woodpecker	23
Gadwall	11	Northern Flicker	13
Mallard	408	Pileated Woodpecker	4
Northern Shoveler	1	Northern Shrike	1
Redhead	20	Blue Jay	63
Ring-necked Duck	3	American Crow	910
Lesser Scaup	3	Black-capped Chickadee	120
Common Goldeneye	186	Tufted Titmouse	8
Hooded Merganser	12	White-breasted Nuthatch	77
Common Merganser	151	Brown Creeper	6
Red-breasted Merganser	1	Carolina Wren	3
Ruddy Duck	2	Eastern Bluebird	6
Wild Turkey	27	American Robin	329
Double-crested Cormorant	5	European Starling	2685
American White Pelican	161	American Tree Sparrow	209
Great Blue Heron	1	Song Sparrow	8
Bald Eagle	36	White-throated Sparrow	7
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Harris's Sparrow	10
Cooper's Hawk	1	White-crowned Sparrow	2
Red-tailed Hawk	24	Dark-eyed Junco	289
Rough-legged Hawk	2	Summer Tanager	1
American Kestrel	4	Northern Cardinal	221
Merlin	1	Red-winged Blackbird	22
American Coot	5	Common Grackle	13
Ring-billed Gull	5523	Brown-headed Cowbird	9
Herring Gull	40	Purple Finch	4
Black-legged Kittiwake	1	House Finch	84
Rock Pigeon	409	Pine Siskin	3
Eurasian Collared-Dove	3	American Goldfinch	104
Mourning Dove	142	House Sparrow	249
Great Horned Owl	2		

## **Bird Brain!**

**By Carol Berrier**

In the 1920's biologists began to dispute the long-held belief that birds can't learn or reason, but act solely on instinct. Indeed, much of their behavior *is* instinctive, but growing evidence shows that birds do learn to adapt through experience, trial and error, and insight. British biologists learned in the twenties that titmice were following milk carts, removing the cardboard lids from bottles, and sipping the cream. Other bird species learned from their example!

In Norway and Sweden crows pull up ice-fishing lines with their beaks. Walking backwards as far as possible with the line in their beaks, the crows will then put the line down and walk forward on top of the line to keep it from slipping. Back at the hole, the process is repeated until the fish or bait can be reached,

Crows in the U.S. and Japan have learned to drop hard-shelled nuts on the street near a traffic light and wait for the traffic to crack the nuts, and the light to change before retrieving the nutmeats.

Egyptian vultures throw rocks at ostrich eggs to get at the contents.

Blue jays and chickadees hide hundreds of food caches in the fall, which they remember and retrieve throughout the winter.

Ravens often work as a team. One distracts a predator while the other grabs its prey.

Galapagos woodpecker finches use wood splints or cactus spines as tools to pry out grubs. Caged jays and crows make tools out of wire, paper, or feathers, bending them as needed to rake out-of-reach food pellets into their cages.

Interest in laboratory experiments testing learning ability in birds grew in the fifties. Crows, ravens and jays are favorite subjects, as are canaries and pigeons. An African grey parrot named Alex stands out. Irene Pepperberg, a Harvard University research associate, began working with Alex in 1977. By 2007, Alex could identify 100 different objects, seven colors, five shapes, and quantities up to six. He also could understand concepts like bigger, smaller, and absence.

Call me Bird Brain if you wish. I will accept this formerly derogatory epithet as a compliment!

***THE WARBLER***  
**VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 2**  
**FEBRUARY 2016**  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**9871 LINCOLN AVENUE**  
**CLIVE, IA 50325**

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**