

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 4
APRIL 2016
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



APRIL 9TH FIELD TRIP

For our Saturday, April 9th field trip, meet at Casey's in Grimes at 7:30 a.m. From there we will travel through Dallas County to Guthrie County to bird at Bay's Branch and other local birding areas. We'll be visiting a variety of habitats that could include marsh, wetland, restored prairie and upland looking for waterfowl and early migrating shorebirds. On the way, we'll stop by Marsh Farm Wetland, a new wetland west of Grimes that has quickly become a birding hotspot. A visit to some "migrant trap" woodlands in the open country could turn up migrating songbirds. Bring binoculars and dress for the conditions, which might include walking in wet grasses. Contact field trip leader, Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or cndthomps@gmail.com for more information. Please note the early starting time of 7:30 a.m.



APRIL 9TH LUNCH INVITATION

The Gerety Family has generously invited field trip participants for lunch at their place after the field trip on the 9th of April. They live out in the country in Western Dallas County. Please contact Kevin or Kim by April 6th if you have any allergies or food restrictions. Their phone number is 641-439-5410.

TRAVELS IN NEPAL

By Ray Harden

Tuesday, April 19th at 7 p.m.

Margaret and Ray Harden visited Nepal December 15th to December 30th, 2014. Nepal is called the "Top of the World" a land that has eight of the world's ten tallest mountain peaks. They will share many of the exciting adventures while in Nepal including wildlife observation, hiking, whitewater rafting, camping and meeting local people. They feel lucky they were able to see this beautiful country and interesting culture before the earthquake in April, 2015. Margaret and Ray have been to more than 50 countries and have participated in several environmental studies in Central America.

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.

Sandhill Crane Count Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt to help monitor the Sandhill Crane population. An orientation session is scheduled for April 14th at the Chichaqua Bottoms Longhouse from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. No prior experience or training necessary - just bring a desire to help and ability to attend the count on April 16th at 5:30 a.m. Contact Doug Sheeley at doug.sheeley@polkcountyia.gov for further information and to sign up for this event.

Whiterock Conservancy--Spring Warbler Count

1313 Fig Avenue, Coon Rapids, IA

Saturday, May 7, 6:30 am or 9 am start—you decide

Join Whiterock Conservancy for a spring warbler count May 7th as migrants make their way north. The event will start at 6:30 a.m., with a break from 8:30-9 a.m., and then continue through the late morning. The event will be based out of the River House yard at Whiterock. Experts will be on hand to help with bird identification. Please bring a pair of binoculars for your personal use. Half-price camping overnight on May 6th is available to facilitate an early start! Please contact Rob Davis with questions of if you plan on attending: Rob Davis <landmanager@whiterockconservancy.org> or 712-684-2697 ext. 114.

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Meeting in Ames, May 13-15

It's time to get signed up for the IOU spring meeting! It will be held in Ames, 5/13 - 5/15, at the Quality Inn & Suites Starlite Conference Center. Big Bluestem Audubon Society will serve as hosts. This should be a prime time for migrants and Ames is close to many great birding locations. Hotspots such as Ledges State Park, Brookside Park, Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Harrier Marsh, Saylorville Lake, Colo Bogs, and Hendrickson Marsh offer a wide range of habitats and the potential for a great variety of birds. Mary Gustafson from Texas will be the keynote speaker and will talk about bird conservation initiatives in Mexico. The host site, the Quality Inn & Suites, is offering a discounted rate to meeting attendees. Just mention that you're an IOU meeting attendee when you make your reservation. Please visit the Meetings page (located under the Iowa Ornithologists' Union tab) at www.iowabirds.org for details.

Lucas County "Big Day of Birding" set for May 21

Iowa Audubon has joined with Tourism Lucas County, Iowa DNR, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and others to create "ecotourism destination" status for Lucas County, focusing upon birds. With diverse forest, grassland, riverine wetland, and agricultural habitats, Lucas County is home to a great variety of birdlife, including wonderful places for neotropical migrants. Notable bird habitats include Stephens State Forest, Red Haw State Park and the Chariton River corridor. Two major portions of Stephens Forest and surrounding private lands have been jointly designated as Bird Conservation Areas and Important Bird Areas by Iowa DNR and Iowa Audubon.

On Saturday, May 21st, a "*Big Day of Birding*" (BDB) will survey Lucas County, including several farms to be opened by their owners only for this special event. A major purpose is to try increasing the county's already extensive species list. Five volunteer teams, led by top Iowa birders, will each be assigned a portion of the county to record all observed species. Teams will all be provided with a van and driver, so that birders can just concentrate on birding. **BDB team sizes will be limited by number and sizes of vans, so volunteers for the day must contact event coordinator Doug Harr (iowaaudubon@gmail.com) by May 7th, in order to sign up and receive further information.**

Besides finding all bird species possible, the field trips are aimed at helping new or less-experienced birders learn identification. Each team member will be given a special Big Day of Birding t-shirt plus snacks and beverages for the day. Pin Oak Nature Center, south of Chariton, will serve as event headquarters. A goal of this BDB is to provide advance information about Lucas County's birds, with plans to initiate a new birding festival in 2017, to be publicized across Iowa and nationwide.

Birdwatching Classes at Gray's Lake

The Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department is offering free birdwatching classes every Wednesday through May 20, as various water fowl and land birds stop through Des Moines to refuel as they journey north during their spring migration.

“The cool thing about this program is it gives people the opportunity to come out, learn what birds are here at Gray's Lake, they can get a little nature on their lunch hour,” said Jen Fletcher of the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department. “It's free, we've got volunteer instructors that come out and show people what's here.”

Parks and Recreation staff will meet with the public from 11:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. near the beach at Gray's Lake Park on each Wednesday for the event. Binoculars will be provided for those who don't have their own. Each week will feature a new bird of focus, and the group will then go “birding” in the park. Through April 1, the focus was on water birds, including ducks, geese, loons, grebes, mergansers, pelicans, and herons. From April 8-May 20, the focus will shift to songbirds, like warblers, vireos, thrushes and sparrows.

The Eastern Bluebird By Carol Berrier

Early settlers named it the “blue robin” for its resemblance in size and posture to the European Robin. Henry David Thoreau described it as carrying “the sky on its back,” and we think of it as the “bluebird of happiness.” However, many of us have never seen an Eastern Bluebird. Bluebirds are small thrushes, at seven inches a bit bigger than a sparrow. Like their thrush cousins they are large-eyed, slender-billed, strong-legged songbirds. These birds of startling beauty have cobalt blue wings and back, a rusty red throat and breast, and a white belly, with the female a little paler than her mate. While most thrushes have spotted breasts, the bluebird and the American Robin exhibit spotting only in the young. The juveniles have no red, but do have some blue in their wings and tails, and they have pronounced white eye-rings.

Bluebirds are harbingers of spring, arriving in late February or early March. After a winter diet of fruit, the Eastern Bluebirds turn to summer fare of insects and earth worms that provide protein for their young. Pioneers thought of these cavity nesters as common yard birds which often built their nests under the eaves of their buildings in last year's Cliff Swallow nests. Or they nested in abandoned woodpecker holes, rotting fence posts, or tree snags. With the spread of imported cavity nesters, European Starlings and English House Sparrows, bluebirds' eggs were pierced, nestlings evicted, and nest sites usurped. Cliff Swallows resorted to nesting under bridges, and bluebirds had stiff competition for fewer nesting cavities.

Loss of habitat, use of pesticides, and a series of severe winters added to the bluebirds' plight, and a steep population decline occurred during the 50's - 70's. The Eastern Bluebird became a rare sight, causing alarmed bird lovers to form societies bent upon recovering bluebird populations. Strategic placement and weekly monitoring of bird houses for invasive species were the prime methods of accomplishing their goal. From 1966 to 1996 bluebird numbers increased 103% due to devoted nest box monitors. During the nineteenth century, bluebirds were about as numerous as robins are today. With our help, perhaps our great -grandchildren will enjoy this marvelous bird with its sky blue back.

Birds are far more.....

Birds, it must be admitted, are the most exciting and most deserving of the vertebrates; they are perhaps the best entrée into the study of natural history, and a very good wedge into conservation awareness.

The truth of the matter is, the birds could very well live without us, but many -- perhaps all -- of us would find life incomplete, indeed almost intolerable without the birds.

Birding, after all, is just a game. Going beyond that is what is important.

...birds are far more than robins, thrushes, and finches to brighten the suburban garden, or ducks and grouse to fill the sportsman's bag, or rare waders or warblers to be ticked off on a bird watcher's checklist. They are indicators of the environment - a sort of environmental litmus-paper.

.....Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996) artist, author, photographer, and educator

Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from July to June.

**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 _____

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Telephone _____ E-mail _____

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