

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXIII, NUMBER 8
SEPTEMBER 2016
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



September 10 Field Trip
Jester Park, Polk County

Meet at 8 a.m. in the parking area of Campground #4 in Jester Park on Saturday, September 10. Ray Harden, Des Moines Audubon member, and Mike Havlik of Dallas County Conservation will lead us on this field trip. We'll be looking for pelicans, herons, egrets, and other migrating species on and around Saylorville Lake and we'll also visit the Jester Park bird blind, take short hikes in the woods, or go wherever the birds lead us. Bring a scope if you have one. For information contact Ray Harden at rayharden2@aol.com or 515-465-5504. In case of threatening weather conditions, contact Ray. A map of Jester Park can be found at: http://www.polkcountyiowa.gov/media/297898/JesterPark_WebMap2014.pdf

Odonates of Iowa – An Introduction to These Winged Jewels
By Ann Johnson
Tuesday, September 20, 7 p.m.

Ann Johnson is a life-long Iowan and who has lived north of Indianola for nearly forty years. She is also a life-long birder who has birded much of the US, Canada, and Mexico. In the summer of 1999 she expanded her natural history interests to learning identification of dragonflies and damselflies. That process of learning led to the publication of a Bur Oak laminated guide "Dragonflies and Damselflies in Your Pocket: A Guide to the Odonates of the Upper Midwest" and the creation of the informal Iowa Odonata Survey – <http://iowaodes.org>. Ann's presentation, "Odonates of Iowa – An Introduction to These Winged Jewels", will focus on gaining an awareness and appreciation of the beauty and diversity of these fabulous insects. As a member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union she has been active in many phases of that organization, most notably as the creator of the IOU website – <http://iowabirds.org>.

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.

Upcoming Des Moines Audubon Programs

October 18, 2016

Hank Zaletel will present a program on a winter trip to Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota.

November 15, 2016

Mark Rouw will present a program on Iowa's Big Trees

Hawk ID: Learning the River of Raptors
Sunday, September 25, 2016, 2 p.m., Forest Park Museum, Perry

Have you ever looked up at a hawk and said, "That's not a red-tail." There are more than a dozen different kinds of hawks that migrate through Iowa in the fall. This fun, fast-paced program will give you the basics on identifying different hawks in flight. Every participant will learn to make their own field guide while a DCCB naturalist draws it on an overhead projector. Registration is required for this free program. For more information, or to register for this programs, contact: Dallas County Conservation Board, 515-465-3577 or conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov

A Fishing Trip Turns Into a Warbler's Nest Watch
By Ray Harden

We were a tired group of four guys. Mike Delaney, Ty Smedes, Forrest Corson, and I had paddled several miles to get our campsite on Ensign Lake in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota. We set up our tents and dining fly, stowed our gear, and had our lunch. We were now ready for some resting time in our hammocks.

I was in my hammock under a warm July sun with my eyes closed and was listening to the gentle waves lap on the rocky shore when VOOOM! A bird flew over me so close I felt the movement of the air from its wings. I looked up into the low branches of the spruce tree above me and saw a male Chestnut-sided Warbler with a beak full of green caterpillars.

Ty saw the bird too and said, "They must have a nest close by." We rolled out of our hammocks and carefully looked around the area. We soon found the nest with three baby warblers in it. Chestnut-sided Warblers pass through Iowa in the spring on their way to nesting grounds in the north woods of Minnesota and Canada.

Their cup shaped nest was a foot and a half off the ground. Fine grass and strips of cedar bark were woven in the fork of a pin cherry shrub near many small dogwoods and ferns that formed a dense mass of vegetation around the nest.

During the five days at the campsite I would lie in my hammock and watch the parent birds land in the fir tree above my head with a mouth full of worms and insects. The bird would sit on a branch and look around for possible danger. It would then slowly drop lower and lower, from the tree branches to the shrubs slowly working its way to the nest. It would feed the young and then quickly fly out, always in different direction from where it entered the nest. This had to be exhausting work for them; each parent came in about every 45 seconds with food for the young. During two rainy days the female sat on the nest and covered the young with her wings, keeping them dry and warm, while the male continued to bring in food.

It was fascinating to watch. The baby birds would hear the parent coming and open their mouths looking up for the food. Once a parent had a large insect that looked way too large for the baby to eat, but mom poked it into the wide open mouth and in three swallows the baby had ingested it.

We could tell the babies were growing fast on their diet of insects and caterpillars - this high protein diet allows them to fledge in twelve days. The parents would also eat some of the insects and caterpillars, but I also saw the adults eating some pin cherries that have a much lower food value.

The babies had grown a lot the five days we were at the camp. On the day we left the baby birds had their eyes open and their downy feathers were being replaced by large covert feathers forming on their wings. We estimated the young would fledge about five days after we left the area- we were sorry that we would miss it. Sometimes fledging birds weigh more than the parents because the parents are constantly feeding the young and not themselves.

I put on a camouflage bug suit and was able to get some photos of the parents feeding their babies. We caught many fish on the trip but watching a pair of chestnut-sided warblers feeding three babies in a nest about six feet from my hammock was one of the high points of the trip in northern Minnesota.

Iowa IBA Spotlight Species: Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*)

By Doug Harr, President, Iowa Audubon

Birders know that almost all warblers are beautiful, but some species in particular tend to stand out. The Prothonotary Warbler is one of those, and sometimes a local name reflects its glowing color, such as “golden swamp warbler” or “candle-in-the-swamp”.

The reference to swamps in those two nicknames is a perfect guide to learning something about the species’ habitat. Hardwood swamps or wet woodlands without an understory are preferred, where this bird can find a hollow tree in which to nest. Prothonotaries are the only eastern cavity-nesting warbler (the only western cavity-nester is Lucy’s Warbler) and will even use a nest box in the right habitat.

Because of preferred hardwood swamp habitat, Prothonotary Warblers are most common in the south-eastern US, although they range across eastern Iowa into southeast Minnesota. They also may be found up the Des Moines River corridor into central Iowa, near the Missouri River in southwest Iowa, and even have been recorded nesting in wooded wetlands near Spirit Lake, that area being about the very farthest northwest extend of its U.S. range.

Males are very easy to identify, with a robust body, relatively long bill, bright yellow to yellow-orange body, bluish-gray wings and tail, with a coal-black eye that contrasts with the bright yellow, unmarked face. Females are similar but a much duller olive-yellow.

Prothonotaries are somewhat slow foragers, compared to other warblers. Males tend to forage higher in trees and shrubs than females, both seeking Lepidoptera, beetles, flies and spiders. Outside the nesting season they will also feed on berries and even nectar.

Mating and nest-building begins almost immediately after females arrive on the breeding grounds, a few days after males arrive. In the species’ southern U.S. range, two nests may be raised annually, but typically only one per year in Iowa and the Great Lakes states. Large amounts of green mosses are used in the nest cavity, thought to help maintain stable incubation temperature. Clutch size usually is 4-5 eggs, one egg laid daily, with incubation lasting 12-14 days after the final egg is laid. Young will fledge at 9-10 days after hatching, able to fly short distances. If a new fledgling falls into the water, it can easily propel itself across the pond surface for a distance of up to 15 meters.

Prothonotary Warblers appear rather tame near humans, often easily observed within a few meters. But they are highly vulnerable to habitat fragmentation, and continuing loss of even hardwoods in swamps and wet woodlands is causing a gradual decline of this species across its breeding and wintering range. For nesting, a pair requires wet, wooded habitat of more than 100 acres in size, so if housing and other development or pasturing takes place near wooded swamps or in forested river floodplains, this species will continue in decline. As a result, it has been placed on various U.S. watch lists, and in Canada, where it occurs only in southern Ontario, Prothonotary Warbler is now listed as a Canadian endangered species. It is because of the decline of this bird that it has been named a “criteria species” to help designate Iowa’s Important Bird Areas.

**From Iowa Audubon’s Newsletter--Volume 11, Number 2, August 2015*

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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, educator

**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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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