

**THE WARBLER**  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXIV, NUMBER 3**  
**MARCH 2017**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**MARCH 11<sup>TH</sup> FIELD TRIP**

For the March 11 field trip, meet at the Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center at 8:00 a.m. for birding around the lake and surrounding area, where we'll be looking for waterfowl, gulls and eagles. Dress for conditions 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.*



**Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup> Program**  
**Butterfly is a Verb, by Harlan Ratcliff**  
**An Entertainment Guide to Butterflying in Iowa**

Harlan Ratcliff does a lot of butterfly photography and he also conducts surveys for them. He writes a "Butterfly Forecast for Central Iowa" which can be found on his Poweshiek Skipper Project website. In addition, Harlan also has a blog called "The Roused Bear." Poweshiek was a Mesquaki leader during the time of Indian removal from Iowa. When he signed treaties his name was written, followed by an explanation of his name: "the roused bear." The Poweshiek skipper is a small butterfly that was originally discovered and described from Grinnell, Iowa (where Harlan was born).

Harlan's butterfly forecast is found at: <http://www.poweshiekskipper.org/forecast/forecastshome.html> and his blog is found at: <http://therousedbear.wordpress.com/>

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. 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.



**Birding Basics at Gray's Lake with John Bissell**

**Birding Basics** is a free Des Moines Parks and Recreation program for novice and experienced birders to learn how to identify Iowa's avian community! The program starts **March 1st** and runs **every Wednesday from 11:00 am - 11:45 am**. Interested parties should meet at Gray's Lake's (2101 Fleur Drive) beach parking lot. Pack a lunch and your binoculars, and come learn about Iowa's exquisite birds!

## TIP OF THE MONTH: SHORT-EARED OWL-WATCHING

While people are enjoying watching wildlife, wildlife-watchers and photographers should do so in a way that protects wildlife, especially endangered and threatened species. The Short-eared Owl is listed as an endangered species in Iowa.

Short-eared Owls fly from their ground-roosts at dusk each day and put on an aerial show when foraging for mice and voles. Since the owls can be easily disturbed by anyone walking near their roosting sites, wildlife watchers and other visitors to grasslands and other public lands should observe these suggested guidelines for the protection of birds:

- Avoid repeatedly flushing or otherwise purposely disturbing wildlife when watching or photographing them. Never purposely chase wildlife!
- Keep a respectful distance from nests and young, especially in hot, cold, or windy weather.
- Stay in your vehicle, it serves as a blind and often allows for closer and longer observations without disturbing wildlife.
- Stay on existing roads, trails, or pathways to avoid trampling fragile vegetation.
- Leave the area as you found it.
- Know and observe the laws, rules, and regulations governing the site.
- Get prior permission to enter private or posted property.
- Be considerate of others around you, since group actions have magnified effects.
- Ensure that all members of the group know and follow the guidelines.
- Monitor the behavior of group members and ensure they act responsibly.
- Be aware that purposely disturbing, flushing, or chasing an endangered or threatened species is harassment and is illegal.
- Please document such activity and report it to the proper authorities.

Short-eared Owls are nifty birds, and the tip this month is to pay heed to these guidelines when in the field, where they pertain to wintering Short-eared Owls, as well as other area-sensitive species.

Adapted from: *The Birding Community E-bulletin*, February 2017

### An Appeal to Support Swampland

President Donald Trump is not the first politician to invoke a metaphor of "draining the swamp" as a political rallying cry. Leaders from both sides of the aisle have used the phrase over the decades, including Ronald Reagan and Nancy Pelosi.

Unfortunately, swamps have gotten a bad rap in the process. They should really be considered an extremely valuable part of Nature, as opposed to sites deserving derision, abuse... and draining.

Essentially, a swamp is a forested or semi-forested wetland containing standing water, at least seasonally, or continuously slow-moving water. Swamps can recharge groundwater (e.g., the Everglades) and they can serve as natural water-treatment areas, acting as filters and purifiers. They can also aid in flood control. Swamps are good at capturing and storing carbon, becoming an important resource in the efforts to mitigate climate change. They support a diversity of animal life, including unique and fascinating birds, from waterfowl to long-legged waders and warblers to raptors.

To read about why swamps do not deserve the reputation as useless ecosystems and why the political metaphor needs to be dropped, check out a late December op-ed piece in *The Washington Post* by Adam Rosenblatt, a Fellow at the American Association for the Advancement of Science:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/12/29/please-no-more-calls-to-drain-the-swamp-its-an-insult-to-swamps/?utm\\_term=.74f45401cfb7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/12/29/please-no-more-calls-to-drain-the-swamp-its-an-insult-to-swamps/?utm_term=.74f45401cfb7) .

Excerpted from: *The Birding Community E-bulletin*, February 2017

## **Greater Prairie Chickens are “Booming” in Southern Iowa** **Stephanie.Shepherd, WDP Biologist**

For the last 6 years, many partners (IDNR, Iowa and Missouri chapters of The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Department of Conservation, Blank Park Zoo, Nebraska Game and Parks, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa State University, Ringgold County Conservation) have been working together to create a grassland landscape in Southern Iowa and Northern Missouri which is large and healthy enough to support a sustainable population of Greater Prairie-chickens. These iconic prairie birds were extirpated from Iowa in the 1950s because of habitat lost, so the work to restore them to the Iowa landscape has been a huge and rewarding undertaking. Here’s an update on where we found ourselves in 2016.

A key component of restoring the Prairie-chicken population has been translocating birds from the healthy population in Nebraska. 2016 was the fifth year birds were trapped in NE and released in Ringgold County around Kellerton, IA. This year the Missouri Department of Conservation and The Nature Conservancy took over the reins from IDNR, and moved 100 birds, 40 of which were released around Kellerton and 60 which were released around Dunn Ranch in Harrison County, MO. Trapping and moving birds will continue in 2017 which will be the last year.

How are all those birds doing? Our goal was to add 100 birds, through release and natural reproduction, to the existing population. From lek surveys (Prairie-chickens gather for breeding at traditional sites called Leks in the Spring each year) in 2016, a conservative estimate of birds is 152. Our estimate in 2011 was 32 birds, so that goal has likely been met. The number of lek sites being used has also grown from 3 to 11.

One of the goals of the translocation was to increase the genetic diversity of the population. Research conducted out of Iowa State University and the University of North Texas indicates that this has been successfully achieved: there are increasing levels of genetic diversity, decreasing levels of genetic relatedness (lower chance of inbreeding) and the original pre-translocation population of birds is still contributing to the current population. In addition, research at Iowa State has helped evaluate prairie chicken habitat available in Iowa and identify areas that are most attractive to the birds and how those areas may change based on several climate and land use change scenarios.

The final and biggest part of the plan to restore Prairie-chickens has been focused on restoring the grassland landscape. The primary players implementing this part of the plan have been the DNR’s Grand River Wildlife Management Unit Staff, Private Lands Staff and the equivalent staff in Missouri as well as a number of non-governmental partners. With some recent protection, the Kellerton Wildlife Management Area will soon reach its goal of permanently protecting at least 2,000 acres of prairie chicken habitat. In addition, through the Iowa DNR’s IHAP program (Iowa Habitat and Access Program) an additional 630 acres of private land in important focal areas will be restored to prairie chicken friendly habitat.

All in all, lots of good things are happening in Southern Iowa for Prairie-chickens and other wildlife that depend upon grassland habitat. The work is far from over however, so stay tuned as all the partners working in the Grand River Grasslands strive to keep this prairie landscape **booming!**

From: Wildlife Diversity News, A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program, January 2017

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

**Dues can now 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:**

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 \_\_\_\_\_

## **Cedar Waxwings**

**By Carol Berrier**

Crabapple trees beautify the lawns where we live not only in the springtime when in bloom, but also in the fall and winter months when laden with apples. These little fruits are favorites among fruit-eating birds such as the American Robin and the Cedar Waxwing, for they remain on the trees throughout the fall and winter when other fruits are gone.

And what could be more beautiful than a tree full of nomadic Cedar Waxwings? Hungry flocks roam the countryside looking for food sources. Cedar berries are a favorite and account for the birds' name. From fall through early spring Cedar Waxwings feed on sugary fruits, adding insects and fruit blossom petals in the spring. Year-round over 70% of their diets consist of fruits.

Cedar Waxwings are a bit larger than House Sparrows. The waxwing's plumage is an elegant blend of soft, silky browns and grays on the back, wings, head and crest, a yellowish belly, a bright yellow tail tip, and a white under-tail. The bird has a dark mask outlined in white, and a dark throat. A distinctive feature of the waxwing is the red droplet-like pigment on the end of its wing feather shafts. This spot looks much like a drop of sealing wax, hence waxwing. Juvenile waxwings have streaked breasts and lack the red spot.

Waxwings often behave differently than most songbirds. For one thing they don't have a song! Instead they communicate almost incessantly with a high thin "see". Except when nesting, they travel about in flocks. They don't return to last year's nesting site, nor do they defend a chosen territory, but will leave a nest if threatened and start again. When feeding, these gregarious birds will often line up on a branch or wire, pass a berry down the line, and sometimes pass it back again before it is consumed. At times they overeat and become intoxicated on fermented fruit. I once rescued an inebriated waxwing from where it sat in the middle of a street, marveling at its beauty before putting it back on a branch with its flock.

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