

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXIV, NUMBER 8
SEPTEMBER 2017
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Field Trip—Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
Saturday, September 9th

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, September 9th and the destination will be Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Meet at the McDonald's on University Avenue in Pleasant Hill at 7:30 AM. We'll be looking for fall migrants--it will be a good timeframe for vireos and warblers. The prairie should still be in of interest and it's always a treat to observe the bison. Please contact Denny Thompson for more information at cdnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837.

Tuesday, September 19, 7:00 p.m.
The History of the Iowa State Preserves System
By John Pearson, Ecologist
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The Iowa State Preserves System was created by legislation in 1965 to identify and preserve, for this and future generations, portions of our natural prehistorical and historical heritage, and to maintain preserved lands as nearly as possible in their natural condition. Preserves are meant to remain for centuries to come.

State Preserves range from less than 1 acre to 845 acres and incorporate a total area of almost 10,000 acres. The Preserves System is defined in the Code of Iowa. This chapter describes a preserve as "an area of land or water formally dedicated ... for maintenance as nearly as possible in its natural condition though it need not be completely primeval in character at the time of dedication or an area which has unusual flora, fauna, geological, archeological, scenic, or historical features of scientific or educational value."

There are five categories of preserves in Iowa. Many designated areas qualify for preserve status in more than one category. Natural Preserves demonstrate Iowa's outstanding biological features, Geological Preserves illustrate Iowa's ancient past, Archaeological Preserves give us a glimpse of the state's original inhabitants, Historical Preserves include significant structures or objects associated with early Euro-American occupation, and Scenic Preserves are selected for their outstanding natural beauty.

We are fortunate that John Pearson, who was originally from Michigan, moved to Iowa in 1985. Besides being a botanist/ecologist, he is an experienced paddler and wonderful writer. John has led interpretive paddling trips to State Preserves along several streams, including the Upper Iowa River, the Des Moines River, and the Winnebago River. In recent years he's become interested in paddling on the Mississippi River, especially along the rugged bluffs bordering Iowa and Wisconsin.

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 the meeting place or the program, please contact Jane Clark at 515-223-5047 or jrclark@radiks.net.

Iowa IBA Spotlight Species: Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina*

By Doug Harr, President, Iowa Audubon

The beautiful, flutelike song of the Wood Thrush is a familiar sound in eastern U.S. deciduous woodlands each spring and summer. But this is a species declining about 1.7% annually range-wide, primarily due to fragmentation of remaining forest habitat by farming and housing development. This results in more predation and cowbird nest parasitism. Wood Thrush populations are increasing slightly only in Louisiana, Minnesota and parts of Wisconsin. While Iowa's numbers have dropped through our history, they appear to have somewhat stabilized recently. Nevertheless, Wood Thrush is an Iowa Audubon "criteria species" for designating Important Bird Areas (IBA), and DNR considers it a "species of greatest conservation need".

Preferred Wood Thrush habitat is the edge and interior of moist woodlands, with lots of leaf litter and healthy but not necessarily dense understory. They also may often be found in suburban parks or woodlots. Habitats are foraged by probing and gleaning for insects and other invertebrates. Like all members of the thrush family, small fruits such as wild grapes, dogwood berries and black cherries also are selected, with up to 37% of the species' diet being vegetable matter. They will sometimes "hawk" or hover above the ground to catch insects and unreachable fruit. Wood Thrushes appear a bit less fearful of humans than other thrushes, although not as tame as American Robins.

Nicknamed the "really spotted thrush" by Pete Dunn, Wood Thrushes are among the easiest to identify members of this family. That nickname very accurately describes the bird's underparts with spots becoming more like streaks on the throat. Upper body parts are all orange-brown, notably brighter on the nape and rear of the crown and a white eye-ring is very obvious, just slightly broken by a gray eye line.

Arriving mostly in April and May from their wintering areas of Mexico and Central America, female thrushes seek nest sites where they often can saddle a nest over horizontal branches at a fork or where twigs provide support and where some concealment exists. Average nest height is about 2.3 meters, and nests are constructed of grasses, leaves, mud and rootlets, appearing quite robin-like. Three to four unmarked, greenish turquoise eggs are typical; with incubation lasting about 12 days after the last egg is laid. Fledging occurs 12-14 days later. Adult males are the primary food providers for nestlings, offering masticated insects and fruits.

Most notable for this species is its haunting song, heard frequently near dawn and dusk, but sometimes throughout the day in good habitat. While songs of most thrush species are considered musical, the Wood Thrush song may top them all. Males are versatile vocalists, sometimes singing two notes at once and often combining different varieties of each part of the three-part song. In flight, its "juee" call is similar to other thrushes but more vibrating and harmonic.

To conserve this species, we must strive to maintain larger primary and old secondary-growth woodlands wherever possible and attempt to reduce fragmentation. However, even smaller woodlands can maintain Wood Thrush numbers if predation and nest parasitism can be reduced. The other main threat to this species is loss of Central America's tropical forests needed for overwintering. Audubon, American Bird Conservancy and similar organizations must do all we can to help preserve those wintering habitats.

From: The Newsletter of Iowa Audubon Society, Volume 12, Number 3, December, 2016

Birding Des Moines in September From the Des Moines Audubon Website

Migration continues throughout the month of September. Labor Day weekend is usually about the last hurrah for Baltimore Orioles and soon after family groups of Eastern Kingbirds will be ready for their southward flight. Warblers like this fall plumaged Chestnut-sided Warbler continue to slowly make their way south.

September is the peak of pelican migration. Numbers entering into the thousands are often seen on larger bodies of water, most notably Saylorville and Red Rock Reservoirs although many are also seen at various sand pits and at Maffitt Reservoir to the southwest. It's not unusual to point your eyes skyward on a beautiful fall day and see a flock of these graceful aerialists performing. The best spot to see American White Pelicans well, however, is from the various vantage points at Jester Park.

Saylorville is somewhat of an inland ocean and frequently birders discover species more closely identified with salt water. Keep your eyes open along the beach areas of Sandpiper Beach, Oak Grove, and Cherry Glen Recreation Areas (all on the east side of the lake) for shorebirds such as Sanderling, Red-necked Phalarope, and Red Phalarope. Fall may also offer up a tantalizing sighting of a jaeger from the far north as they take a mid-continent route to the ocean. Check out the Des Moines Audubon Society's website at: dmaudubon.org

If you are unsure about when you last paid your dues, please email jrclark@radiks.net or call 515-223-5047.

**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 _____

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PATUXENT RESEARCH REFUGE CRANES

Established in the 1930s by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration, the Patuxent Research Refuge is the nation's only National Wildlife Refuge established to support wildlife research. Today, most of the research is conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) through the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. The refuge and the center have been essentially synonymous for about 80 years. Unfortunately, both arms of science at Patuxent - USGS and USFWS - are likely to suffer drastic budget cuts in the ongoing federal budget tug-of-war.

One of the first casualties will be the Whooping Crane Propagation Program, an effort that began in 1966 with the arrival at Patuxent of an injured juvenile Whooping Crane. Since then, the program grew to produce hundreds of captive-breeding crane eggs and young. The program has had its ups and downs, but last summer the associated Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership crafted a new five-year plan to use these captive hatched chicks to boost the experimental Wisconsin Whooping Crane population.

Nevertheless, the Whooping Crane Propagation Program at Patuxent will close in Fiscal Year 2018 and the approximately 75 cranes at Patuxent will be moved to other institutions. Those in charge of Patuxent admit that "there likely will be a disruption of reproduction in those birds for the 2018 season and beyond" and it may "slow the rate of production of chicks for reintroduction of Whooping Cranes, at least temporarily."

One has to wonder how this original Endangered Species Act flagship effort, once ended, will be able to effectively continue to advance the cause of crane conservation.

From: The Birding Community E-bulletin, August 2017



"Here is your country. Cherish these natural wonders, cherish the natural resources, cherish the history and romance as a sacred heritage, for your children and your children's children. Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your country of its beauty, its riches or its romance."

.....Theodore Roosevelt

The American Goldfinch **By Carol Berrier**

If you take a summer walk in the Midwest, you might notice overhead a small bird with an undulating flight pattern. Each dip is accompanied by a short musical call, “per-chic-or-ee”. While perched, this bird has a long warbling canary-like song, longer and less forceful than the song of the House Finch. In fact, many people call this bird a “wild canary” after its cousin. Our bird, however, is the native American Goldfinch. The goldfinch has a sunny disposition to match its sunny summer attire. Never a scolding note do we hear, but sometimes a questioning note - - - an ascending “sweee?”. And when the hungry young have fledged, we hear an incessant “kee-hee”, which sounds to me like “feed-me”!

The American Goldfinch is easily identified by its black tail and black wings with white wing bars. The spring/summer breeding male is a brilliant yellow, while his mates is a dull olive-yellow with wings and tail a softer black. Both sexes’ gray bills turn pink in the summer, and the male acquires a dark black cap.

These little five-inch birds are gregarious, and travel in flocks except when nesting. Goldfinches are late nesters, establishing territories as small as 100 feet in diameter in late June or early July. The singing male flies in high circles over the nest site, or sings from a nearby perch while the female builds her sturdy nest in 4-5 days. He feeds her while she incubates, and they both feed their young. Often she builds another nest while he cares for the first brood. Goldfinches’ diets consist of about 90%-95% seeds, even for their nestlings. In fact, they make poor hosts for nest-parasitic Brown-headed Cowbirds. Cowbird nestlings often starve in a goldfinch nest for lack of protein.

In late fall adult goldfinches have a complete molt, and males look like females with gray bills and olive - gray feathers. Both sexes have the dull black wings and tails, and the black caps on males vanish. Flocking occurs after nesting, and the birds tend to go south stopping where food is plentiful. Females have site fidelity and often return to nest in the spring, finding a new mate for the season. Many goldfinches stay at our feeders all winter. Those flocks are often immatures.

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