

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



January 13 Field Trip

For the Saturday, January 13 field trip, meet in the parking lot at the Saylorville Visitors Center at 8:00 a.m. We'll observe birds around the Visitor's Center and then depending on activity and conditions, we'll venture out in search of birds that might be found at various sites around the lake. Dress for cold conditions and bring a hot beverage and snack for break. Contact Denny Thompson at cdnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837 for more information.

Tuesday, January 16 Program—7 p.m. **Shiripuno Lodge – the heart of Amazonian Ecuador**

Dennis and Cecille Thompson spent a week last fall at Shipuno Lodge in the lowlands of Amazonian Ecuador. The lodge is within the tribal grounds of the Waorani nation which adjoins Yasuni National Park. A six-hour motorized canoe ride was required to reach the lodge. No electricity or hot water made for a true "away from it all" experience.

As a result of its remoteness, some bird and monkey species that are heavily persecuted in more settled areas are common there (think macaws, guans, currosaws, and wooly monkeys). Most of the habitat is terra firme forest. This is Amazonian forest that is not seasonally flooded and has a whole range of rare or little-known neotropical species. Antbirds, toucans, jacamars, puffbirds and other exotics were routinely encountered. Join Dennis and Cecille for a peek at a beautiful wilderness area that few get to visit.

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.

Bird Watching Basics **Sunday, January 14, 1-3 p.m.** **Waukee Public Library, Coal Mine Room**

Are you looking for a new and exciting way to connect with Nature? Come learn the basics to identifying birds. Dallas County Conservation Board naturalist Mike Havlik will guide you through field marks, behavior and calls to help take the mystery out of backyard birds. The group will be looking for live birds as well.. Bird watching is a great hobby for people of all ages and a fun social activity that connects across generations. **Registration is required.** For more information or to register, contact: Dallas County Conservation at 515-465-3577 or conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov .

Kellerton Grasslands named Globally Important Bird Area November 14, 2017

In August, Ringgold County's Kellerton Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) was elevated to status of a Globally Important Bird Area (GIBA) by BirdLife International, based in Great Britain, and the National Audubon Society.

"The Kellerton Grasslands are well-known in Iowa for the resident population of greater prairie chickens, but the new GIBA designation was made based upon the region's critical importance to nesting Henslow's sparrows, listed as an Iowa threatened species," said Doug Harr, president of Iowa Audubon.

Kellerton GIBA also has dual designation as an Iowa Department of Natural Resources Bird Conservation Area (BCA). Kellerton was DNR's original Iowa BCA, and the first such designation of a grassland in the nation. While Audubon's IBA program recognizes sites critical for nesting by several declining bird species or important for large migration stopovers, the Iowa DNR's Bird Conservation Area program is aimed at designating large landscapes of habitat critical to a wider variety of Iowa's birds and other wildlife.

Although the prairie chicken was one of the DNR's first targets for better habitat protection on a BCA landscape, it was quickly realized that the area provides habitat for pretty much every other Iowa grassland nesting bird species, including nesting species of greatest conservation need like Henslow's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, loggerhead shrike, Bell's vireo, northern harrier and upland sandpiper.

Nesting population studies of some species were begun through Iowa State University, with original Henslow's sparrow numbers compiled by Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit leader Rolf Koford. Following Koford's retirement, DNR wildlife diversity biologist Bruce Ehresman took over collecting more nesting data, with up to 309 Henslow's sparrow territories documented in 2015 and 331 territories confirmed in 2016. In early 2017, Ehresman submitted sufficient records to the National Audubon Society so it could be considered for and receive globally important status.

GIBA designation is not easy to acquire, but large numbers of Henslow's sparrows nesting in the Kellerton Grasslands resulted in this BCA/IBA gaining only the second such international recognition in Iowa. The first was Effigy Mounds/Yellow River Forest BCA/GIBA, designated in 2013 for its nesting population of cerulean warblers, a species seeing a 70 percent national decline since 1966. Upon receiving globally important status, the Iowa DNR and Iowa Audubon will continue to collaborate; targeting even more conservation efforts to assure that these icon species can stabilize and continue to recover, while also providing far better habitat for all wildlife. Kellerton Grasslands BCA/GIBA offers some of the best grassland bird viewing opportunities in all of Iowa.

Little Winter Visitors by Carol Berrier

Mid-November brought us miserable weather with a hard freeze, wintery temperatures, cold rain and some snow, along with delightful little birds from the north. Pine siskins vied with our goldfinches for perches on our nyjer seed feeders.

Pine siskins resemble their cousins the goldfinches in size and habits, and often one must look carefully to see the difference. Like the goldfinch, the siskin is a small, five-inch acrobatic finch, which often hangs upside-down while feeding. It will share a feeder with others in its flock, and with goldfinches as well. The pine siskin is a heavily streaked brown bird, with yellow on its wings and tail seen mostly in flight. Its song is similar to that of the goldfinch, but huskier, and its call is a buzzy zhreeeee.

Siskins nest in the coniferous forests of Canada, the northern United States, and the mountainous west. They forage in flocks feeding mostly on seeds, including spruce, alder and birch. After nesting, they move out of the woods to semi-open weedy fields, where they feast on grass, thistle and weed seeds, often heading south if food becomes scarce. They readily adapt to humans and to our feeders.

There is a well-known, true story of a birder from Massachusetts who liked to sleep with his window open a couple of inches even in the winter. A flock of siskins became accustomed to breakfasting at his feeders at dawn. But as the days grew longer, sometimes his seed wasn't out early enough to suit those little birds, so they entered his bedroom and tugged at his hair or his ear to awaken him.

One winter while living in Illinois, I had a flock of siskins that stayed all winter and even for a first nesting that spring. They became very friendly, sitting on the feeder as I filled it. I was able to coax one fearless bird to perch on my finger as it ate.

Winter Bird Feeding Basics--Iowa DNR, November 24, 2017

There is a growing trend in Iowa and in this country to both appreciate and enjoy watching wildlife, and observing birds at feeders is a favored pastime. For most of us, we enjoy observing the beauty of these colorful feathered creatures, while we also appreciate viewing their various behaviors and antics from the comfort of our homes. Feeding birds allows us to observe birds up close and personal, and during cold winter months observing bird activity right outside our windows brings us special cheer and warms our hearts.

With winter fast approaching, many birds are changing their eating habits, with some that relied on insects now switching to a diet of berries and seeds. Bird behavior changes this time of year, too, and to improve their chances of surviving the winter, many species now join in flocks. A flock of birds allows more eyes to watch for predators and also to look for food sources.

Extreme cold temperatures, along with short days and long nights, make finding high calorie food a necessity for winter survival. This is especially true for many small birds, since they have a high metabolic rate. While most birds supply about 80% of their own food needs away from bird feeders (even when bird feeders are full), providing protein rich, high calorie foods from feeders can help birds survive winter blizzards and help birds be in top condition when spring breeding season arrives.

Different bird species prefer different types of foods, and they typically also prefer different types of feeders. To increase the diversity of bird species, providing a variety of feeder types in a variety of locations (around your home) is advised. An ideal feeder is sturdy and tight so that it stays in place and feed remains dry. It should be easy to assemble and clean. The three main feeder types are hopper or house feeders, tube feeders, and tray or platform feeders.

Feeders should be located in sheltered places, out of the north wind, while still in the open to allow birds to watch for danger. Placing feeders closer to the house can be effective and allows easy viewing from indoors. Place feeders where they have a sunny exposure, when possible. There should be trees and shrubs nearby to provide both shelter and escape routes from predators. Conifers are ideal for this. For ground feeding birds, providing a feeding site near cover with an open view of the surroundings works best. All feeders that are mounted on or attached to poles should include predator guards, so squirrels, raccoons, and cats cannot access them. The same goes for hanging feeders, only this time the predator guard should be located above the feeder. These guards, when located properly, also protect the hanging feeder from rain and snow.

If you offer only one food item to birds, it should be black oil sunflower seed. This seed has a high calorie/ounce ratio because of its high fat and protein content, plus it has a relatively thin shell that makes it easier for small birds to access the sunflower heart. This seed is readily consumed by cardinals, woodpeckers, blue jays, finches, chickadees, titmice and nuthatches. It usually is fed in hopper and platform feeders. While ground-feeding birds, such as juncos and several native sparrows prefer white millet, they will readily eat sunflower seeds, too.

While finches do eat sunflower seeds, they prefer nyger seed. This seed is best fed from tube feeders. It is often fed as a "finch mix," which is a combination of nyger and small bits of sunflower hearts. When fed in a long tube feeder, it is not unusual to have a couple dozen goldfinches, house finches and siskins visiting the feeder at once. This can be a particularly cheerful sight on a cold wintry day!

Peanuts are another favored food and can be mixed with sunflower seed or fed separately. With high levels of both fat and protein, peanuts are especially a favorite of woodpeckers, nuthatches, titmice, and Carolina wrens. And don't forget the suet, definitely a cold-weather bird attractant that is eaten by most winter birds. It can be fed from a variety of feeders, ranging from a suet cage to a wooden suet feeder, which is designed so that birds feed from it while hanging upside down beneath it.

Don't forget to supply water, because birds need water year around. Bird waterers with a heater element are essential, and when all other water sources are frozen solid, birds will be flocking to your yard for the water that you offer them. Also, it is very important to clean your feeders often – and clean beneath them, too. During winter warm-up periods it is recommended that a mild bleach solution be used to disinfect feeders. This will help prevent diseases associated with feeders, like Salmonellosis and Aspergillus.

If you find that birds don't visit your feeders, then perhaps there is not enough protective habitat existing for them to feel safe. Always plant native shrubs and trees, and include some fruit-bearing varieties for those birds that may not use feeders. Finally – keep cats indoors or on a leash. Three billion birds are killed each year in this country by cats outdoors, and this is the number one human-related cause of death of birds on this continent.

Now that you've invested time and effort into food, water, and habitat for our feathered friends, you will reap the benefits of that consideration with the presence of a large variety of birds in your yard throughout the winter. Observing these birds will provide countless hours of entertainment for you and your family, as well as for your friends and neighbors.

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

*Additional Contribution for Conservation Projects _____

*Additional Contribution for Bird Feeding Projects _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

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