

THE WARBLER

DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME XXXI, NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2025

EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Des Moines Audubon Field Trip Saturday, February 8, 8:00 a.m., Saylorville Lake

Meet at the Saylorville Visitors' Center at 8:00 a.m. We will check the feeders at the Visitors' Center, and below the dam and other areas around the lake, depending on bird activity. Field trips provide outdoor experiences for Des Moines Audubon members and guests. Not only are these opportunities to see some good birds, they are also times of socializing with people who enjoy the same things that you do. Beginners are welcome and this is a great way to improve your birding skills by joining a wide range of birders. Dress for conditions and bring binoculars if you have them. Please contact Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or cndthomps@gmail.com for more information.

February Program Tuesday, February 18, 7:00 p.m. Photographer Craig Meyers

An African Safari - One Person's Experience.

Craig Meyers is a central Iowa wildlife photographer who spent his career as a multi-media specialist and technology coordinator with Heartland Area Education Agency. He has travelled from Alaska to South America finding wildlife and taking photographs.

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 5110 Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. The Center is just west of Franklin Library. If you have questions about the meeting place or the program, please contact Jane Clark at jrc Clark@radiks.net or at 515-223-5047.

2024 Des Moines Christmas Count

The Des Moines Christmas Count was held on Saturday, 12/21/24. It was a typical late-December day with a low of 19 and a high of 25. There was no snow on the ground and water was mostly frozen with some open water on the larger bodies. We had 19 participants in 9 field parties.

The 78 species tallied tied the third highest record. 25 species of waterfowl was a record high. All-time high counts were set for American Wigeon Northern Flicker and Pileated Woodpecker. Good finds included Ross's Goose, Long-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Fox Sparrow, and meadowlark. Big misses were Snow Goose, Red-breasted Nuthatch and White-crowned Sparrow. Many thanks to John Cecil for tackling the huge blackbird roost in Waterworks Park and for organizing and compiling the 2024 count.

Thanks to all the participants for making the count a success.

*Indicates new high for the count.

Ross's Goose	2	Barred Owl	6
Greater White-fronted Goose	4	Long-eared Owl	1
Cackling Goose	11	Belted Kingfisher	8
Canada Goose	11664	Red-bellied Woodpecker	91
Trumpeter Swan	249	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2
Tundra Swan	7	Downy Woodpecker	90
Northern Shoveler	1	Hairy Woodpecker	22
Gadwall	7*	Northern Flicker	107*
American Wigeon	16	Pileated Woodpecker	16*
Mallard	3376	American Kestrel	3
American Black Duck	2	Merlin	3
Northern Pintail	3	Peregrine Falcon	1
Green-winged Teal	18	Blue Jay	108
Canvasback	6	American Crow	6111
Redhead	3	Black-capped Chickadee	138
Ring-necked Duck	62	Tufted Titmouse	16
Greater Scaup	1	Horned Lark	7
Lesser Scaup	11	Cedar Waxwing	28
Bufflehead	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	102
Common Goldeneye	274	Brown Creeper	24
Hooded Merganser	61	Carolina Wren	6
Common Merganser	166	Winter Wren	4
Red-breasted Merganser	1	European Starling	36152
Ruddy Duck	58	Eastern Bluebird	52
Wild Turkey	53	American Robin	47
Rock Pigeon	709	House Sparrow	646
Eurasian Collared-Dove	4	House Finch	112
Mourning Dove	64	Pine Siskin	2
American Coot	21	American Goldfinch	110
Ring-billed Gull	3	Fox Sparrow	1
Herring Gull	5	American Tree Sparrow	66
Double-crested Cormorant	5	Dark-eyed Junco	408
American White Pelican	8	White-throated Sparrow	57
Great Blue Heron	6	Song Sparrow	10
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Meadowlark sp.	40
Cooper's Hawk	2	Red-winged Blackbird	35008
Bald Eagle	209	Common Grackle	1
Red-tailed Hawk	23	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
Great Horned Owl	4	Northern Cardinal	212

Hairy Woodpecker

By Carl Nollen

Downy Woodpecker's look alike seems to get less attention by birders because it is not as common. In looking thru many years of back issues of the Warbler newsletter, I don't find that the Hairy has ever been covered. But the Hairy Woodpecker and its less common cousin, the Pileated, are probably the most valuable hole makers for all our cavity nesting birds. That long and strong beak, the best mark to identify it from the Downy, can attack wood and excavate a hole in a matter of hours if the heartwood is rotten, or take a week or longer. You may remember an old rhyme, "How much wood could a woodpecker peck...etc." About a peck! (One-fourth of a bushel). Cavities are often made on the underside of a limb. These avian lumberjacks are expert climbers, of course. It is amazing how many cavity nesting species depend on another to make their home. Wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, titmouses, bluebirds, tree swallows, owls. The list goes on. The competition surely is intense. What is nature's purpose in limiting the ability of so many species to make their own homes?

The male Hairy does most of the work to make a hole in a tree, but both sexes drum. The male typically incubates the eggs at night, and the female during the day. This changing of the guard takes place in a woodpecker ceremony with a greeting call and waving of its head. Like Downies, the female Hairy lacks the red nape of the male. Thread-like white feathers down the middle of its black back account for its hairy name. But they are hard to notice. It is best known taxonomically as *Dryobates villosus*, Greek for woodland walker and Latin for hairy. However, some DNA studies have determined that the Hairy and Downy are not as closely related as their similar appearance would seem. So, in 2015, the genus *Leuconotopicus*, Greek for white backed woodpecker superseded *Dryobates*. But some ornithologists still use the previous genus. An interesting word to learn regarding woodpeckers is *zygodactyl*, which describes the feet with two toes forward and two back.

The Hairy is a year-round bird ranging from sea level to high mountains throughout almost all of North America. It needs bigger forest areas than the Downy, which is a primary reason for its being less common than the Downy.

Gladys Black in her 1992 *Iowa Birdlife* book noted the long lifespan of woodpeckers. She trapped a female Hairy at her Pleasantville home in December, 1976, and found she had banded it in April, 1967. The *Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas II* says the Hairy's population trend is stable.

January Field Trip Report

By Roy Adolphson

Our first field trip of the new year occurred on Saturday, January 11. It was a brisk morning with a light breeze from the east and a temperature of about 24 degrees under a cloudy sky. Nineteen hardy souls met at the bird blind area in Walnut Woods State Park at 8:00 a.m. I must admit that I turned up a little bit late---I had set the time on my clock but failed to activate the alarm---so I missed going to the bird blind. I believe mostly "usual suspects" were seen there, such as woodpeckers, chickadees, cardinals, etc. A couple Carolina Wrens were in the area. After that, we walked east on the park road, where we first saw a Barred Owl flying away from us and landing at a safe distance. It was later harassed by a few Blue Jays. A Pileated Woodpecker flew over us, showing its white wing linings and giving a call as it flew to the west. When we reached the easternmost picnic area, we took a trail towards the river. Once in the woods, we encountered a couple Brown Creepers high on a tree trunk and got a close look at a pair (male & female) of Golden-crowned Kinglets. The trail led to where the new pedestrian bridge crosses the river from Raccoon River Park. From there we followed the trail along the river back towards the campground and our cars. A cardinal and a small flock of White-throated Sparrows were seen in the undergrowth near the river.

About 9:30 we drove to Dale Maffitt Reservoir to have a look at the waterfowl. The middle of the lake was mostly open, with ice around the edges. There were even a couple ice fishermen towards the northeastern end. Canada Geese were in abundance, of course---over 800, along with 135 Trumpeter Swans. Our "scopers" could not make out any Tundra Swans, however. We started on the west side of the lake, but the headwind from the east and morning light convinced us to go around to the east side, since the birds were about the same distance from either shore. We could make out one Gadwall, six Mallards, two Cackling Geese, and two American Coots among the rafts of geese. A Bald Eagle could also be seen on the far icy shore foraging on a deer carcass.

**Wildlife Diversity News, Iowa Department of Natural Resources
January 15, 2025
What About Wildlife Where I Live?**

At the Wildlife Diversity Program, in 2025, we are taking inspiration from this year's theme for World Migratory Bird Day: "Shared Spaces – Creating Bird Friendly Cities and Communities". In his book Nature's Best Hope, Dr. Doug Tallamy makes the argument that "Conservation that is confined to parks will not preserve species in the long run, because these areas are too small and too separated from one another."

At the Wildlife Diversity Program, we will focus on five areas where humans and wildlife can connect. They all represent positive actions that can be taken to make your corner of the world more welcoming to wildlife.

- **PLANT NATIVE PLANTS:** One of the most impactful and easiest things to do on your property is to incorporate more plants - trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers - that are native to Iowa.
- **ADD WATER:** We all need water and for wildlife it can be particularly hard to come by during certain times of the year or during periods of drought.
- **USE THE RIGHT LIGHTING:** The lighting we use outside and even inside our homes during certain times of the year can really cause problems for wildlife.
- **REDUCE HAZARDS TO WILDLIFE:** From windows, to rat poison, to our beloved feline companions, we can sometimes unintentionally make the world more dangerous for our local wildlife.
- **EMBRACE WILDNESS:** This element references a way of thinking and some very concrete actions you can take.

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