

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXXI, NUMBER 9**  
**OCTOBER 2025**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**Des Moines Audubon Field Trip**  
**Saylorville Lake**  
**\*Saturday, October 18, 8:00 a.m.\***

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, October 18th and the destination will be Saylorville Lake and surrounding areas. *Please note this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of the month.* Meet in the parking lot of the Visitors' Center at 8:00 AM. From there we will travel to various habitats and locations around the lake and in the surrounding area. We will be looking for migrating species such as waterfowl, grebes, gulls, and migrant sparrows. Other species could be busy flitting among the trees and fallen leaves. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Please contact Denny Thompson for more information at [cdnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cdnthomps@gmail.com) or 515-229-9615.

**September Program**  
**Tuesday, October 21, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, by Erica Place**

Founded in 1979, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) is a statewide nonprofit conservation organization that works with private landowners and public agencies to protect and restore Iowa's land, water, and wildlife. Their supporters and staff have protected more than 200,000 acres of Iowa's natural resources. Chances are, some of your favorite outdoor spots were a past INHF protection project. We'll dive into some of INHF's recent and ongoing efforts to safeguard sensitive landscapes, advocate for good conservation policy, and create more parks, trails, and wildlife areas for you to enjoy.

Erica Place joined INHF's staff in 2022, drawn by a connection to the mission and a passion for all things outdoors. As communications and outreach manager, Erica tells the stories of INHF's work through their quarterly magazine, blog and social media, oversees the volunteer program, and promotes INHF through outreach events. Erica enjoys spending her free time on a variety of outdoor activities — poking around in her garden, exploring wooded trails or rocky sandbars (often with binoculars in hand), or volunteering as a Story County Conservation board member.

## **YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO**

**By Ray Harden**

One of my target birds every birding season is the Yellow-billed Cuckoo. It has been a favorite bird since my grandfather pointed it out to me decades ago. He called it a Rain Crow, but it does not look like a crow. According to folklore and my grandfather the bird calls more frequently before a thunder storm.

In the spring and summer of 2025, I saw a cuckoo three times. The first time was at the Woodward Boat Ramp, the second sighting was on the edge of a prairie next to the Raccoon River, and in August I spotted one on the shore of Saylorville Lake. Yellow-billed Cuckoos are usually seen near a body of water.

The bird has a distinctive call; to me it sounds like a clucking sound. Sibley's Guide to birds says it sounds like "ku-ku-ku-kldoul". I have heard this call many times without seeing the bird. The unusual daytime song is composed of clucks and chuckles and it doesn't have any musical quality. During the night the birds give a call similar to the cooing of a dove.

The cuckoo is a little larger than a robin, with a gray-brown back, a cream-colored breast and belly, with a copper-colored rump and wing feathers. When the bird is in flight it shows a long narrow tail with white oval spots, and its most distinguishing feature is its yellow bill that is slightly downturned.

There are three species of cuckoos in the United States. The yellow-billed is the most common in Iowa, the Black-billed Cuckoo is occasionally seen in Iowa and the Mangrove Cuckoo is found in Florida. The Greater Roadrunner of the southwest is also in the cuckoo group.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is one of Iowa's late summer nesting birds. According to Iowa's breeding bird atlas they nest across the state. Like the cuckoos in Europe the female will occasionally lay her eggs in the nest of other bird species. Their arrival and population numbers are very dependent upon the hatching of tent caterpillars, their main source of food. They are one of the very few birds known to eat the black and brown "wooly bear" caterpillars. The hairy spines of the caterpillars are inedible for most birds.

The cuckoo is seldom seen because they will sit for long periods of time devouring massive colonies of caterpillars or they move very slowly through the upper tree branches looking for food. Their diet also includes insects, worms, and small frogs. The bird's feathers provide them with excellent camouflage in the forest canopy.

The cuckoo's nest is ten feet or more above the ground and it is made of loosely piled sticks and woven twigs. The female lays three to four eggs and she does most of the incubation; however, ornithologists report the male sits on the eggs more often at night than the female. According to some researchers a bachelor male, unrelated to the mated pair, will sometimes assist with the feeding of the young, providing as much as forty percent of the food.

The cuckoo is a helpful bird to farmers and gardeners because it feeds on insect larva that damage crops. The bird's population is declining because of the loss of its preferred habitat of dense woods. The use of pesticides that kill the cuckoo's food supply is also a problem. In Iowa the bird's population numbers have been dropping about one percent per year—their future does not look good. It would be a shame to lose the cuckoo in Iowa's woodlands. It is a natural predator of insects, tent caterpillars, gypsy moths, and other harmful insects. Also, the "Rain Crow's" unusual call would no longer be heard in Iowa's woods and we would miss its warning call of approaching thunder storms. We would have to depend on the TV weather forecasters.

Ray Harden  
August, 2025

**BIRDING FOR BOOMERS**  
**by Sneed B. Collard III**  
**Mountaineers Books, Seattle, WA, 2024. 232 pages.**  
**Book review by Doug Harr**

Author Sneed B. Collard III is someone who did not start birding until he was in his 50s, joining his son Braden after they both were inspired by watching that famous, true story movie about birding competition, *The Big Year*. He later went on to write a book about birding with his son and has also written recent articles for different birding magazines. His new book, *Birding for Boomers*, is basically aimed at getting older people (“Baby Boomers”) into the enjoyment of birdwatching, whether in a backyard or on a birding trip anywhere. However, there is just so much information here that lots of this work is worth reading by almost any adult, whether young or old. That is even suggested in the subtitle: “And Everyone Else Brave Enough to Embrace the World’s Most Rewarding and Frustrating Activity”.

This is an easy, quick-to-read book that begins with how to get started in birding, including just the need of a pair of binoculars and a field guide, then braving bird identification. There are several sections of the book on different topics including habitat exploration and birding trips; dealing with physical limitations; advanced birding and its tools; and how birders can help conserve birds by creating bird-friendly yards, teaching classes, and even dealing with politics.

Multiple chapters in each different section are relatively short and include cute illustrations by Tanner Barkin. Collard’s writing is quite humorous throughout the entire book, another reason for making this a lot of fun to read, even by people who already are well-experienced birders.

Sneed B. Collard III is a Montana-based writer of many other books, including for kids, that made him a recent award-winner, and even a new one about how the American military has worked to save Threatened and Endangered Species. Whether old or young, almost anyone new into birding should greatly enjoy reading *Birding for Boomers*.

From the Iowa Audubon Newsletter, August 2025, Volume 22, Number 2

**Iowa DNR, Wildlife Diversity News**  
**Should you add water to your backyard for wildlife?**  
**August 11, 2025**  
**Which wildlife will use my water feature? What About Mosquitoes?**

Just like us, birds, butterflies, frogs, dragonflies – they all need water too. So, installing water is a win-win for us and wildlife. Birds are attracted to the sound of running water so including a moving water feature in your yard will help them find the water source. Many wildlife such as dragonflies and amphibians like frogs and toads depend on water for a portion of their life cycle and can use a permanent yard water feature.

Type ‘backyard water feature’ into your Internet browser and you will find a plethora of resources on how to create or purchase a water feature. Everything from outdoor fountains to ponds to small waterfalls to hang on your patio wall – the sky is the limit! The National Gardening Association estimates 15% of US households have an outdoor water feature. The water gardening category is one of the fastest growing areas of gardening. People love the sound of running water and the attractiveness of a water feature.

Water features can be effective year-round but in the warmer months, mosquitoes can be a concern. Standing water leads to mosquitoes. An egg laid in water can be an adult in as little as 4 days under certain weather conditions! To avoid a horde of mosquitoes, if you have a standing water bird bath, it is a good idea to change out that water completely at least weekly.

In larger ponds, where you can’t just tip it over and dump the water out, mosquitoes can be a bigger problem. There are chemicals you can use or you can try various ‘natural’ controls such as; adding a pump or fountain to keep the water moving, adding fish, or creating habitat attractive to frogs, dragonflies and other aquatic insects that eat mosquitoes.

Or you could do away with the standing water all together and create a pond-less stream! Providing a water source for birds and other wildlife brings great joy. Water is a wildlife attractant and with a little care and planning, a water feature brings wildlife to you!

See article at: <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/IACIO/bulletins/3ec68db>

**Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from July to June.  
Dues should be mailed to: Jane Clark, 9871 Lincoln Avenue, Clive, IA 50325.  
If you are unsure of the status of your membership, please call 515-223-5047.  
Please make checks payable to "Des Moines Audubon Society"**

**Membership Levels and Dues:**

Student (under 18).....\$1.00

Individual Adult..... \$15.00

Family..... \$20.00

\*Additional Contribution for Conservation Projects \_\_\_\_\_

\*Additional Contribution for Bird Feeding Projects \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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