

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXXI, NUMBER 5**  
**MAY 2025**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**Des Moines Audubon Field Trip**  
**Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup> Field Trip**  
**Saylorville Visitor's Center at 8:00 a.m.**

Join Des Moines Audubon members on Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup> as we celebrate the return of migrating songbirds. Meet in the parking lot of the Visitors' Center at Saylorville Lake at 8:00 a.m. Migration should be in full swing and morning could find the air full of song with the arrival of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Baltimore Orioles, Indigo Buntings, and wood warblers. The main species we will be searching for will be the warblers, but there could be a good variety of migrating birds. Please dress for conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact Dennis Thompson at [cdnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cdnthomps@gmail.com) or 515-254-0837 for information about field trips.

**Des Moines Audubon Program**  
**Tuesday, May 20, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Pectoral Sandpipers at a Midcontinent Stopover Site**  
**By Victoria Fasbender, Graduate Research Assistant**  
**Natural Resource Ecology and Management, Iowa State University**

Migratory birds rely on stopover sites to rest and refuel before continuing their migration. Stopover sites may be limited as many water bodies have been altered by humans. Water management can create landscapes that provide benefits to migrating shorebirds. Lake Red Rock in central Iowa, has implemented a water drawdown by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to benefit migrating waterbirds as part of the Sustainable Rivers Program (SRP). Our work showed that sandpipers closely tracked the shallow water/mud interface during their stopover and that refueling efforts were sufficient to fuel a non-stop flight to northern South America.

Victoria grew up in north-western Wisconsin where her family enjoyed the outdoors. She attended University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and received a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management and a minor in biology and conservation biology in January of 2022. Victoria started at Iowa State University in the Natural Resource Ecology and Management department during the Spring of 2023 as a master student under Dr. Dinsmore for a major in wildlife ecology. Her research investigates the effects a water level drawdown at a reservoir in central Iowa has on fall migrating waterbirds and aquatic invertebrates. This project will help the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers evaluate this management action. She is expecting to graduate from ISU this spring.

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 515-223-5047 or [jrc Clark@radiks.net](mailto:jrc Clark@radiks.net).

## **Tennessee Warbler by Carl Nollen**

Springtime is warbler time here in Iowa. In our newly greening and flowering world, our migratory birds add so much to our warming landscape. The warbler I am most likely to hear, and then see, is the Tennessee Warbler. Its loud three-part, staccato call repeated incessantly from the tree tops is a welcome addition to our new season.

Newly named in 2019 as *Leiothlypis peregrina* (plain wanderer), it was formerly in the genus *Oreothlypis*, and, before that, *Vermivora*. Its common name is a misnomer, named by ornithologist Alexander Wilson in 1811 because he found it in the state of Tennessee. But this warbler does not breed there, nor in Iowa. Wintering in Central America, where it is common in coffee plantations, this long-distance migrant spends a little time in Iowa before continuing to the boreal forests of Canada. The wide area along the Mississippi River valley is its most common route.

The Tennessee Warbler especially likes flowering trees here. Our beautiful flowering crabapple trees have benefitted this drab beauty. Yes, what an oxymoron. Not colorful like some other warblers, its plumage is yellow green above, whitish below, with a gray cap and a white line above the eye. No wing bars. The female is similar, but a little paler. Its beak is noticeably thin and pointed, compared to the Red-eyed Vireo whose beak is a little stouter with a slight hook. Warbling and Philadelphia Vireos are slightly larger, thicker billed, and duller on back. There are a number of other warblers similar in appearance to the Tennessee Warbler. You need good binoculars and practice.

Its favorite diet in the conifers of Canada is the spruce budworm. A good supply will cause several of this species to nest in loose colonies. The female remains secretive on its nest on the ground while the male remains active in the treetops.

I especially like the life-size photographs in *Warblers and Other Songbirds of North America, a Life-size Guide to Every Species*, by Paul Sterry, 2017. This book is the best for close views.

Although this warbler's population is considered to be slightly decreasing like so many of our birds, its conservation status is of least concern.

The Tennessee Warbler's presence in May, made so well known by its constant song, is one of the best heralds of spring here in Iowa.

## **President Jimmy Carter was a birder? By Doug Harr**

Last January, former President Jimmy Carter passed away at age 100, oldest former U.S. president. Although serving only from 1977 to 1980, he did much to help preserve our nation's natural habitats and wildlife, especially by adding eleven national parks (eight in Alaska), new national forest lands, and national wildlife refuges. He was also the first president to push for development of renewable energy and talking about his concerns for climate change.

Older Americans might recall what he did, but many may not know that he was also an avid birder. Throughout his life, Carter birded all seven continents and in 1994 was awarded by Audubon for his work in conservation that protects birds. From 1989 to 1996, Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosaline also conducted North American Breeding Bird Surveys near Plaines, Georgia, where they lived. A newsletter sent to all BBS volunteers nationwide told a humorous story about this. While the Carters stopped every half mile to count all birds seen and heard for three minutes, a passing person wondered why black cars kept parking behind them as they counted. Then it was learned that those were Secret Servant agents following the Carters, something always done to protect all our past presidents.

## **BIRD MIGRATION**

### **Birds On the Move**

**By Ray Harden**

Bird migration is an interesting phenomenon. Some bird movements are subtle, such as the arrival of Dark-eyed Juncos in fall and their departure in spring. Occasionally bird migration can be a shocking newspaper's front-page story, like what occurred on November 2, 1965.

On that day a severe blizzard in Canada and the Northern Great Plains must have blown every duck, goose, and songbird south and into the Midwest. The sky was so full of migrating birds that the air traffic control radar systems in Omaha, Kansas City and Des Moines were overwhelmed and shutdown. Ornithologist estimated that 60 to 80 million birds were in the air that day flying south to warmer weather.

On the Audubon Fieldtrip, March 8, 2025, I was reminded of that event which occurred 1965. At Saylorville Lake we saw thousands of geese in the air, Canada geese, snow geese, and white-fronted geese. But the white-fronted geese stole the show; I had never seen so many of them in one day. They moved across the sky in the classic "V" shaped skeins that did not seem to end.

Spring is the most spectacular migrating time. In Iowa it is the first few weeks in May. It seems as if the birds are in rush north to establish their territory to claim the best breeding and feeding areas. The fall migration is more subtle. It starts in August and goes until mid-December as the birds work their way south. They move a little slower during the fall migration.

The reasons why birds migrate and how they can fly thousands of miles is not completely understood by ornithologists. However, most agree that the main trigger that starts the migration phenomena is the changes of the length of daylight hours. Scientists are hoping the new Motus Wildlife Tracking system that has been installed across the state with cooperation of the Iowa DNR will help to give information about bird migration.

Birds may have begun to develop their patterns of migration during the last ice age as the glaciers advanced and retreated. They had to move south to look for food as the winter froze the northern landscape and then in spring, they had to fly north again to look for suitable nesting grounds.

Some birds migrate thousands of miles, the champion is the arctic tern. It must journey twice a year from pole to pole, a round-trip flight of more than twenty thousand miles. The American Robin only moves a few hundreds of miles from the southern part of the United States to the northern sections of the Midwest and Central Canada. Robins travel at the rate of thirty miles per day. The common blue-winged teal is a faster flyer; it has been recorded flying 122 miles in one day along its migration route.

Scientists are studying the ways birds navigate on their long journeys. Experiments that have been done indicate birds use a variety of methods. Some use the sun if they migrate during the day; others use the stars at night to find their way. It has also been proven that some birds have a type of internal compass and use the Earth's magnetic field to navigate.

Another puzzle science is trying to solve regards the changing migration patterns and the range expansion of some birds. For example, some Canada geese are remaining in Iowa all winter if there is open water and the young of these geese do not migrate. But other geese continue to have normal migration patterns. There are several species of birds, such as the cardinal, titmouse, and great-tailed grackle that are expanding their range slowly north and establishing residences in places where they did not normally live.

Many scientists think this may be due to evolutionary change in the bird's genes, while others believe it is happening because of climate change. Climate change maybe the reason we are seeing more American Robins remaining in Iowa through the winter months as our winters are becoming warmer.

I saw some birds in Iowa this winter that are supposed to be farther south in January and February. At Saylorville Lake in early February I saw two Great Blue Herons and a flock of ten American White Pelicans feeding in the open water below the dam. I also observed a male and female Belted Kingfishers feeding in the open waters of the Raccoon River west of Perry. These species typically migrate. Maybe these birds forgot that they are supposed to go south for the winter, but if birds can find food and have shelter, they don't have to migrate.

Regardless of the reason, bird migration is one of the more interesting phenomena of nature and ornithologists are trying to find explanations for the wide variety of behavior that birds exhibit during migration.

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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 \_\_\_\_\_

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