



***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXV, NUMBER 2**  
**FEBRUARY 2018**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**

**FEBRUARY 10 FIELD TRIP**

The Saturday, February 10<sup>th</sup> field trip will find us meeting at 8:00 a.m. at the circle drive by the bird blind at Walnut Woods State Park. We might also visit Raccoon River Park in West Des Moines. Monthly field trips are usually held on the second Saturday of the month, providing great 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 a snack for break. Please contact Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or [cnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cnthomps@gmail.com) for more information.

**Tuesday, February 20 Program—7 p.m.**  
**South Georgia Island – Nature’s Masterpiece, By Ty Smedes**

In the Atlantic Ocean, nestled about half-way between the tips of South America and Africa, South Georgia Island, a 100 mile long mountainous island towers above the sea. Its beaches are a wildlife paradise, crowded with battling bull Elephant and Fur Seals, all vying for space with several species of penguins, which number into the hundreds of thousands! This British protectorate (former headquarters for the South Atlantic whaling fleet) is now managed as a pristine environment. Home to more than 100 million birds, including several species of Albatross, these protective measures are expected to push the population to 300 million. Come see and learn about this magical place, as we ply the scenic bays, aboard the *Ortelius*, an expedition ship, built to navigate some of the roughest seas in the world. This program presented by Ty Smedes will be both an educational and beautiful presentation.

Ty’s photos have been published by many major magazines and book publishers. He specializes in wildlife, prairie wildflower, and landscape images. As a feature writer for the Iowa DNR’s *Iowa Outdoors Magazine*, his goal is to educate the reader by writing about and photographing many of the lesser known birds, animals, and places. Ty has taught nature photography classes and is an experienced photo-tour leader, having led nature photography tours to Yellowstone and Teton National Parks, as well as the Eastern Sierras during the fall season. He was also co-leader of a nature photography tour to Brazil in 1996 and has led nature photography tours to East Africa in 2005, 2008, and 2010, as well as Botswana in 2006, 2013, and 2014, and Zambia in 2016. His most recent adventure travel has taken him to the Falklands, South Georgia Island, and the Antarctic Peninsula, as well as the jungles of West Papua New Guinea. Information regarding Ty’s three books *Capturing Iowa’s Seasons*, *The Return of Iowa’s Bald Eagles – 2nd Edition*, and *Iowa’s Wild Beauty* can be found on his website at [www.smedesphoto.com](http://www.smedesphoto.com).

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 51<sup>st</sup> 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, please contact Jane Clark at 515-223-5047.

## **January Field Trip Report** **By Tom Dougherty**

The seven participants on the January field trip donned their cold weather gear to fend off the frigid temperature (1°F) and a steady breeze. The group's efforts for braving the sub-zero wind chills were well rewarded with a number of notable finches on the day in the Saylorville Lake area. The group met at the Visitor Center at 8 a.m. and a quick check of the area behind the Visitor Center proved to be a good idea as a swarm of 14 Pine Siskins descended on the tube feeders during our brief stop. The feeders also attracted some American Goldfinches, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers along with some Northern Cardinals and Blue Jays. A large group of Mourning Doves was observed hunkered down just below the observation deck trying to stay warm.

As Saylorville Lake was solidly frozen that day, our group headed below the dam to the overflow spillway and Bob Shetler Recreation area. The flowing waters at the spillway brought, not too surprisingly, a large group of Canada Geese and Mallards. However, it also attracted 18 Trumpeter Swans, one of which was sporting a collar with a GPS device, many Common Goldeneyes, 15 American Pelicans, a Hooded Merganser and a Ring-necked Duck. These birds were accompanied by the ever-dependably present American Bald Eagles. A small flock of birds was flitting about the grasses bordering the river and in among this group, mostly American Tree Sparrows, was a Common Redpoll.

After this successful stop, everyone was happy to get back into their cars and warm up a bit on the trip to Jester Park. At Jester, the group stopped at a grove of conifers looking for Red-breasted Nuthatches and although none were found, a few Eastern Bluebirds showed up, puffed up to the point they looked almost round. The next Jester stop was at the Discovery Pond, just across the road from Shelter #5. The conifers on the north side of the pond produced a few Red-breasted Nuthatches along with a Brown Creeper. However, best of all, some Red Crossbills were discovered feeding on the cones at the top of a conifer for easy viewing by the entire group. Bob Maloy was able to snap some photos of these unexpected visitors. A quick check of eBird reports showed these were the first Red Crossbills seen in Polk County in more than three weeks. A quick tour around Shelter area #5 produced more Red-breasted Nuthatches along with some surprising Song Sparrows.

On the final visit of the day, we stopped at the Jester Park bird blind. This stop produced one last new finch: a Purple Finch. Additionally we found some more Pine Siskins and the expected feeder birds such as Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, Black-Capped Chickadees and Dark-eyed Juncos. We finished up the morning with 27 species.

I believe we were all very pleasantly surprised by the variety of birds we found on such a wintry day.



### **“Chickadee Check-off”, the Income Tax Check-off that Benefits Conservation**

Last year, more than 7,800 of Iowa's 1.6 million taxpayers helped boost non-game wildlife conservation with donations to the Fish and Wildlife Fund on their state income tax form.

Iowans donated roughly \$147,000 last spring when completing their 2016 tax forms, which translates to an average gift of \$18.73 per donor. The Fish and Wildlife Fund, known popularly as the “Chickadee Check-off,” is a mechanism the Iowa Legislature created in the 1980s for Iowa citizens to donate to wildlife conservation on the Iowa state tax form. Prior to its establishment, the so called non-game wildlife had no dedicated funding.

“We are appreciative for the increase in contributors, and are hopeful that more Iowans see the benefit that their donations goes directly to habitat development and restoration programs for some of Iowa's most vulnerable animal species,” said Stephanie Shepherd, wildlife biologist for the Wildlife Diversity Program in the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

At its height, Iowans donated more than \$200,000 annually to the fund. While the main reasons for the decline in donations are unknown, Shepherd said tax payers need to be alert when filling out their form or working with a tax preparer. “The Chickadee Check-off is an inconspicuous line that is easy to pass over or forget, and many tax preparers may not remember to ask whether a client wants to donate,” she said. “It may be up to the taxpayer to remind their preparer, or make a point of looking for it whether they are doing their form on paper or electronically.”

According to Shepherd, donating on the tax form is easy: simply write the amount to donate next to the Fish and Wildlife Check-Off, line 57 on Form 1040, and the sum is either automatically deducted from the refund or added to the amount owed. As with all charitable contributions, the amount is deductible from next year's taxes.

“If every Iowa taxpayer donated just \$1, it would mean \$1.5 million for wildlife and natural resource conservation,” Shepherd said.

Proceeds from the check-off are one of the few means of support for the Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Diversity Program, which is responsible for protecting more than 1,000 fish and wildlife species in the state. Money from the check-off helps improve wildlife habit, restore native wildlife, provide opportunities for citizens to learn about our natural resources and much more.

Contact: Stephanie Shepherd, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Program, 515-432-2823 ext. 102 or [stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov) for more information.

## 2017 Des Moines Christmas Count

The Des Moines Christmas Count was held on Saturday, 12/23/17. It was cold, with a high of 25, but little wind so it was a good day to be out. There was no snow on the ground and water was mostly open. We had 19 participants in 13 field parties and 7 feeder watchers.

We totaled 75 species, which ties our 2<sup>nd</sup>-highest count. The best find was the first Snowy Owl for the count. It was briefly seen east of Highway 141 in Johnston before flying north out of sight. Other highlights include: 18 species of waterfowl, Ring-necked Pheasant, Great Blue Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, Killdeer, Iceland (Thayer's) Gull, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Harris's Sparrow and Common Redpoll. A lack of snow made it hard to locate open country birds such as Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting (all missed).

We totaled 36,679 individual birds. That's the highest ever and only the second time over 30,000. Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls and the downtown American Crow roost were the main contributors to this amazing total. We didn't check Waterworks Park for an icterid roost, so the numbers could have been even higher. High count records for species included: Redhead, Cooper's Hawk (tied), Red-bellied Woodpecker and Pileated Woodpecker. While not setting a record, the numbers for the following were much higher than usual: Ring-billed Gull, Barred Owl, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Junco and Northern Cardinal. Wild Turkey, Mourning Dove, Tufted Titmouse and Cedar Waxwing were on the low side. Thanks to all the participants for making the count a success.

**Bold** = new to the count. *Italicized* = new high for the count.

Snow Goose	1	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1
Cackling Goose	254	Belted Kingfisher	7
Canada Goose	10648	Red-headed Woodpecker	7
Trumpeter Swan	66	Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>124</i>
Northern Shoveler <sup>8</sup>	10	Downy Woodpecker	78
Gadwall	8	Hairy Woodpecker	23
Mallard	2740	Northern Flicker	43
American Black Duck	2	Pileated Woodpecker	8
Northern Pintail	2	American Kestrel	4
Canvasback	1	Merlin	4
Redhead	26	Blue Jay	144
Ring-necked Duck	13	American Crow	11250
Greater Scaup	3	Black-capped Chickadee	211
Lesser Scaup	22	Tufted Titmouse	8
Common Goldeneye	45	Red-breasted Nuthatch	6
Hooded Merganser	20	White-breasted Nuthatch	135
Common Merganser	49	Brown Creeper	6
Ruddy Duck	3	Carolina Wren	3
Ring-necked Pheasant	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1
Wild Turkey	14	Eastern Bluebird	28
American White Pelican	82	American Robin	27
Great Blue Heron	1	European Starling	1044
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Cedar Waxwing	5
Cooper's Hawk	6	American Tree Sparrow	188
Bald Eagle	80	Dark-eyed Junco	707
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Harris's Sparrow	2
Red-tailed Hawk	55	White-throated Sparrow	39
American Coot	16	Song Sparrow	7
Killdeer	1	Northern Cardinal	249
Ring-billed Gull	6278	Red-winged Blackbird	230
Herring Gull	159	Common Grackle	17
Iceland (Thayer's) Gull	1	House Finch	55
Rock Pigeon	772	Purple Finch	11
Eurasian Collared-Dove	3	Common Redpoll	1
Mourning Dove	72	Pine Siskin	11
Great Horned Owl	2	American Goldfinch	107
<b>Snowy Owl</b>	<b>1</b>	House Sparrow	367
Barred Owl	10		

## More Winter Finches

By Carol Berrier

Pine siskins aren't the only little finches that have come south from their arctic habitat in search of food. On January 9th, I looked out at my nyjer seed feeders to find them mobbed with little feathered acrobats vying for perches. My goldfinches had been numbering over a dozen, along with one or two siskins, but that morning they were joined by a dozen common redpolls also wanting breakfast. My four nyjer feeders were not enough, and with wings aflutter there was much jockeying about.

While we were freezing with subzero temperatures, the boreal forests and arctic tundra this January were warmer than usual, causing more snowfall and making it difficult for arctic birds to find food. Although redpolls survive cold better than other songbirds, they do need food!

Common redpolls are goldfinch-sized and streaked with gray-brown. They can be easily identified by their red foreheads and black chins. Males also have a reddish wash on their breasts and rumps.

They must be tasty little birds, for the Cooper's hawk passed through several times when redpolls were present. Perhaps that is why they are restless, and why they travel in flocks seeking safety in numbers.

Redpolls have a special adaptation that allows them to gather seeds very quickly and store them in their esophageal pouches or diverticula. This enables them to take their food to a safe, sheltered spot where they can regurgitate, shell, and eat the seeds at their leisure safe from hawks or stormy weather. Or, they might carry bedtime snacks to their roosts for nourishment during long arctic nights.

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