

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



Field Trip, Saturday, April 14th

For our Saturday, April 14th field trip, meet at Casey's on 1st Street in Grimes at 7:30 a.m. From there we will travel through Dallas County to Guthrie County to bird at Bay's Branch, Lakin Slough and other local birding areas. We'll be visiting a variety of habitats that could include marsh, wetland, restored prairie and upland looking for waterfowl and early migrating shorebirds. On the way, we'll stop by Marsh Farm Wetland, a wetland west of Grimes that has become a birding hotspot. A visit to some "migrant trap" woodlands in the open country could turn up migrating songbirds. Bring binoculars and dress for the conditions, which might include walking in wet grasses. Contact field trip leader, Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or cnthomps@gmail.com for more information. Please note the early starting time of 7:30 a.m.

Using Weather Radar to Monitor Bird Migration—Tuesday, April 17th **By Karl Jungbluth**

Karl Jungbluth will demonstrate the use of weather radar to monitor nocturnal bird migration. Karl has over 20 years of experience studying Iowa birds, and his career with the National Weather Service gave him unique insights into the techniques of tracking migrants. He'll discuss how we can augment our understanding of migration and improve our birding success by interpreting bird signatures on spring or autumn weather radar. Karl will place special emphasis on predicting "fallouts" of colorful migrants in central Iowa.

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 the meeting place or the program, please contact Jane Clark at 515-223-5047 or jrclark@radiks.net.

National Wildlife Refuge System 115 years old

On 14 March 1903, with the encouragement of noted ornithologist Frank Chapman and the Florida Audubon Society, President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island in the Indian River Lagoon as the country's first Federal Bird Reservation. The intent was to save Brown Pelicans from poachers. This action soon gave birth to the National Wildlife Refuge System. By the end of his conservation-studded presidency, Teddy Roosevelt had named nine more reservations in Florida and a total of 55 bird reservations and national game preserves, the forerunner to the modern National Wildlife Refuge System.

Peregrine Falcon Watch
Saturday, April 14th, 9-11 a.m.
East side of State Capitol Building

Peregrine falcons are the fastest animals on the planet reaching speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour. Peregrine means to wander so to see one of these birds in the wild is a gift. A Dallas County naturalist together with the DNR will be meeting at the State Capitol Building to watch the peregrine falcons nesting on the east side ledges. Flights, stoops, hunting and feeding have been observed at this historical nesting site. This program was such a success last year, we are offering it again.

Spring River Float– Paddling and Birding
Raccoon River—TBD
Start time 8 am Saturday, May 5

Kickoff your spring paddling season with DCCB. Our monthly floats strive to not only introduce you to the waters of the three Raccoon Rivers that traverse our county, but to also introduce you to a new contact point in the wilds of Dallas County. This float's wild contact will be the BIRDS. Our rivers' corridors represent some of the best wild habitat remaining. These linear stretches of wildness are homes to a wide array of feathered wildness. The annual spring migration of warblers should be at its peak, mixed in with the more common local bird species. This avian variety will make this float a wild contact for both the paddler new to ornithology and the veteran birder. Share a float with DCCB, and connect to the feathered wilds of our place. Registration is required for this program.

Dallas County Conservation Board
Phone: 515-465-3577
Email: conservation@dallascountyiowa.gov



Ducks Return
By Carol Berrier

When the ice disappears from our ponds, the ducks reappear. There are two types of ducks, divers and dabblers. Divers look for large bodies of water where they can dive for fish and also have room for a running start when taking to the air.

Dabblers are mostly vegetarians and seldom dive. Instead they submerge their heads and necks; and with tails tipped up, they dabble near the water's surface looking for seeds of pond weeds, for smartweed, and for aquatic insect larvae. Dabblers need no runway, but can spring directly into flight. They look for potholes, marshes, ponds, rivers and small lakes.

The Mallard, a dabbler, is the most numerous duck species in North America and worldwide, occurring in Europe and Asia. It is also the easiest to recognize. The drake with its green head, white neck ring, chestnut colored breast, yellow bill, gray flanks and back, and up-curved black tail feathers are familiar sights. Both sexes have a blue speculum (wing patch) and orange feet. The female is nondescript brown, with a distinctive bright orange bill that has a black saddle.

Mallards usually arrive in the spring already paired. In April the female builds a nest, usually on the ground, and sometimes a mile or more from water. She does the parenting, and after she begins incubating her eggs, the drake retires to a shoreline waiting area which he shares with other paired drakes. If the nesting attempt is successful, the drake soon leaves to join a flock of unpaired drakes in a large nearby marsh. There the drakes shed their breeding plumage for hen-like eclipse plumage, but retain their yellow bills. Losing flight feathers, they become flightless for several weeks. They soon molt again, replacing their eclipse plumage with new breeding plumage by mid-August.

Meanwhile, in May the female's 6 to 15 eggs hatch. After briefly brooding the ducklings, she leads them to water, sometimes a mile away. In July or later her parental duties end, for after 50-60 days the ducklings are able to fly and fend for themselves. The hen is then ready for her own molt and flightless period. Sporting new feathers, the hens, along with juveniles, join the large flocks of males. Family ties are broken and courtship begins again. Mallards are usually paired with new mates by late October.

Tree Swallow Nests on the Bluebird Trail

By Carol Mefford

Fabulous feathers! So many uses of feathers for our feathered friends, so to mention a few: birds use feathers to keep cool or stay warm, make or muffle noise, gloat, concentrate sound to improve hearing, stay dry, carry water, for courtship displays, to provide necessary streamlining to steer and balance a bird's body in flight, escape predation by shedding, and in *Building Nests*. For anyone who has monitored bluebird boxes, the idiom of 'to feather one's nest' is a clear motto of the Tree Swallow and nest building. Tree Swallow nests look oh, so elegant as they are topped with fluffy, white feathers.

One of the joys of monitoring a bluebird trail of boxes is opening a nesting box, peering inside, and determining who has set up housekeeping. At Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, a county park in northeast Polk County, the Tree Swallows are the dominate bird in the nesting boxes. (The bluebirds seem to be happily using the many holes manufactured by woodpeckers in the dead trees.) It is a joy to be out on the open prairie with the Tree Swallows zooming around like aerial pilots, and find a nest topped with lovely, white feathers. Ah ha: a Tree Swallow nest.

If you are lucky and sit and watch the swallows on an early spring morning, you might be able to see the swallows actually 'playing' with feathers; dropping and re-catching them in flight, or passing them along to another flying T.S. If you Google 'Tree Swallows and feathers' you can watch this game and also see videos of the T.S. swopping in to grab a feather from a human hand (Please make sure they are clean, not chemically treated feather.)

The actual Tree Swallow nest under the feather tick is a rather sloppy cup of dried grass, and Cornell University bird scientists, who have studied the bird and their nest building, report that nest building begins April-May, can take 2-4 weeks, is done only by the female, although both parents fly miles and miles collecting feathers. The female lays one egg a day, with 4-7 eggs per nest. Scientists have found the feathers probably insulate the eggs and babies allowing the parents to spend more time flying and to gather insects for food as they fly. They roll the insects into a BB-sized ball. Extended weather patterns of cold rain can be deadly to the T.S. because of reduced insect activity.

Tree Swallows even bathe and drink in flight 'much like a stone skipping over water', and thus prefer nesting sites that are close to water. Incubations lasts 14-15 days and begins the day the last egg is laid. When monitoring the nesting boxes and peering inside, the female will freeze on the nest; so she does not budge, and when this happens, the box door is quickly closed. Such a brave parent!

Tree Swallows almost always only have one brood per season. This is 'probably because groups migrate together and the young must be ready to fly and feed themselves upon fledging.' Each Tree Swallow, Cornell University reports, will consume about 2,000 insects per day during an average 45 day nesting period, AND the parents also catch and feed their brood (of 4-7 nestlings) about 6,000 per day during an average 20 days spent inside the nesting box. (Make you tired yet?) This adds up to 180,000 insects per nesting pair.

Genesis 1:20-23 "Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind."

WISDOM DOES IT AGAIN

From The Birding Community E-bulletin, March 2018

Wisdom, that long-lived Laysan Albatross on Midway Island, is a mother once again at the astounding age of 67. Wisdom is the world's oldest known wild bird, and she and her current mate, Akeakamai, welcomed their newest chick early last month [February] at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. Albatrosses and other seabirds return to the same nesting site each year and Wisdom has been using the same nesting site at Midway since at least 1956, when she was first banded by the late ornithologist, Chan Robbins.

Wisdom has successfully raised at least 30-36 albatross chicks over the course of her life. Because Laysan albatross don't lay eggs every year and raise only one chick at a time when they do, the contribution of one bird to the population makes a huge difference.

"Laysan albatross and other seabirds depend on the habitat protected by Midway Atoll and other remote Pacific wildlife refuges," said Bob Peyton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge Manager for Midway Atoll Refuge and Memorial. Biologists with the Fish and Wildlife Service are working to restore the habitat seabirds need at Midway Atoll and throughout the Pacific and remove threats like invasive predators - because protecting the future for seabirds mean protecting the places they call home.

Laysan Albatross spend 90% of their lives at sea, but they depend on a few islands in the Pacific to breed and raise their young. Globally significant, Midway is home to 73 percent of all Laysan albatross, as well as the endangered Short-tailed albatross.

Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from July to June.

Dues should be mailed to:

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 _____

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