THE WARBLER

DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK

Des Moines Audubon Society
Organized 1923

Field Trip, Saturday, August 11th

For our Saturday, August 11th 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. Our objective will be various spots in Guthrie County (Bay's Branch, Lakin Slough, Springbrook State Park.) We'll also stop by Marsh Farm Wetland in Dallas County, a birding hotspot west of Grimes. Shorebirds and open country birds will be our focus. We'll be visiting a variety of habitats that could include marsh, wetland, restored prairie and upland-- bring binoculars, scopes if you have them, a snack for break and dress for the conditions. Contact trip leader, Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 or cndthomps@gmail.com for more information. Please note the early starting time of 7:30 a.m.

Loggerhead Shrike (Lanius ludovicianus), Iowa IBA Spotlight Species

By Doug Harr

With the Year of the Bird as a major public subject in 2018, conserving diminishing avian species here in Iowa could not be more important. Loggerhead Shrikes are one of those declining species, long-designated as one of Iowa Audubon's criteria species that helped us create our Important Bird Areas (IBA).

Loggerhead Shrikes are summer nesting residents in places dominated by open country with short vegetation and scattered thorny shrubs, pastures with fence rows, old orchards, mowed roadsides, cemeteries, riparian areas, and savanna woodlands. Unfortunately, many of these habitats have seen some of the greatest losses in Iowa.

Shrikes are songbirds that are essentially little raptors, catching arthropods, amphibians, small to medium-sized reptiles, small mammals and even other birds—a shrike was once observed carrying a male Eastern Bluebird by some Iowa Audubon members several years ago, near the Big Sioux River in Lyon County. Because of the shrike's relatively small (8 1/2") size and small talons, they most frequently carry prey to be impaled upon shrub thorns or even a barbed-wire fence. There, they can tear apart the prey to eat it or carry it to feed nearby nestlings.

Nests are constructed as deeply as possible in wild plum or multiflora rose thickets, Osage orange trees, frequently in red cedars and sometimes even in woodpiles when suitable trees or shrubs are lacking. Nests are typically about 6 " in diameter, constructed of small twigs, rootlets, bark strips and even string, neatly woven together and lined with lichens, moss, small feathers and fur, creating a well-insulated structure to keep hatchlings warm and dry.

Clutch size averages 5 to 6 eggs, which are incubated for about 16 days, and nestlings then spend another 16 days until fledging. Both adults bring food to their chicks, but upon fledging, the young birds mostly just follow their parents to observe and learn hunting techniques.

While the western and southern US still have decent numbers of Loggerhead Shrikes, the species is decreasing nationwide, with small numbers left in Iowa due to severe losses of favored habitats. Loggerheads winter from Missouri on south, but a few may sometimes be seen just inside the Iowa border. During the winter, Northern Shrikes, a relative which nests from Minnesota well into Canada, may be seen in Iowa Loggerhead habitats.

The key to keeping shrike numbers stable in Iowa mostly depends upon proper habitat management. Tall and medium height grasslands must be protected, and shrubs—in pastures or along roadsides—should not be removed or killed with herbicides. Patch-burn grazing can be a key to saving suitable habitat. The Kellerton Globally Important Bird Area in Ringgold County utilizes such practices and is one of the best places in Iowa to see this creature often nicknamed "Butcher Bird".

*From: Newsletter of Iowa Audubon, April 2018, Volume 15, Number 1

The Chimney Swifts of Pleasantville
By Carl Nollen

Gladys Black needs no introduction to Iowa birders. She was possibly the most influential and best known amateur birder in Iowa, leading field trips and writing many newspaper articles. I doubt she had one favorite bird, but there is one species for which a memorial was built in her honor. That is the chimney swift.

In her home town of Pleasantville in Marion County, a chimney swift tower and open shelter was dedicated in May 15, 2004. It features four large displays with information on the chimney swift and Gladys Black's life of accomplishments. The crowning glory of this structure is the chimney built especially for the swifts. There is only one other tower in Iowa built especially for them, in Cedar County near Buchanan. Before that Althea Sherman had one built in Clayton County in 1915.

Leland and Sally Vander Linden of Pleasantville conceived the idea to build such a structure as a memorial to Gladys. Leland, in the construction business, designed it, and Sally was in charge of the project to get it built. The chimney is 24 feet tall, with two flues each 10 inches square leading down into a chimney four feet square. I visited the Vander Lindens one evening recently to sit in their backyard bordering the Cora Shadle Park where this special chimney is located. Sally says they have noticed only three or four swifts this year. Other years there have been more.

There is only one active nest in a chimney, though many swifts might roost there at night. The very small stick nest stuck to the inside of a chimney with the adults' glue-like saliva seems precarious for the three to five eggs and the young. The pure white color of the eggs is typical of a bird species nesting in a dark place. Incubation is 16-21 days and the young fledge after 14-19 days. Swifts winter in the upper Amazon basin of South America, especially in Peru. Sally says they arrive here about May 15 and leave October 15, although some years earlier.

Chimney swifts are hard to observe and study because they spend all day flying, only coming to roost after sunset. Then they may appear out of nowhere and swiftly drop down into the chimney. You may hear them twittering in the sky as they fly about or chattering in the chimney as they settle down for the night. Like many of our species, the population seems to be declining. I formerly had swifts in my chimney and knew when they came in at night by the rustling and chattering sounds low in the chimney.

There are two web sites worth looking at. A colorful site with many photos is the Althea Sherman site, www.althearsherman.org. The history of her first tower is there as is the construction of its replacement. In 2015 Linda and Robert Scarth recorded so well with videos the progress of a nest in this new tower in Cedar County in 18 blogs. The other site is based in Austin, Texas, www.chimneyswifts.org. This is the Chimney Swift Conservation Association.

Our Des Moines Audubon *Warbler* newsletter of November, 2004, had a short article about the Gladys Black Chimney Swift Tower and Learning Center. The April and May, 2003, *Warbler* newsletters featured articles about chimney swifts. The March, 2014, newsletter devoted a full page on Kim Gerety's project in Dallas County to build two towers for chimney swifts attached to their garage.

The Iowa Ornithologists Union website and listserv features daily notices of birds reported at sites throughout Iowa. I never see anyone reporting a visit to Gladys Black's memorial to the swifts in Pleasantville. Come some late evening and take a seat near the chimney in the park and see the swifts visit the chimney built especially for them. It's just a short drive from Des Moines. It could also be your last stop on the way home after visiting the Lake Red Rock sites reported so often by Iowa's birders.

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	$10.00
Family	$15.00
Life	$125.00

*Additional Contribution for Conservation Projects _____
*Additional Contribution for Bird Feeding Projects______

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Our National Symbol: The Bald Eagle, on Independence Day

From Iowa DNR, July 4, 2018

With a wingspan of 6 to 7½ feet, a bald eagle flying overhead is a majestic sight and one to behold. Our founding fathers certainly thought so making the bald eagle the national bird in 1782 and the National Emblem in 1789. As the only eagle endemic to North America, the bald eagle was an apt choice for inclusion in our national symbols.

Charles Thompson, one of the key players in designing the Nation's new symbol wrote that the shield or Escutcheon is "born on the breast of an American Eagle without any other supporters to denote that the United States of America ought to rely on their own Virtue." Benjamin Franklin was famously against including the bald eagle as part of the national emblem, calling the bald eagle a "Bird of bad moral Character" for his tendency to steal fish from other birds and for being a "rank coward" in the face of a kingbird.

Known for their distinctive white head, the bald eagle sits 3 to 3½ feet tall and weighs 8-15 pounds. They primarily feed on fish and are nearly always found near water, although they will also eat waterfowl, especially the sick or injured, and carrion. Bald eagles tend to nest from February through June, and it is believed that the eagles mate for life and often return to the same nesting site year after year. The nests can reach over 7 feet across, 12 feet deep, and weigh over two tons! Females lay one to three eggs and incubation lasts 35-40 days. The young's first flight is typically about 75 days after hatching.

When the bald eagle was first adopted as a national symbol, its range spanned from Alaska and Canada to Northern Mexico and it is believed that there were over 100,000 nesting eagles in the country. The first decline of the species began in the mid to late 1800s and coincided with the decline of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other prey. At one point bald eagles were considered marauders that preyed on domestic livestock like chickens and lambs, and consequently they were frequently shot, though bald eagles can only lift three to five pounds. Along with habitat loss this led to further declines in the bald eagle population. In order to combat this decline, in 1940, Congress enacted the Bald Eagle Protection Act, later amended to be the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, which prohibits that killing, selling, or possession of the species.

DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane), a synthetic pestiside developed in the 1940s was another factor in the continued decline in the bald eagle population. The pesticide was eventually banned in 1972 after mounting evidence showed that the cumulative buildup of the pesticide caused reproductive issues and drastically reduced the fertility of bald eagles and other bird species. Unfortunately by 1963, there were only 417 nesting pairs of bald eagles remaining in the contiguous United States. Bald eagles were one of the first species protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1972. The banning of DDT and the work implemented by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, State Wildlife Departments, like the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and other partners facilitated and accelerated the rate of recovery for the species through captive breeding programs, reintroduction efforts, law enforcement, and nest site protection during the nesting season. As of 2006, the last time there was a national survey, the US Fish and Wildlife Services estimates that there are at least 9,789 nesting pairs of bald eagles in the contiguous United States. Thus, in 2007 the bald eagle was delisted from the threatened and endangered species list [although they are still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, which prohibits that killing, selling, or possession of the species.]

Iowa had lost all of its nesting bald eagles by the early 1900s, though prior to European settlement it had hosted hundreds of nesting bald eagles. It wasn't until 1977 that Iowa once again had an eagle nest. The bald eagle remains one of Iowa's Species of Special Concern and monitoring remains a priority. Iowa currently has at least 450 nesting pairs of bald eagles and has eagles in every county in Iowa. The Iowa DNR monitors eagle nest activity and success with the help of over 100 volunteer monitors that have been trained through the Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program. To get involved check out the Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program webpage! The Iowa DNR also performs a midwinter bald eagle survey, which while variable from year to year shows a sharp increase in the numbers of eagles in the 1990s and slower growth in the 2000s.

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Birds, it must be admitted, are the most exciting and most deserving of the vertebrates; they are perhaps the best entrée into the study of natural history, and a very good wedge into conservation awareness.

The truth of the matter is, the birds could very well live without us, but many -- perhaps all -- of us would find life incomplete, indeed almost intolerable without the birds.

Birding, after all, is just a game. Going beyond that is what is important.

...birds are far more than robins, thrushes, and finches to brighten the suburban garden, or ducks and grouse to fill the sportsman's bag, or rare waders or warblers to be ticked off on a bird watcher's checklist. They are indicators of the environment - a sort of environmental litmus-paper.

……Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996) artist, author, photographer, educator
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TIP OF THE MONTH: BACK OFF

While driving on the highway, from time to time you've probably encountered that assertive bumper-sticker, slapped onto a car in front of you: "Back off!" This announces to other drivers the driver's annoyance when it comes to tail-gating. This is a good reminder to all of us to maintain an appropriate distance to cars in front of us when driving.

Unfortunately, bird nests don't come with any equivalent signage. While birds are nest-building, incubating, or feeding young, they are extremely vulnerable. And there are no good reasons why we should make their lives any more vulnerable or more difficult.

Of course, being dive-bombed by a Northern Mockingbird, Brewer's Blackbird, Northern Goshawk, or a colony of Common Terms is plenty of notice that you've come too close to a nest site. So is the "broken wing act" (a.k.a. distraction display) of a Killdeer, or the "rodent run" of a Piping Plover.

Too close an approach to a nest can lead to severe consequences. And reoccurring visits in particular, can leave a path or a scent trail for potential predators to follow. If you find a nest, don't simply go back the way you came, leaving a dead-end trail to the location; try to leave the area by another route.

Basically, if you come across a nest, and unless you're doing real research, it's time to move on. Don't linger. Don't photograph it. And don't record it for YouTube posterity. Indeed, most of us should refrain from photographing nesting birds altogether. In many cases the practice is unnecessary, unjustifiable, and often can add up to harassment.

This season is a stressful time for birds, and usually they will let you know when you are getting too close. Under those circumstances, and for the good of the birds, it's a good time to back off.

From: The Birding Community E-bulletin, June 2018

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