

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



Field Trip Saturday, January 12

Let's meet in the circle drive at the bird blind in Walnut Woods State Park at 8 AM on Saturday, January 12. We'll check out the birds at the blind and in the woods at the park and later check for more birds at Maffitt Reservoir if there is open water. Maffitt, primarily located in Polk County, also has corners that reach into Warren, Dallas and Madison Counties. The reservoir was constructed in the early 1940s, as a backup water source but it is also a popular birding spot. Bring binoculars, a snack and beverage and dress for the conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact field trip leader, Dennis Thompson at cnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837 for more information.

Tuesday, January 15, 7 p.m.
Climate for Change by Ty Smedes

As we experience an exploding human population and rapidly increasing pressure upon remaining habitat, the plant and animal communities that make up our planet's diverse ecosystems are under siege. Along with covering Iowa's natural history, member Ty Smedes, an Iowa outdoor writer and nature photographer has ventured to the jungles of South America, the savannas of Africa, the icy shores of Antarctica, and the high mountain stronghold of New Guinea's fabled Birds of Paradise. Join Ty for a slide presentation and lecture, as we discover many spectacular species of wildlife, and explore some of our planet's most wild places. We will discuss the challenges faced by many of these creatures, as we highlight several local and global success stories and consider the need for environmental sustainability during this 21st century.

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 this meeting place, please contact Jane Clark at 515-223-5047.

Trumpeter Swan Soiree
Saturday, January 26, 10:30 a.m.—2 p.m.
Walnut Woods State Park, West Des Moines

Help celebrate North America's largest waterfowl species at Walnut Woods State Park on Saturday, January 26. Programs will be given both indoors and outdoors with concurrent outdoor viewing and interpretive presentations of trumpeter swans and bald eagles given by Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Polk and Dallas County Conservation naturalists. Spotting scopes and binoculars will be provided. Hundreds of trumpeter swans winter at the Dale Maffitt Reservoir and surrounding area southwest of Des Moines, providing a rare opportunity to view good numbers of free flying trumpeter swans.

**Bird Watching Basics Sunday, January 27, 1—3 p.m.
Forest Park Museum, Dallas County Conservation Board**

Are you looking for a new and exciting way to connect with nature? Come learn the basics to identifying birds through field marks, behavior, and calls to help take the mystery out of backyard birds. We will be looking for live birds as well. Birds are pretty, usually abundant, and you never know when you might see something unexpected. This is a great hobby for people of all ages and a fun social activity that connects across generations. Registration is required for this free program: phone: 515-465-3577.



**Iowa's Winter Raptors
From Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity News**

Get out your binoculars! These raptors can only be found in Iowa during the winter as they breed elsewhere.

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)

Most common in the bluff country of Northeastern Iowa, golden eagles can be found from November through March. Golden eagles are known to defend their young or prey from coyotes or bears. Although capable of killing large prey like cranes and wild ungulates, it normally subsists primarily on rabbits, hares, ground squirrels, and prairie dogs. Golden eagles are brown with a variable yellow to tawny brown wash over the back of the head and neck. Adults have a faintly banded tail and their wingspan is 80"-88". Immature bald eagles are frequently misidentified as golden eagles. It takes 4 years for adult plumage to be acquired.

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*)

A small hawk, with the males which are smaller than the females, being the smallest hawks in North America. The wingspan is only 16"-23". They generally look very similar to the Cooper's hawk though they are smaller. The male Cooper's hawk and the female sharp-shinned hawk can be particularly hard to distinguish because they are about the same size. The adults have blue-grey above and pale reddish below. Adult sharp-shinned hawks will continue to feed their young weeks after they fledge, initially dropping the food in the nest, but later forcing the fledglings to take it from them in the air once they have gained some skill.

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*)

It overwinters in Iowa but heads north during the summer to nest in the arctic and subarctic regions. It is a large hawk with a wing span of 52"-55." It is typically dark brown with a tail that is dark at the tip and pale at the base. Like many Buteos, the rough-legged hawk has a dark and a light morph. The hawk gets its name from the feathering that extends down the legs to the base of the toes, which is useful for staying warm in cold weather. It hunts by hovering over a field and watching for movement below.

Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)

This small owl, often described as the cutest owl in North America, can be found during the winter days sitting still on the branches of conifers in Iowa woodlands. They have a special affinity with conifers and nest in the conifer dominated forests to Iowa's north. They migrate south in the winter, looking for abundant sources of their favorite prey, deer and white-footed mice. The migration of the Northern Saw-whet has been a subject of study and Project OwlNet collects data from owl banding stations across the U.S. to try and learn more about this species migration patterns.

Please note that these aren't the only raptors found in Iowa during the winter months. Many of our nesting raptors do stick around during the winter months and you will still see plenty of Red-tailed Hawks, Cooper's Hawks and Bald Eagles flying and roosting around.

Iowa's Wildlife Diversity Program
By Stephanie Shepherd | Wildlife Diversity Biologist
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Tax Time....It's for the birds! And butterflies and frogs and turtles and....

It's been a year, well really a couple of years, of big change at the Wildlife Diversity Program. Long-time outreach and species restoration specialist Pat Schlarbaum retired in 2017 and bird biologist Bruce Ehresman retired this past spring. Their knowledge and experience has been much missed. The three remaining diversity staff have done our best to continue conserving Iowa's wildlife and we have been busy!

- We collected bird, herptile, odonate, mammal, butterfly, and fish data on 50 sites as part of our Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring Project.
- We helped lead monarch butterfly conservation efforts in the state, region and nation with staff serving on writing committees for both the Midwest and Iowa Conservation Plans as well as serving on the National Science and Species Status Assessment teams.
- We gave at least \$65,000 in grants for wildlife diversity focused habitat management, environmental education and small research projects.
- Working with Iowa State Extension, we produced a Mammals of Iowa booklet to foster knowledge and appreciation of Iowa's mammals.
- We performed surveys to help better define the status and distribution of the Federally Endangered Rusty-patched Bumblebee. Stephanie even found one buzzing around her prairie garden in Boone and it was recorded at our home base of Ledges State Park!!
- We collected data, often with the help of some amazing volunteers, on Bald Eagle, Osprey and Peregrine nests, Greater Prairie-chickens, and Frogs and Toads at over 350 wetlands.
- We received a federal grant to investigate how to most effectively add and manage for earlier blooming plants in reconstructed prairie.
- We gave at least 20 programs, workshops and presentations across the state.

As the New Year begins we also start thinking about one of our favorite times of year...Tax season! Not always an event to inspire joyfulness, we appreciate it because it gives folks an opportunity to donate money through the Fish and Wildlife Fund (or Chickadee check-off) on the state tax form.

If every Iowa taxpayer donated just \$1 on the Fish and Wildlife Check-off, it would mean \$1.5 million for natural resource conservation! So, if you're able, take a moment this tax season to get a little wild and consider making a donation.

Donating is easy. Simply enter your donation amount on the **Fish and Wildlife Check-Off** contribution line (usually between lines 55-59 on form 1040), and the sum is either automatically deducted from your refund or added to the amount owed. Don't forget to talk to your tax preparer if you have your taxes done professionally – many tax preparers forget to mention donation opportunities. The 1000+ species of birds, butterflies, mammals, frogs, toads, turtles and dragonflies that call Iowa home will thank you.

Thank you again and we wish all of you a winter filled with plenty of time in nature.

Red-headed Woodpecker

By Carol Berrier

A native of Scotland, ornithologist Alexander Wilson was awed by the sight of a Red-headed Woodpecker. The year was 1794, and Wilson had just arrived in Delaware. The spectacular nine-inch bird's entire head was bright red and its back solid black. Large white wing patches, and a white rump and belly added to its beauty. If Wilson hadn't seen the bird, he surely would have heard its loud drumming or its emphatic queeah ! calls. Wilson was so inspired that he set out to describe birds of the New World in his American Ornithology (1808 -1814).

The Red-headed Woodpecker in Wilson's time was more plentiful in the eastern United States than the American Robin. Even as late as the 1940's and 1950's, redheads were numerous, enjoying their favorite habitats of open deciduous woodlands, savannas, and tree-lined city streets. But as dead wood was cleared from woodlots and from forested land, the woodpeckers lost many favorite nesting sites and their numbers began a steady decline.

Vacant woodpecker cavities are used by many birds and mammals. In 1890-91, one hundred European Starlings were brought to the United States. Unfortunately they thrived, reaching the mid-west by 1920, and the west coast by the 1940's. Now hundreds of millions of these aggressive birds make our native woodpeckers' lives difficult. Red-headed Woodpeckers nest high in long-dead barkless trees, and are prime targets for starlings. Starlings don't wait for nests to be vacated, but enter the cavities, tossing out eggs and nestlings and attacking the adult woodpeckers, leaving the cavities foul-smelling and unusable after their own young have fledged.

Red-headed Woodpeckers eat insects (including flying ones which they catch on the wing), ants, beetle larvae, grasshoppers, and caterpillars. They also eat corn, acorns, beechnuts, wild berries, and tree sap, storing enough in tree crevices for their winter food supply.

Male and female redheads look alike, but juveniles have brown heads.

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