

THE WARBLER

DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY

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OCTOBER 2019

EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Field Trip to Easter Lake and Yellow Banks County Parks Saturday, October 12, 2019, 8 a.m.

Please meet at Easter Lake County Park on the SE side of Des Moines at 8:00 a.m. We'll check out the newly renovated area and also visit Yellow Banks County Park. Fall migration should still be going strong. Contact Denny Thompson at 254-0837 or cnthomps@gmail.com for more information.

Monthly field trips of Des Moines Audubon Society, usually held the second Saturday of the month, provide wonderful 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.

Tuesday, October 15, 7 p.m.

Northern Peru: Andean Avian Paradise By Karen Viste-Sparkman and Stuart Sparkman

Peru is a land of extremes, from the desert coastal metropolis of Lima to the Incan/colonial city of Cajamarca at 9000 feet. Journey vicariously with Karen Viste-Sparkman and Stuart Sparkman to this enchanting country and enjoy a sample of the fascinating and beautiful bird life that northwestern Peru has to offer. Wonderfully varied landscapes, the ruins of ancient architecture, and hardworking people proud of their culture are a few things a visitor to Peru will experience. The lure for birders is that Peru, a country the size of Alaska, boasts a bird list of 1800 species, roughly twice the number of avian species as the continental U. S. and Canada. From widespread South American birds like Green-and-black Fruiteater and the majestic Andean Condor to range-restricted endemics of Andean valleys like the Yellow-faced Parrotlet, Gray-bellied Comet, Marañon Crescentchest, and Yellow-scarfed Tanager, the birding feast never ends. Oh, and did we mention this trip netted fifty species of hummingbirds alone?

Karen is a wildlife biologist, and Stuart is a retired mathematics teacher. They have been birding together for more than 30 years. This was their third trip to South America. Join them for some memories of a southern birding vacation in Peru.

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 jrclark@radiks.net.

Des Moines Audubon Society and National Audubon Society

State and local Audubon Societies evolved over several years, even before National Audubon Society was established. The first organization, Massachusetts Audubon, was founded in 1896 by two women who were outraged about birds being killed for their feathers which were being used for hat making.

According to National Audubon's history, by 1898, state-level Audubon Societies had been established in Pennsylvania, New York, New Hampshire, Illinois, Maine, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, Minnesota, Texas, and California. *Note, neighboring state organizations in Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota were established by 1898.

In 1905, the *National Audubon Society* was founded, and also by 1905 *The National Association of Audubon Societies* was incorporated in New York State.

By 1923 *Des Moines Audubon Society* and *Iowa Ornithologists Union* were both organized in Iowa. Des Moines Audubon Society was organized by a group of folks interested in the birds of the area. By 1940 "The National Association of Audubon Societies" became the "National Audubon Society".

In 1942 the Des Moines Audubon Society was officially incorporated in the state of Iowa and continues still as an organization independent of National Audubon. Although it is not a chapter of National Audubon, there is an affiliation and a shared interest in protection of birds and other wildlife and their habitats. National Audubon dues do not include Des Moines Audubon dues.

Gray Catbird, by Carol Berrier

A friend recently asked me if I could identify a bird that she had seen in her back yard. "It's all dark gray," she said. "That's all I need to know," I replied. "There is only one possibility--the Gray Catbird."

The Gray Catbird does have a black cap but its only bit of color is a rusty patch under the tail, visible only when the tail is raised in excitement or in courtship. The sexes look alike.

Catbirds do migrate, although some will stay during a Midwest winter if there is a good supply of berries. They return to their nesting sites after wintering in the southern United States or the tropics. The males arrive in late April or early May, a week before the females. Some birds remain paired for years, returning to the same site. The male stakes out his territory with nearly constant singing in the mornings and evenings, and even sometimes at night.

A member of the Mimidae, or "mimic thrush" family, the catbird is related to the Mockingbird and the Brown Thrasher, and like them is a fine singer and mimic. But unlike those two cousins the catbird does not repeat musical phrases, and it interrupts its song with occasional harsh squealing notes and catlike mewling.

The catbird changes from its fall/winter diet of fruits to a spring/summer diet that includes protein-rich insects especially good for growing nestlings. Most of their foraging is on the ground, and their nest is built near the ground in dense shrubbery or in a hedgerow. As a child I looked for the catbird's nest each spring deep in our barberry bush, safe from predators.

The female catbird builds the nest and incubates the three to five blue-green eggs. The male feeds the female on the nest and helps with their nestlings. He takes charge when they fledge, while the female starts a new nest for a second brood.

After nesting season the male catbird's song becomes a whisper, and the adults molt before their fall migration begins.

BACK TO SANTA ANA AGAIN?

For more than a year we have assumed that Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, a vital Important Bird Area (IBA) in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas was excluded from border-wall construction by a specific Congressional prohibition against such construction. But alas, Santa Ana NWR may not be quite as safe as we thought.

According to supporters and advocates on the ground, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) are seeking creative ways to circumvent the intent of the prohibition. CBP may be splitting hairs, citing non-FWS ownership of the land directly under the levee going through the refuge (on which the wall would be built) and essentially thwarting the will of Congress. You can find more information from the National Wildlife Refuge Association at <https://www.refugeassociation.org/news/2019/8/26/santa-ana-national-wildlife-refuge-is-threatened-again> .

From: The Birding Community E-bulletin, September 2019

More Than One in Four Birds Lost in the Past 50 Years Thursday, September 19, 2019

A study published September 19 in the journal *Science* reveals that since 1970, bird populations in the United States and Canada have declined by 29 percent, or almost 3 billion birds, signaling a widespread ecological crisis. The results show tremendous losses across diverse groups of birds and habitats—from iconic songsters such as meadowlarks to long-distance migrants such as swallows and backyard birds including sparrows.

“Multiple, independent lines of evidence show a massive reduction in the abundance of birds,” said Ken Rosenberg, the study’s lead author and a senior scientist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and American Bird Conservancy.

“We expected to see continuing declines of threatened species. But for the first time, the results also showed pervasive losses among common birds across all habitats, including backyard birds.” The study notes that birds are indicators of environmental health, signaling that natural systems across the U.S. and Canada are now being so severely impacted by human activities that they no longer support the same robust wildlife populations. The findings show that of nearly 3 billion birds lost, 90 percent belong to 12 bird families, including sparrows, warblers, finches, and swallows—common, widespread species that play influential roles in food webs and ecosystem functioning, from seed dispersal to pest control.

Among the steep declines noted:

- Grassland birds are especially hard hit, with a 53-percent reduction in population—more than 720 million birds—since 1970.
- Shorebirds, most of which frequent sensitive coastal habitats, were already at dangerously low numbers and have lost more than one-third of their population.
- The volume of spring migration, measured by radar in the night skies, has dropped by 14 percent in just the past decade.

“These data are consistent with what we’re seeing elsewhere with other taxa showing massive declines, including insects and amphibians,” said coauthor Peter Marra, senior scientist emeritus and former head of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and now director of the Georgetown Environment Initiative at Georgetown University. “It’s imperative to address immediate and ongoing threats, both because the domino effects can lead to the decay of ecosystems that humans depend on for our own health and livelihoods—and because people all over the world cherish birds in their own right.

Can you imagine a world without birdsong? “Evidence for the declines emerged from detection of migratory birds in the air from 143 NEXRAD weather radar stations across the continent in a period spanning over 10 years, as well as from nearly 50 years of data collected through multiple monitoring efforts on the ground. “Citizen-science participants contributed critical scientific data to show the international scale of losses of birds,” said coauthor John Sauer of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). “Our results also provide insights into actions we can take to reverse the declines.” The analysis included citizen-science data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey coordinated by the USGS and the Canadian Wildlife Service—the main sources of long-term, large-scale population data for North American birds—the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, and Manomet’s International Shorebird Survey.

Although the study did not analyze the causes of declines, it noted that the steep drop in North American birds parallels the losses of birds elsewhere in the world, suggesting multiple interacting causes that reduce breeding success and increase mortality.

It noted that the largest factor driving these declines is likely the widespread loss and degradation of habitat, especially due to agricultural intensification and urbanization. Other studies have documented mortality from predation by free-roaming domestic cats; collisions with glass, buildings, and other structures; and pervasive use of pesticides associated with widespread declines in insects, an essential food source for birds. Climate change is expected to compound these challenges by altering habitats and threatening plant communities that birds need to survive. More research is needed to pinpoint primary causes for declines in individual species. “The story is not over,” said coauthor Michael Parr, president of American Bird Conservancy. “There are so many ways to help save birds. Some require policy decisions such as strengthening the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. We can also work to ban harmful pesticides and properly fund effective bird conservation programs.

“It’s a wake-up call that we’ve lost more than a quarter of our birds in the U.S. and Canada,” said coauthor Adam Smith from Environment and Climate Change Canada. “But the crisis reaches far beyond our individual borders. Many of the birds that breed in Canadian backyards migrate through or spend the winter in the U.S. and places farther south—from Mexico and the Caribbean to Central and South America. What our birds need now is an historic, hemispheric effort that unites people and organizations with one common goal: bringing our birds back.” See more at <https://www.3billionbirds.org/>.

Citation: Rosenberg, K. V., A. M. Dokter, P. J. Blancher, J. R. Sauer, A. C. Smith, P. A. Smith, J. C. Stanton, A. Panjabi, L. Helft, M. Parr, and P. P. Marra. This paper was published online by the journal *Science* on Thursday, September 19, 2019.

**Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from July to June.
National Audubon dues do not include Des Moines Audubon dues.
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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