

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



Saturday, March 9th Field Trip

For the Saturday, March 9th field trip; plan to meet in the parking lot at the Saylorville Visitors Center at 8:00 a.m. We'll observe birds around the Visitor's Center and then depending on activity and conditions, we'll venture out in search of birds that might be found at various sites around the lake. Dress for conditions and bring binoculars and a snack for break. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend. Contact Jane Clark at 515-223-5047 or jrclark@radiks.net for more information.

Tuesday, March 19, 7 p.m. Owls of Iowa by Joel Van Roekel

Joel Van Roekel will be presenting a version of his "Owls of Iowa" program for Des Moines Audubon. Join us, sit back and enjoy Joel's casual style of presenting and feel free to ask questions as he gives us a look at some of the good stuff that is in Des Moines City Parks.

When Des Moines Parks and Recreation decided to add Environmental Education staff to their program, Joel took the position and ever since then, has been working to make connections between the public and the wildlife that exists in our Des Moines City Parks. Programs and events take place throughout the year that provide education and recreation blended together to entice people get outside while they have some fun and hopefully learn something new. Snowshoeing under the Snow Moon in February or Stand Up Paddleboarding on Gray's Lake in August to see the cliff swallow nests are just a couple of examples of events that he has presented.

Joel graduated from the University of Northern Iowa with two seasonal internship experiences with Black Hawk County Conservation and then went to work for Warren County Conservation Board as the County Naturalist. From there he came to Des Moines Parks and Recreation as the Supervisor of Environmental Education.

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

Red-bellied Woodpecker

By Carol Berrier

Red-headed Woodpeckers, once so numerous, have experienced a steady decline in the last 50-60 years due to removal of dead wood from our woodlands, and the growth of alien species choking our forest floors. As red-heads moved west in search of oak savannah, *Red-bellied Woodpeckers* expanded north and west from their habitats in the southeastern United States. The two species do not compete for nesting sites, since red-bellies prefer dead trees with bark still intact, or even dead limbs on live trees. Red-heads choose tall trees without bark.

The diets of both species are half vegetarian, including in the fall acorns, corn, and wild fruits. In mid-November I watched as a Red-bellied Woodpecker made repeated trips from my sunflower-seed feeder to the nearby locust tree where he cached the seeds in a crevice for winter use. In the spring ants, insects, beetle larvae, and caterpillars make up the bulk of their diets.

All woodpeckers are well-adapted for clinging to tree trunks. Two of their four toes face backward for support, and their stiff tails act as braces. The Red-bellied Woodpecker is a handsome ten-inch bird with a black and white barred back and wings, a white rump, and grayish-white underparts that are tinged with red. "Red-bellied" is a misnomer, for the red on the belly is faint and often difficult to see. He does have red on his head, extending from the back of his neck, over the crown, and down to his bill. The female red-belly looks like the male, except that the red on the back of her head does not extend over her crown. The immature has a brown head.

Unlike songbirds, woodpeckers use loud drumming to lure a mate or protect their territory, Red-bellies and redheads both have loud churring calls and the typical undulating woodpecker flight pattern.

*Editor's note: Please see the January 2019 issue of *The Warbler* for Carol's article on *Red-headed Woodpeckers*.

The Northern Flicker

By Carol Berrier

As a young child I had a favorite climbing tree, an old apple tree with limbs low enough for me to reach. Below the lowest limb was a knothole where a branch had once been, about five feet above the ground. One spring I heard noises emanating from the hole. I watched until I saw a flicker enter, and the chirping noises became louder. I had discovered a flicker's nest.

The flicker is a large, jay-sized woodpecker, twelve to fourteen inches long. It has a brown back with black barring, a black tail, and a white rump which is conspicuous when the bird is in flight. The flicker's breast and belly are tan with black spots. It has a narrow black bib, a tan face, gray crown, and a red crescent on the back of its neck. A black mustache is present in the male and in both male and female immatures, but absent in the adult female. The eastern "yellow-shafted" birds show yellow underwings in flight, while their western "red-shafted" relatives display salmon red underwings and red mustaches, but lack the red neck crescent. Sometimes they interbreed.

Although the flicker's bill is long, it is slightly curved and not as strong as the bills of other woodpecker species. Hence they look for knot holes and soft wood for their nest sites. They also tend to reuse their nests, returning to them in subsequent years. Flickers have very long sticky tongues which they use in their foraging. Their favorite food is ants, and they are often on the ground feeding at ant hills. They also like other insects and wild berries. They are not dependent on mature dense woodland habitat, but look for forest edges, parks, roadsides, and suburbs.

Perhaps because of their preference for ants, most flickers in our northern states migrate to the Gulf States for the winter, returning to their nest sites and reuniting with their mates in March or April. However some flickers stay through the winter. Spring has arrived when you hear the wicker, wicker, wicker call and the loud drumming of the Northern Flicker.

Book Worms

Reading and discussing nature books is a fun wintertime activity, without having to lace up your boots. Join *Book Worms* discussions led by Polk County Conservation naturalist, Heidi Anderson at Plot Twist Bookstore, 502 N Ankeny Blvd., Ankeny. March 28 - 7:00-8:30 pm. *The Feather Thief* by Kirk Wallace Johnson. For questions please call 515.323.5339. Please note there is a \$5.00 fee. Register at:

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Polk/Park/Polk-CountyEducationPrograms/Events/12162/Book-Worms.aspx>

WINTER FEEDER MAINTENANCE TIPS

Once considered a wintertime activity, backyard bird feeding now takes place all year. But the practice nonetheless accelerates in winter, so now is a good time to consider your own feeder maintenance schedule.

Simply put: keeping bird feeders clean is a good way to help keep your visiting birds healthy. Odd seeds, stuck in the nooks and crannies of feeders, can become wet and moldy. These can easily be removed with a brush and water sprayed from a hose (if weather permits.)

Still, to be sure your feeders are clean, use a highly diluted solution of bleach and water (nine parts water, one part bleach). Tube-feeders are the most important ones to clean thoroughly. Immerse the feeders in the liquid mix for a couple of minutes, then rinse thoroughly and let dry before refilling with seed. (Note: even diluted bleach can discolor your shirts, blouses, pants, etc.) Also, rake and remove seed hulls and other debris immediately below your feeders on a regular basis to retard mold and bacterial growth.

From: The Birding Community E-bulletin, December 2018

BEYOND STANDARD RANGE MAPS

Last month, the fine folks at the Cornell Lab's eBird introduced a new class of maps that reveal where North American birds are, and how they are faring, at a finer scale than has ever been produced before.

It's called "eBird Status and Trends," and it uses data and models to estimate bird abundance every 1.7 miles and every week of the year across most of Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. Applying sightings from more than 12 million eBird checklists and satellite data from NASA, the project covers 107 North American species, with more to be added later this year.

The eBird team summarized the change succinctly: "Suddenly, a range map doesn't have to be based on a single expert's knowledge, drawn with opaque ink, and printed on a map the size of a postage stamp. It can be alive: driven by millions of data points, intricately detailed down to the county level and below, and moving to show the way birds move with the seasons."

The results go far beyond standard range maps. The new maps show abundance (not just occurrence), giving birders, conservationists, and scientists the ability to distinguish a species' strongholds from areas where it may be scarce. The maps are created with models that include environmental data, which means eBird Status and Trends can reveal which habitats are best for finding a given species from week to week throughout the year.

All the maps, graphs, animations, and other data are free for anyone to view, and with a free eBird account you can even download them.

The free availability reflects eBird's guiding principles: collecting data that the birdwatching public voluntarily provides and transforming it into products that benefit conservationists and scientists. This way, users can enjoy their pastime while actually making the world a better place for birds. You can take a closer look at some of the project's main features here: <https://bit.ly/2BMCSHi>.

From The Birding Community E-bulletin, January 2019 You can access all the past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>.

Red List of Threatened Species: A Few Additional Surprises for Us

As reported in the February issue of *The Warbler*, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species maintains a record of how close species may be to extinction. Every year, BirdLife updates which birds are stable, which are in recovery, and which have slipped toward extinction.

Last month a few upbeat stories were shared in *The Warbler*. Now the surprising and troubling stories:

Common Grackle populations have been dropping. With numbers plummeting by more than 50 percent between 1970 and 2014, the species has now been classed as Near Threatened by IUCN. Pest-control measures may have contributed to this decline.

Eastern Whip-poor-will data have revealed that the species population fell by over 60% between 1970 and 2014. With a dependence on flying insects for food, the species may be declining due to pesticides, intensive agriculture, and other factors reducing insect availability. The species has been up-listed to Near Threatened this year

Rufous Hummingbird could be sliding to extinction in plain sight, and the species has also been up-listed to Near Threatened this year. Its reliance on nectar and on insects during the breeding season may combine to put the species in jeopardy. This hummer may become a victim of climate change as early-blooming flowers in some locations could mean that hummingbirds arrive from migration too late to take advantage of this vital food source. Forest fires and changes in post-fire habitat conditions could also be contributing to the species' decline.

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