

THE WARBLER

DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME XXVI, NUMBER 6

JUNE 2019

EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



FIELD TRIP TO CHICHAQUA—SATURDAY, JUNE 8th

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, June 8 and the destination will be Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt in northeast Polk County. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot on the west side of the Ramada Inn (used to be Best Western Motel) located in the SW corner of the Ankeny 1st Street Interchange on I-35 (address: 133 Southeast Delaware Avenue). Polk County's Chichaqua Bottoms includes over 8,000 acres along the Skunk River, with prairie, wetlands and riparian woodlands supporting about 200 species of birds. Target species include: Sandhill Crane, Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat and Henslow's Sparrow. Dress for conditions. Contact Denny Thompson for more information at cnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837.

REMINDER: NO PROGRAM MEETINGS IN JUNE, JULY OR AUGUST

Des Moines Audubon May Field Trip Report

By Roy Adolphson and Jane Clark

The Des Moines Audubon Field Trip on Saturday, May 11th started at Saylorville Lake Visitors' Center. It was another chilly morning. There were 17 birders who showed up anticipating spring migrants, and we ended by seeing 84 total species, 17 of which were warblers! Things started out a little slow at the visitors' center, but we had a nice fly-by of a Pileated Woodpecker. We then moved on to Cottonwood Recreation Area below the dam. There we found a Yellow-throated Warbler in the sycamores and a Clay-colored Sparrow hanging out with many Chipping Sparrows and American Goldfinch. We also observed a small group of Palm Warblers flitting to and from some disturbed soil to nearby shrubs and a Forster's Tern was flying over the adjacent pond. Some saw Orchard Orioles along the entrance drive to Cottonwood.

Next we went below the dam to Bob Shetler area and checked out the ponds, wet areas and streams. We had a distant view of a Green Heron across the river and we found Northern Waterthrush, Prothonotary Warbler, American Redstart, Yellow-rumped Warblers and Swainson's Thrush. Later we walked the paved trail below the big pond and were rewarded with a Wood Thrush singing its flute-like song and its wik-wik-wik call, a Golden-winged Warbler, and Chestnut-sided Warbler. Wild Turkeys were observed in a few places during the morning.

A possible Fish Crow that was heard and observed at the last turnaround below the dam along the river was an obvious highlight, although the chances of it getting accepted as a record are probably slim. At the end of the trip, Denny led a couple other vehicles down to Lakeview Recreation Area west of the dam where we scoped the Osprey nest on a distant cell tower, but couldn't find the bird. However, we did pick up a Great Egret and a Spotted Sandpiper.

~~~~~

"For the whooping crane there is no freedom but that of unbounded wilderness, no life except its own. Without meekness, without a sign of humility, it has refused to accept our idea of what the world should be like."

-- Robert Porter Allen, (1905-1963) conservationist

## HOPE SURELY SLIPPED AWAY

"Hope" was one of seven Whimbrels banded in 2008 and 2009 as part of a joint project between The Nature Conservancy and the Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William & Mary in Virginia. She was initially tracked with a satellite transmitter and became a living symbol of the challenges faced by migratory shorebirds throughout their lives.

Hope was the last of her group of seven that continued to be monitored for years. Unfortunately, she is also considered to be one of the many casualties of Hurricane Maria in September 2017.

Hope was originally captured as an adult on 19 May 2009 while staging in Boxtree Creek in Virginia where she was banded and fitted with a satellite transmitter as part of a study focused on Whimbrel migration. Hope was then tracked for more than 50,000 miles back and forth four times between her breeding site on the Mackenzie River in far western Canada and her wintering site on Great Pond, on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Once her transmitter antenna was lost in September 2012, shortly after she arrived at Great Pond, researchers decided to remove the transmitter rather than replace it. After removing the transmitter in late November 2012, Hope simply had to be identified by her coded leg flag (AYY).

Hope was featured on a website that allowed the public to potentially track her movements. She rapidly attracted a near-cult following of shorebird biologists, bird watchers, and school children from across the hemisphere and beyond. Over the years, she became a virtual ambassador for shorebird migrants making impressive nonstop flights, sometimes moving great distances out over the open Atlantic Ocean, and navigating with great precision to specific stopover sites. Hope reliably exhibited high fidelity to her breeding site, her wintering location, and several staging areas along the way.

One of the more dramatic events during Hope's tracking life occurred in August of 2011, when after taking off from South Hampton Island in Hudson Bay she encountered Tropical Storm Gert over the open ocean off the coast of Nova Scotia. Hope flew through the storm for 27 hours against powerful headwinds. Once she broke through the storm, she immediately made a turn toward Cape Cod and after an unplanned layover to refuel, she ultimately continued to her winter territory on Great Pond.

In mid-August 2017, Hope arrived at her usual wintering site at Great Pond where she was positively observed and photographed. St. Croix was hit by Hurricane Irma on 6 September 2017 as a category five storm with heavy rain and major damage. Local ecologist, Lisa Yntema, was eventually able to visit Great Pond and saw Hope following Hurricane Irma on 11 September. Unfortunately, less than two weeks later, on 19 September, St. Croix was hit by Hurricane Maria, causing extensive damage with the eye of the storm passing directly over Great Pond.

Starting on 5 October, Lisa Yntema visited Great Pond several times through the fall of 2017, but she did not find Hope. In April and May of 2018, Barry Truitt also spent time searching for Hope at her spring staging area on Boxtree Creek in Virginia, but unfortunately came up empty. Hope did not return to Great Pond during the fall of 2018 either. There will surely be some serious searching near Boxtree Creek again this month too, but the odds are not good for finding the famous Whimbrel.

In a thoughtful homage to Hope, Bryan Watts, from the Center for Conservation Biology, wrote the following: "Over a short period of time, by just living out her fascinating life, Hope unknowingly taught scientists important lessons about the requirements of Whimbrels through the annual cycle, educated the broader community about the challenges faced by migratory birds, demonstrated that local actions can contribute to international movements, and left a legacy that will educate children for generations. Fair winds and following seas, Hope."

From The Birding Community E-bulletin, May 2019

---

## WHOOPIING CRANE EASTERN POPULATION HITS MILESTONE

From The Birding Community E-bulletin, April 2019

The reintroduced Eastern Migratory Population of Whooping Cranes that nests in Wisconsin and winters mainly in Florida has reached an estimated population milestone of 100 birds. This includes 45 females, 52 males, and 3 cranes of undetermined sex. During spring migration, many of these cranes were sighted along the migration route; by early March these included 13 in Illinois, 36 in Indiana, 9 in Kentucky, 3 in Tennessee, 14 in Alabama, 3 in Georgia, and 5 that were still in Florida.

Given past history, some individuals of this crane population may wander to neighboring states this summer. Since Whooping Cranes do not begin nesting until three or four years-old, and since non-breeding sub-adults are known to wander before they reach nesting age, such wandering is expected.

To see the report on the stopover sites and the reported locations of these migrating individuals, you can refer to: <https://www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane-eastern-population-update-march-2019/> .

## **Iowa IBA Spotlight Species: Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)**

**By Doug Harr**

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.

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 de-creasing 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 re-moved 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".

Newsletter of Iowa Audubon, April 2018, Volume 15, Number 1

---

## **The European Starling**

**By Carol Berrier**

"There must be 1,000 starlings in that tree!" I muttered in disgust. It was December 15, 2018, and I was participating in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

On March 6, 1890, wealthy drug manufacturer, Eugene Schieffelin, believing that every bird mentioned by Shakespeare would be a welcome addition to our native bird population, released sixty European Starlings in New York City. The following year he released forty more. Previous releases of nightingales and skylarks had failed, but Schieffelin was encouraged by the successful introduction of the "English" (House) Sparrow thirty years previously. The adaptable starlings thrived and by the 1920's starlings had reached the Midwest, and by the 1940's the west coast. Now the population in North America is believed to be at least two hundred million. European Starlings are not a protected species.

Although frequently seen in mixed flocks with blackbirds, starlings are not closely related to them. Like blackbirds starlings are gregarious, have black feathers, often forage on the ground, and walk instead of hop. Unlike blackbirds they have short tails and they can vocally mimic other bird species as well as dogs, cats, and machines (including doorbells and telephones). Starlings also have short "tseeer" and "hooee" calls. In late summer starlings molt, replacing their black feathers with a speckled winter look and their yellow bills with gray.

Starlings forage by "gaping". Inserting their closed bills into the soil, and then snapping them open, they can pry apart grass roots, exposing grubs. Fruits, grains, and caterpillars are also mainstays in their diets.

Why do ornithologists dislike these birds so much? Mainly because they aggressively take over nest cavities, depriving our woodpeckers of their nest holes. Bluebirds, tree swallows, great crested flycatchers, wrens, and chickadees are also sometimes evicted from their nests. Starlings can't enter a hole one and one-half inches or less in diameter, so check your bird houses. Parents do not remove fecal sacs after the nestlings develop feathers, so once used by starlings a cavity is left a sodden mess, unusable even for the starlings' second brood.

These sociable birds use large communal night roosts in trees or on city buildings. Their noise and droppings make them extremely unpopular with their human neighbors. Yet, despite their faults, a murmuration of thousands of starlings in synchronous flight is a beautiful sight.

**THE WARBLER**  
**VOLUME XXVI, NUMBER 6**  
**JUNE 2019**  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**9871 LINCOLN AVENUE**  
**CLIVE, IA 50325**



**Nonprofit  
Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 1142  
Des Moines, IA**

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_