

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



MARCH 14TH FIELD TRIP

March field trip - we'll meet at the Saylorville Visitor Center at 8:00 a.m. This should be a prime time to look for migrating waterfowl and gulls. There should also still be a lot of Bald Eagles in the area. Please contact Denny Thompson at 254-0837 or cndthomps@gmail.com for more information. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend.

Des Moines Audubon Program Tuesday, March 17, 7 p.m. Inviting Birds to Your Yard, by Karl Jungbluth

Inviting Birds to Your Yard will be presented by Karl Jungbluth, a bird and gardening enthusiast who lives on the north boundary of Ledges State Park. The presentation will chronicle 26 years of efforts to turn an old uninteresting yard into a place of shelter and food for birds, and a place of peaceful beauty for people too. Karl will focus on bird-friendly native shrubs, highlight some of his prairie/pollinator plantings for sunnier spots and provide tips on making your veggie garden a bird and butterfly hangout. Along the way, Karl will also discuss living with four-legged wildlife and other challenges to success that make his garden like everyone else's, evolving on the edge of untamed.

Karl Jungbluth has been gardening south of Boone for 26 years- while watching birds AND the weather at the same time. Since retiring from the National Weather Service in 2013 he gets to spend a lot more time outdoors, whether working on a project in his open-air workshop, hiking in Ledges State Park or helping with bird surveys. Karl was a contributor to the ISU Extension publication "Attracting Birds to Your Yard."

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.



"Birds should be saved for utilitarian reasons; and, moreover, they should be saved because of reasons unconnected with dollars and cents. . . [T]o lose the chance to see frigate-birds soaring in circles above the storm, or a file of pelicans winging their way homeward across the crimson afterglow of the sunset, or a myriad of terns flashing in the bright light of midday as they hover in a shifting maze above the beach - why, the loss is like the loss of a gallery of the masterpieces of the artists of old time."Theodore Roosevelt, (1859-1919) 26th President of the United States, historian, naturalist, explorer.

More than 200 bird species nest in Iowa, but over 420 species spend at least part of their year here. Many of these birds migrate long distances to move between breeding and winter habitats and use Iowa as a place to rest and refuel along the way. By creating native habitat, reducing window strikes, and advocating for our feathered neighbors, we can make Iowa a better home for birds!

What else can the average person do to help their feathered neighbors?

Create Habitat

Many scientists recognize the loss of habitat as a leading contributor to wildlife population declines. Although some non-habitat areas like agricultural fields, roads, and buildings are necessary, increasing the amount and quality of habitat is possible and likely one of the most effective ways to help birds and other wildlife. Habitat conservation and creation can take many forms. Entering land into conservation easements and habitat programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), volunteering to conduct habitat restoration and management on private property or public land, and increasing native plantings in yards and rights-of way, can all provide habitat for birds and other wildlife. The more native habitat the better, every little bit counts!

Reduce Lawn, Plant Natives

Birds have fewer places each year to safely rest during migration and to raise their young: More than 10 million acres of land in the United States were converted to developed land from 1982 to 1997. Lawns and pavement don't offer enough food or shelter for many birds and other wildlife. With more than 40 million acres of lawn in the U.S. alone there's huge potential to support wildlife by replacing lawns with native plantings.

*Add native plants, watch birds come in: Native plants add interest and beauty to your yard and neighborhood, and provide shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will sustain birds and diverse wildlife.

Avoid Pesticides

More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied in the United States each year. The continent's most widely used insecticides, called neonicotinoids or "neonics," are lethal to birds and to the insects that birds consume. Common weed killers used around homes, such as 2, 4-D and glyphosate (used in Roundup), can be toxic to wildlife. Pesticides that are toxic to birds can harm them directly through contact, or if they eat contaminated seeds or prey. Pesticides can also harm birds indirectly by reducing the number of available insects, which birds need to survive.

*A healthy choice for you, your family, and birds: Consider purchasing organic food. Nearly 70% of produce sold in the U.S. contains pesticides. Reduce pesticides around your home and garden.

Keep Cats Indoors

Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada. This is the #1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss. Cats can make great pets, but more than 110 million feral and pet cats now roam in the United States and Canada. These nonnative predators instinctively hunt and kill birds even when well fed.

*A solution that's good for cats and birds: Save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping cats indoors or creating an outdoor "catio." You can also train your cat to walk on a leash.

Chimney Swift Volunteer Opportunity

Mike Havlik, naturalist for Dallas County Conservation Board (DCCB) is working on a volunteer opportunity that includes Chimney Swifts. Staff at DCCB are at the very beginning stages of monitoring two sites where they know swifts nest and roost during migration. There are other bird clubs and conservation organizations that have volunteers monitoring first and last dates for arrival and departure, peak influx during migration, etc. Mike would like it if everyone could put a collective sticky note on the back of your brain to keep your eyes open for potential and known nesting or roosting sites in Dallas County. Just send him an e-mail and he will begin collecting information for the next year.

Mike.Havlik@dallascountyiowa.gov

515-465-3577

<http://www.dallascountyiowa.gov/conservation>

Iowa Important Bird Area Spotlight Species: Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) By Doug Harr

The Piping Plover is a small, federal and Iowa endangered shorebird that inhabits wide, open beaches, alkali flats, and sand flats of North America. Its very limited breeding sites in Iowa are only on sandbars of the Missouri River. With climate change causing increased flooding of our rivers, the future of this species is of considerable concern in Iowa.

These chunky-looking little shorebirds have sandy-colored upper body parts, white undersides and orange legs. In breeding season, adults have a black forehead, a black breast band and an orange bill with a black tip. In winter, black body bands fade and the bill turns entirely black.

Like most plovers, this species simply nests in a shallow depression in the sand, often lined with small pebbles. Four buffy, dark-spotted eggs are incubated for 23-28 days, depending on location and time of season. Precocial young are up and running almost immediately upon hatching, and both parents care for their young.

Adults and young typically display a “peck-and-run” method of foraging. On freshwater beaches or sandbars, flies, beetles and other insects on the ground are targeted foods. On ocean beaches, aquatic invertebrates washed up on the shore are primary foods.

In spring, Piping Plovers migrate from the Gulf Coast to Iowa and the Great Plains in mid-late April. Fall migration begins in late July but may continue into September.

Piping Plovers are listed as endangered primarily because of habitat loss and human interference. On coastal areas, commercial, residential and recreational developments contribute to huge habitat losses. As nesting areas become more reduced in size, predation by both wild and domestic animals increases. And when humans do anything too close to nesting sites, nests are frequently abandoned. Mid-continent nesting sites, from Iowa to central Canada, are most frequently lost to flooding from unexpected torrential rains. Large dams on the Missouri and other Midwestern rivers are often used to back up water from heavy rains in order to reduce downstream floods, or they will release much water to reduce upstream floods. In either situation, downstream or upstream nest sites may be destroyed.

Measures to protect this species' habitat are conducted each year, including nest monitoring and protection, limiting residential and industrial development and properly managing water flow. Critical nest sites in some protected coastal areas are frequently cordoned off to prevent human access or nearby activities from causing nest desertion. Disturbing Piping Plovers on nesting sites can result in state or federal fines.

Increasing public education and the ability of government agencies or private conservation groups to control development and disturbance are essential keys to the survival of Piping Plovers. Some Audubon Important Bird Areas (IBAs) along the Missouri River have been so-designated to help protect this endangered species.

From: Newsletter of Iowa Audubon, August 2018, Volume 16, Number 2

The Indigo Bunting

By Carol Berrier

Do you know the all-blue songbird that sings from his perch on a high wire, declaring ownership of his two to six-acre nesting territory? It's not our Eastern Bluebird with its red breast and white belly, nor the Blue Jay, trimmed in white and black, but a little sparrow-sized finch - - the Indigo Bunting. The indigo's song consists of couplets "sweet-sweet. where-where, here-here, see-it, see-it." He arrives in late April from wintering in the south to claim his territory from previous years. He wisely chooses an edge habitat or a hedge that would appeal to a nest-building female.

Blue pigment does not exist in bird plumage, so if an indigo sits in shadow, his structural color does not appear and he is just a little black bird. But, WOW, let the sun shine in and he lives up to his name!

The female indigo is a bird of a different color. She arrives a few days later. She is dressed inconspicuously in brown with faint streaking on her breast. She busily builds a nest about three feet off the ground in a brushy tangle. She incubates her three to four white eggs, and feeds the nestlings insects, later adding seeds and berries. Sometimes the female raises a second brood, while the male takes over caring for the fledglings from the first brood.

When nesting duties are over the fall molt occurs. The males' blue feathers are replaced and they look like females. Their brown feathers however are tinged with blue on wings and tail. Immature males also have brown plumage tinged with blue until their second year. Juveniles study the night sky in preparation for their species' night migration over the Gulf of Mexico to Central America.

Fall migration occurs in late August through October with small flocks flying together, mapping their night flights by the stars, and feeding by day. In Central America Indigo Buntings are known as *riceys* because of their preference for rice fields. In February the indigos molt again, with the males returning to their breeding plumage.

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