

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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OCTOBER 2021
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



OCTOBER 9th FIELD TRIP

The October field trip of Des Moines Audubon Society will be held Saturday, October 9. Meet at the Des Moines Water Works Amphitheater at 8:00 a.m. We will be walking the trails and some off-trail areas looking for fall migrants in Water Works Park and Gray's Lake Park. Contact field trip leader Denny Thompson for more information at 515-254-0837 or cnthomps@gmail.com.

Des Moines Water Works is located on Fleur Drive directly across from Gray's Lake, The Park covers nearly 1,500 acres of open wooded areas and stretches from Fleur Drive, west to 63rd Street, bounded by the Raccoon River on the north edge, and George Flagg Parkway to the south.

Tracking Bird Migration for Conservation, Tuesday, October 19 **By Anna Buckardt Thomas**

*Masks are required in Polk County Buildings and social distancing guidelines will be required.

Many birds experience seasonal migrations which play an important role in their annual survival and conservation. But understanding these bird movements can be a challenge for researchers. Join Anna Buckardt Thomas, as she explains some of the current technologies being used by scientists to track bird migration, shares examples of her own research that utilized these technologies, and highlights the importance of these tools to bird conservation.

Anna Buckardt Thomas is the Avian Ecologist for the Iowa DNR and works within the department's Wildlife Diversity Program out of the Boone Wildlife Research Station. She has been with the DNR since July 2019. Anna grew up in northeastern Illinois, and has been a birder all her life. She received her B.S. in Wildlife Ecology and Management from Michigan Technological University, and her Master of Science in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Maine. Much of Anna's research focuses on bird migration and movement, and she will be sharing some of that work with us during her presentation. Anna is most interested in conducting monitoring, research, and outreach that has direct application to bird conservation in Iowa.

*Please note, this program could be postponed due to the spread of the Coronavirus. At the time of the publication of this newsletter, Polk County has not made an announcement about cancelations. If there is a cancelation, an attempt will be made to contact you.

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.

High Trestle Trail Bridge Overlook Hawk Watch
Sunday, October 3, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Join several “hawkers” for the High Trestle Hawk Watch, as they watch the river of raptors move south along the Des Moines River. These “hawkers” will be helping new and experienced birders identify hawks as they pass over the river valley. Viewing will be on the west overlook, on the Woodward side of the High Trestle Bridge. Parking is on the east side, off of **QF Lane** in Boone County, which requires a half-mile walk on level ground.

Evening Grosbeaks
By Carol Berrier

“Oh, they are beautiful!” I murmured to my brother as I stood at his window awed by the sight before my eyes. On that late November day in the 1970’s, more than a dozen birds resembling stocky goldfinches were feeding on black oil sunflower seeds. Noting their large powerful bills, I knew that the birds were members of the grosbeak family. They were Evening Grosbeaks, a species I had seen once while vacationing in northern Wisconsin, where the birds nested. But this was Iowa, nearly 50 years ago.

After moving to Wisconsin in 2011, I hoped to see those beautiful birds once more. The male Evening Grosbeak has a brown head with a yellow forehead, a brown and yellow body with black wings, and a short black tail. Two white spots, one on each wing, are especially noticeable in flight. The female’s head and body are gray, with a yellowish tint on her undersides. Her black wings each have two white spots, and there is white on her tail.

Evening Grosbeaks are gregarious birds, and flocks forage together after the young are raised, often roaming south to warmer climes. They eat mainly seeds, but also some insects and fruits. Seeds of box elder are special favorites. Unfortunately, this is not a tree that humans appreciate and many have been removed. Seeds and fruits of maple, hawthorne, crabapple, cherry, juniper, pine, and elm are also favored, and a feeder filled with sunflower seed lures the birds up close.

According to The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Evening Grosbeak is now a “special/concern” species, its nationwide population having dropped 97% between 1966 and 2015. The reasons for this severe decline have not been determined. Perhaps as we learn more about climate change, they will become apparent.



Book Review by Doug Harr, President Iowa Audubon

BIRDS IN WINTER: Surviving the Most Challenging Season. Roger F. Pasquier, 2019. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ. 304 pp.

Author Pasquier, an associate in the American Museum of Natural History’s Dept. of Ornithology and lifelong birder, has written this first book devoted entirely to the winter ecology of birds and their behavior. It is quite scientific in nature, based upon more than 700 research studies and papers listed in the bibliography. As a retired wildlife biologist specializing primarily in birds and habitat, I learned a lot more from Pasquier’s work than I had previously known. It really should be considered a textbook of sorts, sometimes taking a long time to read chapters, all printed in very small font text; hence, this may not be something just a casual birder would want to purchase and read. But for anyone into really learning about how so many different species of birds can survive harsh winters by shelter, food sources, plumage, migrations and much more, this is an excellent educational tool and one that should be saved for future reference.

From Iowa Audubon Newsletter, April 2020, Volume 16

BLUE JAYS

One of Nature's Opportunists

By Ray Harden

The Blue Jay is the mascot of several sports teams: Urbandale, Perry, and the Toronto major league baseball team. According to Iowa's ornithologist, Gladys Black, the Blue Jay has a reputation for being "bold, brassy, and sassy". Perhaps this is why it was chosen to be a team's mascot. The Blue Jay is very aggressive with other birds. When it arrives at the feeder the other birds fly away; if they don't, they are quickly dispatched when the jay threatens with its large sharp beak. Several jays will often group together and aggressively chase owls and hawks out of their territory in a "mobbing" behavior.

The Blue Jay is often a predator on the nest of other smaller birds such as warblers, vireos, and flycatchers. After driving the parents off the nest, they will eat the eggs and baby birds. They are opportunist and will feed on other animals such as insects, mice, as well as carrion. However, 75% of their diet consists of plant material such as grain, fruits, acorns and nuts. Blue Jays frequently will stuff their crops with corn and sunflower seeds and then store them somewhere else to eat at a later time.

Of birds visiting my feeder, the Blue Jay is one of the most beautiful. It is easy to identify with a crest on its head, blue body and bold white and black spots on its wings and tail. The underside of the bird is whitish to a dull gray color while the breast is set off with a black necklace. There is no color or marking difference between the males and females. The birds range in weight from three to four ounces and are nine to twelve inches long.

The Blue Jay's call is unmistakable. Its loud shrieking alarm call of "jay, jay, jay" warns all birds that an intruder or predator is in the area. It has other calls such as the musical "queedle, queedle" that it gives when bobbing up and down on a tree branch. It is also said that the Blue Jay can mimic the call of the Red-tailed Hawk and other raptors. Their mimicking calls will cause other birds to drop their food and flee, allowing the Blue Jay to get a free meal.

The preferred habitat for the Blue Jay is the edge of woodlands, the areas between forest and field. Their range has expanded since to European settlement; originally, they were only in the eastern part of the United States from Canada to Mexico. As the settlers moved west the land was cleared for agriculture creating more edge habitat and allowing the birds to expand their territory. Their population increased as the settlers' planted trees for fencerows and windbreaks around farmsteads. They are year-round residents and very common all across Iowa.

Their population densities are greater in the eastern half of Iowa; recent bird counts have indicated a slight decline in the population of Blue Jays in the western third of Iowa. This may be due to changes in farming practices that have taken out fencerows and removed groves of trees around old farmsteads. But in other areas they are doing well and have adapted to the changes that humans have made in the environment. The birds are increasing on acreages and in suburbs around cities. The Dallas County Christmas Bird Count recorded 176 Blue Jays in 2019 and 141 of the birds were seen during the 2020 bird count.

Blue Jays are monogamous and tend to form a life-long bond with their mate. They seem to prefer building their nest in evergreen trees using twigs, bark, moss, and even paper and rags. The female lays three to six eggs that incubate in eighteen days and three weeks after hatching the birds leave the nest. Both parents sit on the eggs and take care of the young. They are also both protective parents and can be very aggressive toward any sized predator. In the wild the Blue Jay lives for an average of seven years but one bird in captivity lived to be 26 years old.

Elderhostel to Road Scholar

During Ray Harden's program at our September Des Moines Audubon meeting, he mentioned "Road Scholar". The organization's original name was founded as "Elderhostel" in the summer of 1975 when it began as a learning program conceived to combine not-for-credit classes with inexpensive lodging for older adults. Five New England colleges offered the first programs to 220 pioneering participants in the first year. By 2010, more than 4 million adults had taken Elderhostel programs, and the organization re-branded with a new name: Road Scholar.

**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..... \$15.00
Family..... \$20.00

*Additional Contribution for Conservation Projects _____

*Additional Contribution for Bird Feeding Projects _____

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