

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



Tax Time is for ... All Wildlife!
By Stephanie Shepherd

Since 1982, when the Iowa legislature created the Fish and Wildlife Fund Tax Check-off, Iowans have been able to bring a little wildness into the tax season. The Fish and Wildlife Tax Check-off, affectionately called the Chickadee Check-off was created to allow people to make a charitable donation to wildlife conservation in Iowa out of their tax refunds or by tacking a few dollars on to any taxes owed. When filling out the state income tax form, just look for the contribution line in Step 9 of form 1040 and write in any dollar amount next to Fish/Wildlife.

Since that time, Iowa tax payers have donated almost \$6 million to the state's Wildlife Diversity Program, which protects nongame and vulnerable species (all the wildlife that can't be hunted, fished or trapped) through habitat development, data collection and research, education and much more. Every cent of each donation supports wildlife diversity; there are no administrative fees.

If every Iowa taxpayer donated just \$1 on the Fish and Wildlife Check-off, it would mean \$1.5 million for natural resource conservation! So, if you're able, take a moment this tax season to get a little wild and consider making a donation. The 1000+ species of birds, butterflies, mammals, frogs, toads, turtles and dragonflies that call Iowa home will thank you.

Donating is easy. Simply enter your donation amount on the Fish and Wildlife Check-Off contribution line (in Step 9 on the 1040 tax form), and the sum is either automatically deducted from your refund or added to the amount owed. Don't forget to talk to your tax preparer if you have your taxes done professionally – many tax preparers forget to mention donation opportunities.

You can learn more about the program on their website: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity> .

Please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off this tax season and supporting wildlife conservation in Iowa!

DNR CONTACT: Stephanie Shepherd at 515-230-6599 or <mailto:stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov>

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**2020 Des Moines Audubon Christmas Count**  
**By Dennis Thompson**

The Des Moines Christmas Count was held on Saturday, 12/26/20. It was a nice late-December day with a high of 35 and little wind. There was no snow on the ground and water was mostly frozen with some open water on the larger bodies. We had 23 participants in 16 field parties and 7 feeder watchers. Thanks to all the participants for making the count a success! (Details are on the next page.)

## 2020 Des Moines Audubon Christmas Count

The 79 species tallied is the second-highest ever for the count, only trailing the 82 counted in 2018. Eurasian Tree Sparrow is new for the Des Moines count. It was not unexpected as it has been rapidly expanding from its traditional stronghold in SE Iowa. Species seen this year but three or fewer times in the past ten years were: Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Short-eared Owl, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Shrike, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Species not seen this year but seen in seven or more times in the last ten years were: Snow Goose, Redhead, Greater Scaup and American Coot. All-time high counts were set for Greater White-fronted Goose, Hooded Merganser, Bald Eagle, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl (tied), Carolina Wren, European Starling and Red-winged Blackbird. The individual count of 124,057 birds is by far the largest ever for the count and that's without locating a crow roost. Hats off to John Cecil for tackling the huge blackbird roost in Waterworks Park. *Italicized* = new high for the count.

|                             |        |                         |        |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------------------------|--------|
| Greater White-fronted Goose | 38     | Downy Woodpecker        | 160    |
| Cackling Goose              | 26     | Hairy Woodpecker        | 27     |
| Canada Goose                | 14,164 | Northern Flicker        | 12     |
| Trumpeter Swan              | 253    | Pileated Woodpecker     | 2      |
| Tundra Swan                 | 4      | American Kestrel        | 8      |
| Gadwall                     | 19     | Merlin                  | 4      |
| American Wigeon             | 4      | Northern Shrike         | 1      |
| Mallard                     | 1497   | Blue Jay                | 138    |
| American Black Duck         | 1      | American Crow           | 467    |
| Green-winged Teal           | 1      | Black-capped Chickadee  | 247    |
| Canvasback                  | 3      | Tufted Titmouse         | 22     |
| Ring-necked Duck            | 1      | Red-breasted Nuthatch   | 5      |
| Lesser Scaup                | 2      | White-breasted Nuthatch | 172    |
| Bufflehead                  | 1      | Brown Creeper           | 7      |
| Common Goldeneye            | 195    | Winter Wren             | 2      |
| Hooded Merganser            | 84     | Carolina Wren           | 16     |
| Common Merganser            | 44     | Eastern Bluebird        | 46     |
| Ruddy Duck                  | 29     | American Robin          | 71     |
| Wild Turkey                 | 19     | European Starling       | 18,027 |
| Rock Pigeon                 | 901    | Cedar Waxwing           | 43     |
| Eurasian Collared-Dove      | 5      | House Sparrow           | 342    |
| Mourning Dove               | 112    | Eurasian Tree Sparrow   | 2      |
| Killdeer                    | 2      | House Finch             | 98     |
| Wilson's Snipe              | 2      | Purple Finch            | 2      |
| Ring-billed Gull            | 33     | Pine Siskin             | 37     |
| Herring Gull                | 29     | American Goldfinch      | 177    |
| American White Pelican      | 2      | American Tree Sparrow   | 153    |
| Great Blue Heron            | 2      | Song Sparrow            | 23     |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk          | 2      | Lincoln's Sparrow       | 1      |
| Cooper's Hawk               | 2      | Swamp Sparrow           | 4      |
| Bald Eagle                  | 324    | White-throated Sparrow  | 43     |
| Red-tailed Hawk             | 65     | Harris's Sparrow        | 4      |
| Rough-legged Hawk           | 1      | White-crowned Sparrow   | 2      |
| Great Horned Owl            | 12     | Dark-eyed Junco         | 453    |
| Barred Owl                  | 12     | Red-winged Blackbird    | 18,000 |
| Short-eared Owl             | 1      | Rusty Blackbird         | 1      |
| Belted Kingfisher           | 11     | Common Grackle          | 17     |
| Red-headed Woodpecker       | 1      | Yellow-rumped Warbler   | 2      |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker      | 110    | Northern Cardinal       | 205    |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker    | 1      |                         |        |

## THE RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER--STILL AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

By Ray Harden, December 2020

An avid birder is always looking for an exotic or an endangered species. In November of 2019 my wife and I were birding in the Croatan National Forest on the North Carolina coast near the city of Morehead. We were looking for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker. It has been on the endangered species list since 1970. After several hours of looking, we were lucky, because we saw three of the birds and took some good photos. In past years we had searched in the national forest across Florida and parts of Georgia looking for this bird with little luck. We were very pleased to see it on this trip.

As with many endangered species the Red-cockaded Woodpecker is not doing very well because of the alterations that have taken place in its habitat. This species is a specialist--it only lives in the southern longleaf pine forest. Originally the woodpecker and the longleaf pine ecosystem had a range across the southeastern quarter of the United States. Currently, this ecosystem has been reduced and the endangered woodpecker is only found in about thirty isolated areas of its original range.

It has been jeopardized by the removal of forest to make room for row crops, fire suppression, and the harvesting of mature longleaf pine trees that the bird needs for nesting. In addition, the harvested longleaf pines trees have been replaced by faster growing different species of trees that the woodpecker does not use for nesting.

Also, Hurricane Hugo in September of 1989 was a major disaster for the Red-cockaded woodpecker. The hurricane destroyed about 100,000 acres of the bird's best habitat in the Francis Marion National Forest on the South Carolina Atlantic coast. Natural disasters can be a threat to many endangered animals.

In November of 2020 my wife and I returned to the same area in the Croatan National Forest and hiked for a few hours on the trails hoping to see more of the little endangered woodpeckers. I was greatly surprised that we did not see any.

I expected to see them because the then current Secretary of the Interior wanted to remove them from the endangered species list. He was quoted as saying, "Conditions have improved enough to 'down list' the Red-cockaded Woodpecker", from the endangered species list.

In the last four years the then current administration attacked many members of the endangered species list and attempted to weaken and twist the interpretation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The law generates controversy because its enforcement requires changes in land use. The attacks have been on specific listings, recovery measures, and the law's reliance on science. ESA opponents say the law hinders economic development. I think this is sad because it comes at a time when the world is facing a crisis in biodiversity and the possibility of mass extinctions.

I hope that the new administration in the White House will reverse these policies and work to improve and strengthen the nearly fifty-year-old Endangered Species Act (ESA). It became law in 1973 with strong bipartisan support.

The Endangered Species Act has worked. Ninety-nine percent of the species listed have avoided extinction. Grizzly bears, humpbacked whales, and of course the bald eagle are just a few of the forty-six species now listed as recovered. The ESA helps protect species in the USA and to some degree animals overseas.

You and organizations, such as Audubon, Sierra Club, The National Wildlife Foundation, and other environmental groups can help protect endangered species by contacting your legislators and members of the new president's administration encouraging them to support and strengthen the ESA.

These actions will help endangered plants, mammals and birds, like the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, so that they can be factually removed from the endangered list and are soon added to the recovered list.

**Coming Soon--Spring!**  
**Excerpts from Birding in Central Iowa, Spring 2020**  
**By Ray Harden**

The first rays of sunlight were coming through the leafless trees and a cool breeze was blowing through the Raccoon River Valley. It was mid-April and the frosted grass crunched under my feet. My wife and I were birding at Squirrel Hollow Park in Greene County.

We were hoping to see the arrival of the early neo-tropical migrants passing through Iowa. We observed and photographed every bird we saw in the park, but we were especially looking for warblers.

There are more than 50 species of warblers in North America. Thirty-four have been observed in Iowa, but only a few remain in our state to nest. Many have similar markings and calls making this group of birds difficult to identify, but they are a beautiful family of birds. The famous ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson called warblers "the butterflies of the bird world", because of their many striking colors.

Many warblers just pass through Iowa, only staying a few days on their way to the northern coniferous forest in Minnesota and Canada. This makes it a challenge for birding enthusiasts to see warblers.

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