

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXVIII, NUMBER 6
SEPTEMBER 2021
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



FIELD TRIP TO CHICHAQUA—SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11th

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, September 11 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 by Wyndham Inn (also Ankeny Diner) 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 the usual fall migrants. Dress for conditions. Contact Denny Thompson for more information at cdnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837.

Des Moines Audubon Program Tuesday, September 21, 7 p.m.*
Red-cockaded Woodpecker, by Ray and Margaret Harden

*Please note, this program could be postponed due to the spread of the delta variant 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.

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

In November of 2019 Ray and Margaret Harden took a Road Scholar birding trip to North Carolina's Outer Banks. They spent a week on Emerald Island at the Trinity Conference Center, about three hours southeast of Raleigh. They birded on the beaches of the Atlantic Ocean, the woodland trails of the island, salt water marshes, estuaries, and at Fort Macon State Park. They took a ferry boat ride to the Rachel Carson Preserve where they saw a large flock of shorebirds. Part of the trip included a visit to an aquarium and nature center with a boardwalk that overlooked the island's Bogue Sound.

Their group of birders recorded ninety-nine species of birds during the weeklong trip. The highlight was adding three new species to their life list and getting some good photographs of the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker in the Croatan National Forrest.

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.

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER

By Ray Harden, December 2019

"I hear one." Margaret said as soon as she lowered the car window. We had just stopped our car in the Croatan National Forest near Morehead City, North Carolina. I lowered the driver's window and listened intently. The only sound I heard was the traffic on the highway a mile away. I shook my head letting her know that I could not hear the bird.

"There it is again, it's on your side." Then I finally heard the soft squeaky "shrit, shrit" call.

Margaret quietly got out of the car, listening and looking for the endangered and elusive red-cockaded woodpecker. She whispered to me that she spotted it two trees to the left of the car and she started clicking the shutter of her camera. Finally, "I see it." I said and I started taking photos too.

The little woodpecker was about thirty feet away, half way up a medium size long-leaf pine tree, working its way up the trunk searching for insects. It seemed as if the bird spent more time on the backside of the tree than on the front and most often branches were in the way for a good shot. But both of our cameras were snapping photos.

The day before we were in this same long-leaf pine forest with a Road Scholar Birding group of twenty-five other people and there was also a person target shooting with a shotgun about a fourth of a mile away. We did not see any kind of a bird. Today we fared much better. We saw several Brown-headed Nuthatches and three Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. We were thrilled.

We have looked in several national forests in the southeastern United States for this woodpecker. We saw it once three years ago in the Apalachicola National Forest in the Florida Panhandle, but were not able to get any good photos of it.

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker is eight inches long and looks very similar to Downy Woodpecker, but slightly larger. It is called "red-cockaded" because of the small red tufts on the side of its head; however, these are seldom seen. It has a black cap, distinctive white cheeks, a white belly with black spots, and its back has black and white barring.

The Red-cockaded Woodpecker was originally found in the southeastern quarter of the United States. However, the species's survival is jeopardized by agriculture, logging, forest policies that suppress fires, human development, and other factors of habitat destruction. It is only found in thirty areas across the southeast. It was placed on the endangered species list in 1970. A major weather disaster has made conditions even worse for this little woodpecker. In September of 1989 Hurricane Hugo destroyed about 100,000 acres of the bird's habitat in Francis Marion National Forest in South Carolina.

This woodpecker requires the long-leaf pine ecosystem for its survival (the same habitat as the endangered Bachman's Sparrow.) The Red-cockaded Woodpecker nest only in living long-leaf pine trees. Because of this, it may take a year or more for the bird to excavate a nest hole in the tree. Tree sap flows out the newly made hole and gives the tree's bark a shiny amber color. The shiny colored bark allows ornithologist to mark the tree as an active nest site for study and protection.

The sticky tree sap also serves as a means to keep rat snakes out of the nest that prey on the eggs and baby birds. The woodpecker's eggs are also preyed upon by flying squirrels and other birds.

The male woodpecker feeds on insects at the mid tree trunk line and higher while the females tend to feed lower. They feed on insects, especially wood boring beetles and grubs, but they also eat fruits, berries, and seeds.

Saving the Red-cockaded Woodpecker depends on increasing their nesting habitat by setting incentives to encourage the perpetuation of old growth pine forest and maintaining corridors between the bird's nesting areas. The southern long-leaf pine tree is one of the most valued trees for lumber. It will be difficult to get the timber industry to reduce clear-cutting practices and wait longer between timber harvests.

More funding is needed for the National Forest Service and parks to control the encroachment of hardwood trees that compete with the pines and to use fire to control other undesirable species of plants in the understory of the pine forest. Also, efforts are needed to keep nesting cavities free from competitors and predators if this little woodpecker is going to survive.

My wife and I were pleased to see and photograph the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker in its natural habitat. I hope that birders in the future will be able to see it too.

Wren Redux

By Carl Nollen

In the May Des Moines Audubon newsletter, I reported my April discovery of a Carolina Wren nest in my garage. After they fledged, I cleaned out the cabinet but left the nest. A curiosity thing, I suppose. You don't see a domed nest with a side entrance every day. On August 2, I was going to move the cabinet, but spied three little beaks pointed at me from that nest. What a surprise! Another brood.

I should have known. My yard had been filled with Carolina Wren calling, chirping, and singing. Especially near the garage. Their chirps are somewhat like "cheers," resembling the house sparrow's chirps, but louder, a little double-noted, and more musical. I occasionally heard a weak, sweet warbling, which seemed to be communication between the mates. This song is not in my bird tapes. There was a lot of wren activity.

August 5. The nest is empty and the three babies have flown. Out through the chipmunk-chewed garage door seal on the floor. No wren music now. Where did they go? To explore the neighborhood? This raises some questions. Between the April and August fledging, did they have a brood in my garage I didn't know about? Did they have a nest in my many brush piles? Or did they wait over two months to have their second brood. I know I will hear them again sometime as they are visible and vocal at my place year-round.

August 7 noon hour. I didn't have long to wait. A Carolina Wren perched on top of my rain gauge on the garage deck by the kitchen window. It launched into the two slightly different versions of its call, following with the chirp routine. What a concert! Loud and beautiful! It's as if it is saying, "I'm baack!"

In the meantime, the House Wrens have also just fledged from my acorn-shaped bird house hanging from the eave. The Blue Jays are their usual noisy selves in July and August. Squabbling and squalling, they keep the peanut feeder spinning. I spotted their nest high in the honey locust tree. The young ones help keep the yard busy. I enjoy the Blue Jays' different hues of blue. The robins, which I have reported have such a problem with squirrels, built a nest this year high in a maple tree. Near the end of a branch not on the squirrels' highways throughout the tree tops. The cardinal's nest in a catbrier/elderberry tangle, so artfully concealed, was successful. There are more nests to be discovered after the leaves fall.

I recently talked to Sally Vander Linden, one of the promoters for building the Gladys Black chimney structure in Pleasantville. She reports a half dozen swifts circling around the chimney built especially for them. I never hear of any birders visiting this place. I wrote about the chimney swifts of Pleasantville in the August, 2018, Warbler newsletter.

Des Moines Audubon Field Trip Report

By Diane Dentlinger

Des Moines Audubon's August 14th field trip covered several spots on the east side of Saylorville Lake. We were a little concerned when we arrived at the first stop, the Visitors Center, and found the parking lot almost full, but the weather was ideal and the approximately fifteen birders identified 46 species in three and a half hours.

We were detained longer than expected in the parking lot by several active Eastern Wood-Pewees, including great views of adults feeding young. The lake lookout behind the Visitors Center included a lone Double-crested Cormorant "snorkeling" at the water's edge directly below us. Most of us had never before seen that kind of activity.

We then drove north to the Sandpiper recreation area and birded there before working our way back south stopping at Oak Grove, Cherry Glen and Red Feather. Sandpiper was productive including a calling Fish Crow, which beginning birders particularly appreciated as they learned to acclimate their ears to the nasal, two-note ah-ah call. A Lark Sparrow made an appearance, and although not everyone saw it, one birder got a good, diagnostic photograph. Sandpiper also produced Yellow Warbler, the only kind of warbler identified that morning, Warbling Vireo, Tree Swallow, Eastern Bluebird and Indigo Bunting.

Birds on the beaches included a couple of Franklin's Gulls which were often hidden behind Ring-billed Gulls, but which everyone was able to see. Only a couple of birders spotted the adult and juvenile Blue Grosbeaks from the Cherry Glen beach parking lot. They were in the last car in the caravan leaving and saw the birds at the end.

We had three species of woodpecker: Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied. Other species identified included Belted Kingfisher (heard), Killdeer, Red-tailed Hawk, Osprey, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Dickcissel, Chipping and Song sparrows, Eastern Kingbird, Alder Flycatcher (heard), Eastern Phoebe, Chimney Swift, Barn Swallow, American Goldfinch and Tufted Titmouse. By the time we reached Red Feather Prairie, our last stop, things had quieted down, and we were only able to add House Sparrows. And although some of us saw Canada Geese enroute to the field trip, this may have been the only Des Moines Saylorville field trip without a Canada Goose during the trip.

**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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