

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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MAY 2022
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Saturday, May 14th Field Trip
Saylorville Visitor's Center at 8:00 A.M.

Join Des Moines Audubon members on Saturday, May 14th as we celebrate the return of migrating songbirds. Meet in the parking lot of the Visitors' Center at Saylorville Lake at 8:00 A.M. Migration should be in full swing and morning will find the air full of song with the arrival of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Baltimore Orioles, Indigo Buntings, and wood warblers. The main species we'll be searching for will be the warblers, but there could be a good variety of migrating birds. Please dress for conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact Dennis Thompson at cnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837 for information about field trips.

Des Moines Audubon Program Tuesday May 17, 7 p.m.
Jenni Boonjakuakul, Iowa Bird Rehabilitation

Iowa Bird Rehabilitation is a 501(c)(3) that specifically focuses on the rehabilitation of wild birds in Iowa. Jenni Boonjakuakul has a state permit to rehabilitate wildlife and a federal permit to rehabilitate migratory birds. She has 22 years of wild bird rehabilitation experience, but it wasn't until 2018 that she started Iowa Bird Rehabilitation (IBR) and established it as a non-profit. She is the founder and CEO of the organization. Jenni has been rehabilitating wild birds since 1999 and has been helping birds in Iowa since 2007, each year admitting more birds than previous years. In 2020 IBR hit record numbers and admitted over 1,300 wild birds.

IBR has taken in over 90 different species of birds found in Iowa, from the tiny Ruby Throated Hummingbird to the large White Pelican. As a rehabilitation group, they have the opportunity to help the public understand common ways birds get injured and how that can be prevented, such as window strikes and awareness of pruning and cutting down trees during the breeding seasons. If they can help the public understand normal bird behavior, and share ways to encourage them to support the normal growth and development of birds, then they can help the wild bird population coexist with humans in urban areas and as we sprawl further out of the cities and into rural areas.

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.

SpaceX and Birds Update

Previously in November 2021, the Birding Community E-bulletin reported on the ongoing controversy with the location of the on-site SpaceX facilities in Texas. The company founded by Elon Musk in 2002 may have been part of the billionaire space-race news over the past year, but the conservation – and especially bird conservation – consequences are not always part of the news.

Elon Musk certainly wanted to site his take-off tract just off the Gulf of Mexico, and close to the Texas border with Mexico. “We’ve got a lot of land with nobody around, so if it blows up, it’s cool,” Musk reportedly said at a press conference in 2018.

The March 2021 SpaceX explosion scattered rocket debris over some of the delicate habitat of the Boca Chica tract of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge – comprising tidal flats, beaches, grasslands and coastal dunes that host a huge range of wildlife. Cleanup took three months.

SpaceX’s site is surrounded by state and federally protected lands, including tracts of the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. A number of bird species are involved, from the federally Threatened Piping Plover and Red Knot to the Endangered Northern Aplomado Falcon. These lands also support several species of sea turtle and mammals listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Overall, a number of species have been impacted. For example, previously, there were about a dozen nests of Snowy Plovers on the local tidal flats on the edge of Boca Chica where the refuge abuts SpaceX’s property. In 2020 there were just two pairs found; in 2021 it was only one. According to the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, the population of another plover, Piping Plover, in the Boca Chica region has decreased by 54% over the past 3 years (2018-2021).

Despite the area’s ecological importance, SpaceX has conducted and expanded operations with little oversight by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and without a comprehensive study of impacts on wildlife and the environment.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had delayed its final review of SpaceX’s Starship rocket project at Boca Chica, due to a deluge of comments from individuals and bird conservation groups. Indeed, the FAA received more than 19,000 responses as it develops the final Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the Starship project. The document’s new release date was March 28th but it has been delayed again.

Excerpts from The Birding Community E-bulletin, November 2021 and March 2022

AVIAN INFLUENZA CONTINUES

In last month’s *Birding Community E-bulletin*, we reported on the presence and spread of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) being detected beyond poultry, but in wild birds, particularly among waterbirds in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways.

By now, this highly pathogenic avian flu strain currently spreading in North America has been detected in 34 species of wild birds in the U.S.

This ongoing outbreak may have begun in South Carolina and also in Newfoundland and Labrador in December 2021. Since then, it has been detected in wild birds in 32 states and seven Canadian Provinces from Newfoundland to Florida and westward to North Dakota and Colorado, as well as British Columbia.

Among agencies monitoring the spread are the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative. While low-pathogenic avian flu is common among wild birds, this highly pathogenic strain is more troublesome. “This one is actually causing severe illness and death of wild birds in large numbers, which we haven’t seen previously,” said Brian Stevens, a wildlife pathologist from the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative.

Further attention to these developments is surely warranted.

From The Birding Community E-Bulletin, April 2022

Common Redpolls by Carol Berrier

Midwest birders were excited to learn in late January that an irruption (sudden invasion) of birds was taking place. Normally found in northern states or in Canada, the birds were forced to look for food farther south. We were delighted to see Common Redpolls at our feeders, although a shortage of food up north is not delightful! These active little birds are able to withstand very cold weather. They do not migrate to escape the cold, but rather to find food. They often migrate and feed in large flocks, and don't appear to be territorial, even when nesting. They don't return to a previous nest site or keep other Redpolls from nesting nearby. Perhaps because they encounter few humans in the Subarctic, they are quite tame and fearless near humans.

Common Redpolls are goldfinch-sized and streaked with gray and brown. They are easily identified by the red on their heads (polls) and by their black chins. Males have a reddish wash on their breasts and rumps.

They must be tasty little birds, for hawks often visit when Redpolls are nearby. Redpolls have a special adaptation that allows them to quickly store seeds in their esophageal diverticula (pouches.) This enables them to take their food to a spot where they can regurgitate, shell, and eat the seeds in safety.

Enjoy these little birds if they should stop at your feeders next year, for they won't stay long. The flock's constant motion might help to keep the hawks away.

WISDOM: A LEGACY

In February and March of 2021, at more than 70 years young, "Wisdom," the world's oldest known Laysan Albatross and banded wild bird, was taking on the challenges of avian motherhood once again home at her home on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial.

Biologists led by Chan Robbins had first identified and banded Wisdom in 1956 after she had laid an egg, perhaps her very first egg. She herself had hatched around 1951, but possibly earlier. We last reported on Wisdom and her nesting on March of 2017: <http://tinyurl.com/E-bMar17>

Reports are that Wisdom has not been sighted in 2022, which is a situation of concern. But we know that at least one of her offspring, a chick from 2011, identified by leg-band number N333, has been sighted raising a chick of its

From The Birding Community E-Bulletin, April 2022

SAVING CHIMNEY SWIFTS

Previous Birding Community E-bulletins have reported on efforts to address the loss of Chimney Swifts. In Canada alone, the population of Chimney Swifts has declined by nearly 90% since 1970.

Recently, *Birds Canada* with some of its partners launched a new Chimney Swift Chimney Restoration Fund to provide financial support for the restoration of chimneys and other structures that are important for Chimney Swifts in Canada. The reduction in the number of accessible chimneys is a serious factor in the decline of these amazing birds. "When aging chimneys are capped, screened, lined or demolished, this represents a loss of habitat, which is a threat to the survival of Chimney Swifts," said Véronique Connolly, coordinator of the new fund.

The Chimney Swift breeds in central and eastern North America and spends much of the rest of the year in northwestern South America. Of course, the decline of flying insect life, both in Canada and the US, is another daunting problem and why we are seeing fewer of these swifts.

As their name implies, Chimney Swifts nest and roost in chimneys, but 400 years ago, they relied on large, hollow trees in old-growth forests. As these disappeared from the landscape, the species was able to survive by relocating to human-made structures, such as chimneys, as an alternative. As chimneys are usually used only in the colder months, Chimney Swifts are able to use them safely during the spring and summer. Fortunately, they are good guests and their tiny nest poses no fire risk. In addition, they live off flying insects, so they provide an insect control service.

From the Birding Community E-Bulletin, April 2022

**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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