

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 8
SEPTEMBER 2022
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



**Field Trip—Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
Saturday, September 10**

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, September 10th and the destination will be Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Meet at the McDonald's on University Avenue in Pleasant Hill at 8:00 AM. We'll be looking for Henslow's Sparrows, Sedge Wrens, Bobolinks and other migrating species. The prairie should be showy and it's always a treat to observe the bison. Please contact Denny Thompson for more information at cdnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837.

**Raptors of the Midwest, Tuesday, September 20
By Ty Smedes**

Most Iowa birders recognize our more common raptors like the Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks, along with the Great-horned and Barred Owls, but there are many other raptors that only occasionally nest in our state, along with many other species that pass through during migration. Join us for an educational and updated presentation to learn more about the hawks, falcons, eagles, owls, and vultures that live in Iowa or migrate through on their way to nesting or wintering areas. We'll discuss their physical traits as well as identifying the prey they seek, and the habitat they prefer for nesting and rearing their young. You'll also learn tips for identifying these birds of prey, when you spot one sitting or on the wing. And of course, there will be many interesting and colorful photos to help with identification.

Ty's photos have been published by many major magazines and book publishers, including Outdoor Photographer, Sierra, The Nature Conservancy, Smithsonian, Ducks Unlimited, The Iowa Conservationist, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and many others. He specializes in wildlife, prairie wildflowers, and landscape images. Ty has taught nature photography classes and is an experienced photo-tour leader. He has led nature photography tours to East Africa, Botswana, and Zambia. Adventure travel has also taken him to the Falklands, South Georgia Island, and the Antarctic Peninsula, as well as the jungles of West Papua New Guinea. Information regarding Ty's books *Capturing Iowa's Seasons*, *The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles – 2nd Edition*, and *Iowa's Wild Beauty* can be found on his website at <http://www.smedesphoto.com>.

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 email: jrc Clark@radiks.net.

Great Crested Flycatcher **by Carl Nollen**

Hearing our spring migrant birds when they just arrive is just as much pleasure to me as seeing them. After a long winter of waiting for the songs of our breeding birds, I can open my bedroom window to enjoy the early morning sounds of many newly arrived birds.

By early or mid-May this particular bird has arrived. The raucous “reep reep” of the great crested flycatcher stands out for its loudness. This treetop bird needs a loud call to reach the ears of someone on the ground! Even the slight variations of its calls are distinctive enough to cause no doubt which species is making this noise. They fly around from one tree to another in a whirlwind of sound and activity.

Yellow breast, chestnut tail and gray head are its dominant features. The crest is not so noticeable. It is not raised unless the bird is agitated, and the flycatcher’s height in the treetops doesn’t allow the observer on the ground to easily see it.

The great crested flycatcher is our only flycatcher species that nests in cavities. It is one of many species that depends on a hole made by a woodpecker or one provided by nature in the form of a snag or similar opening. Man-made boxes are readily used. Snake skins, cellophane, and other crinkly or shiny materials are often used in nest-building.

Human habitation has not harmed its population as thinned woods and wood edges are preferred to unbroken forest. Very territorial, as you would expect from this loud singer, it will return to the same area each year. Gladys Black, in her 1993 book, *Iowa Bird Life*, knew their haunts and named the several places near the Des Moines River in Marion County where she knew they would be.

Because of its broad range, treetop nesting and habitat preferences helped by humans, the great crested flycatcher is of least conservation concern. It inhabits the entire eastern and southern United States and southern Canada. Like most of “our” migrant birds, the springtime songs and calls of late April, May and June fade away in July and August, and leave us in September. This flycatcher flies south to Central America and northwestern South America. Seven or eight months will have to pass before we will once again enjoy the antics and sounds of this welcome bird to our neighborhoods.



Squirrel Hollow Park and Wildlife Area **By Ray Harden**

Squirrel Hollow Park and Wildlife Area in Greene County is a place where my wife Margaret and I enjoy birding. The two-hundred-acre park in Greene County is a few miles west of Rippey. It has a lot to offer for a weekend getaway or a day of birding. The park has tent and R.V. camping facilities, picnicking, hiking trails, fishing on the Raccoon River and it has a new concrete boat ramp for launching canoes.

We go there for birding. Over several trips this year we have recorded and photographed more than fifty species of birds. Migrating warblers in spring have found Squirrel Hollow a perfect spot for a layover. They use the area for feeding and resting on their way north. Birds such as green and blue herons, great egrets and kingfishers, killdeer, and sandpipers are frequently seen on the banks and sandbars of the Raccoon River.

There are several types of habitats in the park including open fields, densely wooded areas and oak savannas. We have seen scarlet and summer tanagers, turkeys, rose-breasted grosbeaks, yellow-billed cuckoos and many other species of birds that prefer the dense woods.

What I like best about the park is the ability to bird while sitting in my car and using the car as bird blind. We find a place to park that has a good view of the woods and wait for the birds to appear. This is good birding method for someone with mobility issues. Squirrel Hollow has very little usage and traffic when compared to other camping areas.

Our last outing there was on August 1st, however we almost did not make it into the park. About a quarter of a mile from the entrance we found a fencerow with a thick hedge of dogwood, mulberries, honeysuckle, grapevines and blackberries. Several species of birds were feeding on the berries and insects. We saw a flock of juvenile great crested flycatchers, gray catbirds, wrens, pewees, downy and hairy woodpeckers and many more. Margaret spotted a summer tanager in a tall dead elm tree--we called it our best bird of the day. He posed nicely for photographs. Also, Squirrel Hollow is a place where a birder will most assuredly find red-headed woodpeckers.

While you are in the area make sure you stop at Tipton Prairie, about two miles from the park. This is a five-acre piece of land that has never been tilled and has an amazing number of native plant species. Tipton Prairie is an incredible remnant of Iowa's Tall Grass Prairie Ecosystem. For more information contact the Greene County Conservation Department in Jefferson, Iowa. The telephone number is 515-368-4629.

**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 _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Shorebirds of the Prairie Potholes

If you think you have seen a sandpiper or plover around the edge of a local pond or wetland, it's not your imagination. Although we often associate these birds with coastal beaches, many species of shorebirds can be found regularly in our area during migration, and several of these species, including the endangered piping plover, nest in our area.

International Travelers

Weighing only a few ounces, many shorebirds complete phenomenal migrations of up to 20,000 miles round trip. Every year of their adult lives they journey from as far away as Tierra del Fuego, at the southern tip of South America, to the Arctic. They fly up to 70 hours without a rest, crossing mountain ranges or entire oceans. During the winter months, they take advantage of warmer weather and plentiful food supplies in Central and South America. In the spring they begin their journey north to lay eggs and raise their young on the tundra and boreal forests of Northern Alaska and Canada. The Prairie Pothole Region of the U.S. and Canada has hosted migrating shorebirds for thousands of years.

The name "Prairie Potholes" refers to small, water-filled depressions left by receding glaciers. Some potholes hold water year-round and others for only brief periods of times. The variety of water depths and vegetation provided by these different potholes offer a diversity of habitat for wildlife. Many shorebirds visit the potholes as stopover sites along their migratory pathway. For some, they can double their body weight during their stay, refueling for the next leg of their journey. For others, the prairie pothole region marks the end of their northward migration. These birds nest in prairie grasses, taking advantage of a spring abundance of food.

*Excerpts from a U.S. Prairie Pothole Joint Venture publication

"...great clouds of golden-plovers, or 'prairie-pigeons,' swooped down seemingly out of nowhere, apparently to alight, but only to sweep away again like a turbulent wave; the white and the sandhill cranes danced merrily (and awkwardly) before their mates..." (Bohumil Shimek describing Iowa at the time of early European settlement)

BOOK NOTES: WHAT'S BEHIND VAGRANCY

There is a recent book on vagrancy that may interest readers, "Vagrancy in Birds" by Alexander Lees and James Gilroy (Princeton University Press, 2022).

Bird migration has been the source of interest and research for years, and vagrancy has proven to be mysterious to both researchers and birders alike. This new title explores in detail the causes and patterns of avian vagrancy... especially in the opening chapters, and delves into broad concepts including compass error, wind drift, migration overshooting, extreme weather events, irruptions, natural dispersal, and other ways to possibly explain vagrancy and its biological significance.

The authors use recent research to address such fundamental questions as what causes avian vagrancy, why do some places attract so many vagrant birds, and why do some species seem more disposed to long-range vagrancy than others.

Following the thorough introductory chapters on the causes and mechanics of vagrancy, the rest of the book is devoted to extensive summaries of vagrancy that include often spectacular photographs and examples and patterns of family-by-family treatments of vagrant species and their geographical origins and ultimate destinations.

This attractive book and its thought-provoking content should be of interest to both armchair birders and active field ornithologists, and a must read for anyone interested in the mysteries of bird travels.

From the Birding Community E-bulletin, August 2022

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