

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 9**  
**OCTOBER 2023**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**Field Trip**  
**Saturday, October 14, 8:00 a.m.**

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center on Saturday, October 14<sup>th</sup>. From there we will travel to various habitats and locations around the lake and in the surrounding area. We will be looking for migrating species such as waterfowl, grebes, gulls, and migrant sparrows (including LeConte's and Nelson's). Other species could be busy flitting among the trees and fallen leaves. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the conditions. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact field trip leader Dennis Thompson at [cdnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cdnthomps@gmail.com) or 515-254-0837 for more information.

**Tuesday, October 17 at 7:00 p.m.**  
**Grassland and Shrubland Birds at Camp Dodge**  
**By Dr. Catherine McMullen**

Cathy McMullen will be speaking about how Camp Dodge in Johnston manages for grassland and shrubland birds, and how this management, fortunately, also works well for their training grounds needs. She will especially focus on the grass and shrubland birds of conservation concern that are benefitting from the habitat at Camp Dodge, and the trends in their population that she and Tyler Harms have documented.

Cathy has an MS and BS in Biology from Drake University and a PhD from Iowa State University in 2000. She has been with the university since 2001, first as post-doctorate, then as a member of the Department of Natural Resources, Ecology and Management (NREM) faculty.

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](mailto:jrclark@radiks.net).

## **High Trestle Hawk Watch**

### **High Trestle Trail Bridge**

### **October 7, 10am-4pm**

Join several “hawkers” as they watch the river of raptors move south along the Des Moines River. Naturalists and volunteers will be helping new and experienced birders identify the birds as they pass. Viewing will be on the west overlook on the Woodward side of the High Trestle Bridge. Parking is on the east side of QF in Boone County. There is a half-mile walk on level ground to get to the overlook. No registration is required.

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## **Coyotes At the Raccoon River**

### **By Ray Harden**

I was camping in early August at a friend’s prairie on the banks of the Raccoon River. It was difficult for me to go to sleep because it was a warm humid night, plus the night was full of sounds. Two birds seemed to be in competition for the most annoying call. A barred owl, somewhere down the river, was giving its “Who, who, who, cooks for you?” call. The most annoying and sleep-depriving call was the constant “song” of the whippoorwill that was very close to my tent.

Sleep finally came. It seemed as if I had just dozed off, when I was awakened by the sharp yipping of coyotes. Peeking out the door of my tent and looking across the river, I saw a group of five coyotes walking on the sandbar. The light of the full moon gave me a good view of their silhouetted forms and activities. Some of them walked to the river's edge for a drink of water while the others sniffed around the logs and brush piles looking for prey.

Eventually they all took a drink of water and then they explored the debris scattered across the sandbar. They seemed particularly interested in a massive root ball of an old cottonwood tree; they sniffed around it for couple of minutes.

Suddenly something must have happened that I did not see or hear. The lead coyote of the pack let out a loud yip and took off with a fast lope up the steep riverbank. The others stopped in their tracks and looked at their leader, then began to follow it up the hillside. They stopped on a flat open area about halfway up the hill and they all began to yip and howl. After about a half a minute of howling they jogged over the hill top and disappeared.

Wow! What a show they had put on for me. The pack was about one hundred yards from my tent and close to eye level.

The coyotes' voices of yips and howls produced a haunting but beautiful chorus as their calls echoed through the moonlit river valley. I have heard coyotes howling many times on past camping trips. I have even heard their calls from my bedroom window on other warm nights, calling from the back fencerow of my acreage. However, I have never seen a pack in the light of a full moon doing their howling like I did on this camping adventure.

Iowa State University Professor James Dinsmore states in his book, *A Country So Full Of Game*, wolves and coyotes were common in Iowa and they ranged across the state at the time of European settlement. Their exact range is difficult to determine because the settlers lumped both species together and referred to both as “wolves”. Both were hunted, trapped, poisoned, and shot by Iowa’s early settlers. They believed that these wild animals would kill their livestock, and local governments awarded bounties for each “wolf” that was killed.

The gray wolf was probably exterminated in Iowa around 1900 and the population of coyotes was in decline until the 1950s when their numbers began to increase. Dinsmore attributes the increase of coyotes due to the clearing of timber, giving the animals more of their preferred habitat. The greatest population of coyotes occurs in western and southern areas of Iowa. In many places their numbers are increasing and they are considered to be a pest in those areas, and various methods of eradication are being used to remove them. Humans and coyotes don’t seem to be able to coexist as people continue to make severe changes in the ecosystem.

I hope that my grandchildren will be able to hear these animals on their camping trips. Humans are changing the environment so much that someday the howls and the yips of the coyotes and other wild critters might not be heard in river valleys and across the fields of Iowa. Also, the changes that are taking place in the environment can have deleterious effects on humans and our way of life.

## Plumage Dimorphism in Birds By Carl Nollen

One of the many mysteries of our bird world is why the sexes of certain species look alike and others look different. In some cases, this difference is so pronounced, the female has been confused as another species. Some examples of dimorphism in our local birds are Mallard Ducks, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Northern Cardinals, Ring-necked Pheasants, and Red-winged Blackbirds. Species which look alike, called monomorphism, include Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, and American Crows. Some differences are small, such as the red nape for the Downy Woodpecker, which the female does not have.

There may be three reasons for dimorphism: mating, territory, and protection of nests. The female of a species often chooses her mate. So, the male needs outstanding plumage to get her attention. Birds are known to have better or different vision than humans. They can see ultraviolet colors. They can see differences in plumage we can't. This is known especially in the European Starlings, those pests with nasty nests who murmur so beautifully. Their iridescent, speckled plumage is judged by its reflectance to the female who can see this better than we can, and may choose a mate with higher radiance.

An experiment was done with Red-winged Blackbirds to see how their red shoulder patch affected their success with territory. It was covered in several birds and the covered males had less success in establishing their territories.

A nesting bird needs to be inconspicuous, or have cryptic coloration. Her nearby mate can look different in his protection of the nest. A theory is the female who does the most work in rearing her young needs to be more selective in her choice of a mate and is more likely to be dimorphic. In monomorphic birds, both contribute. They are more likely to be flock-living and monogamous.

There are so many exceptions, so many unknowns, and so many species to observe, science has a lot of work to do. How do polygamy, polygyny, and monogamy factor. There is scientific disagreement on those roles. Seasonal differences, juveniles, mate fidelity for a season, several seasons, or for life. The more we find out, the more we find out what we don't know. But the birds know!

## Book Review, by Ric Zarwell *Beloved Beasts - Fighting for LIFE in the AGE of EXTINCTION*

It is not often that reading one book provides the reader with triple benefits. But this is provided by *Beloved Beasts - Fighting for LIFE in the AGE of EXTINCTION*, by science writer Michelle Nijhuis.

*Beloved Beasts* focuses on the fate of threatened and endangered wild animals - in many cases predating this recent official status. The biodiversity stories are highlighted through rich biographical capsules with inspiring details about poorly known or under-appreciated conservationists as well as new insights about widely known ecologists. Each of these have an overriding commitment and use amazing attributes in applying innovative, heartfelt, and successful measures to save wildlife.

In addition to providing an in-depth and thought-provoking narrative of biodiversity issues in our present age of extinction the second payoff of *Beloved Beasts* is an enticing history of wildlife conservation both nationally and internationally. Whichever is your preference - biodiversity, or history of wildlife conservation - this wonderful publication merges them in a special and useful way.

The third major benefit of *Beloved Beasts* is the beautiful, carefully researched, and wise writing of author Michelle Nijhuis who seamlessly weaves together problematic conservation issues with the passionate and timely responses of key conservationists. Using the sensitivity of an ecologist, this approach readily conveys little known details across each major subject area, and demonstrates deep research and compassion for both wildlife and conservation activists.

With a polished literary style, which is steps ahead of that found in a majority of environmental and conservation books, this is a new masterpiece to enjoy. Very reasonable prices can be found with an easy search.

\*Review from the Newsletter of Iowa Audubon, April 2022, Volume 19, and with permission of the author.

**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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