

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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NOVEMBER 2023
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



Field Trip
Saturday, November 11, 8:00 a.m.

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of Saylorville Lake Visitor's Center on Saturday, November 11th. From there we will check out various locations around the lake. We will be looking for migrating species such as waterfowl, loons, and gulls. Dress for windy and possibly cold conditions and bring binoculars if you have them. All levels of bird watchers are encouraged to attend! Contact field trip leader Dennis Thompson at cdnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837 for more information.

"Ducks seem proportionately more plentiful than they really are because they concentrate in large visible flocks while land birds are distributed acre by acre over millions of square miles of American soil."

.... Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996)

Tuesday, November 21, 7 p.m.
A Year of Birding
By Al Farris

The Des Moines Audubon November program presented by Al Farris was inspired by the movie *The Big Year* but created by someone of more modest means. According to Al, it is a "mash-up" of photos from several years and several North America locations arranged in a calendar year format to illustrate what birds could be seen in a year.

Al has a B.S. and M.S. in Zoology at Western Illinois University, and a PhD in Zoology from Washington State University. He was employed with the Iowa Conservation Commission and the Department of Natural Resources for 30 years, mostly as the Fish and Wildlife Division Administrator.

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.

Let's Talk Sparrows!
October 13, 2023
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Diversity News

As the temperatures drop and the leaves are falling, the forests and prairies come alive with sparrows. Although they may be more muted in their color than other songbirds, and even confusing in their many shades of brown, many sparrows are quite beautiful in voice and plumage and Fall is a great time to observe them.

Around 20 species of sparrows can be found in Iowa at some time during the year. Twelve species, like Song, Field, and Swamp Sparrows, spend the summer in Iowa and nest in our forests, prairies, wetlands, and agricultural lands. Some of these species may also be seen in lower numbers in winter, but most migrate to the southern US or Mexico for winter.

But for several species, like American Tree and White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, Iowa is "south for the winter." Still others, like LeConte's and Lincoln's Sparrows might be seen for a few weeks each year as they migrate through the state, breeding north of us, and wintering south of us. Outside of the breeding season, sparrows tend to flock together and seeing large numbers of individuals is common for certain species. Late September through Fall is an excellent time of year to see the wide diversity of the sparrow family in Iowa as breeding birds begin to leave and migrants and wintering species arrive.

One of Iowa's most recognizable sparrows is the Dark-eyed Junco. A common visitor to backyard bird feeders, this little black and white bird calls Iowa home from October through May. A distinctive marking of the species is the white outer tail feathers that become visible in flight.

Another winter sparrow is the American Tree Sparrow, which forms winter flocks that frequent shrubby edges of grasslands and forests. Look for their reddish-brown crown and eye line and the black dot in the center of their un-striped chest.

American Tree Sparrows can sometimes get confused with Chipping Sparrows, which spend the summer in Iowa. But notice that Chipping Sparrows have white and black stripes surrounding their red head stripe, and lack the dot on their chest.

During migration we see many White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows in Iowa. White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows can sometimes be tricky to tell apart, but are usually quite different than the other species; the white color on their heads sets them apart. Notice that the White-crowned Sparrow has bold white and black head stripes and a clear chest, while the White-throated Sparrow has white and black stripes, or brown head stripes with yellow eyebrows and a white bib under the chin.

Undoubtedly, the most confusing group of sparrows to identify are what can be called "the little brown ones with stripes" of which there are many. One key area to look at to help with identification of these species is the face. Look for eye stripes, head stripes, eye rings, and colored areas as well as bill shape and color to help distinguish them. Also look at the placement and thickness of stripes. It can take practice and looking at many individuals to grow confident, but even if you are not sure what species you are looking at, you can still enjoy their beautifully patterned feathers.

Song can also be a helpful tool to sort out the different sparrows. Song Sparrows for example, are the classic soundtrack of summer in Iowa and can be found in many different habitats, from urban settings to forest edges. Their song starts with several clear whistled notes followed by a variety of musical buzzing and trills. Henslow's Sparrows, which favor large prairies, sound like a short buzzy hiccup or sneeze.

Always remember that time of year and habitat can also be good clues to help narrow down the options of any bird species you are trying to identify. And if all else fails, try to enjoy whatever little brown bird you see or hear, even if you can't name it!

Besides your own backyard a good place to look and listen for sparrows year-round is one of Iowa's 24 Bird Conservation Areas. Each large landscape encompasses many acres of excellent bird habitat including several public properties you can visit and explore! Happy Birding!

* Activity at feeding stations picks up. Be sure to check on the feeders at the Saylorville Visitor Center and the bird blinds at both Jester Park and Walnut Woods State Park.

"It was November, the month of crimson sunsets, parting birds, deep, sad hymns of the sea, passionate wind-songs in the pines."
--(L.M. Montgomery)

THE SEA-EAGLE PERSISTS

Regular readers of the E-bulletin will surely recall the ongoing saga of the wandering Steller's Sea-Eagle that has been documented since August 2020 across North America, from Alaska, perhaps through Texas, into New England and then into Atlantic Canada. Well, it is still being seen and photographed in Newfoundland, near remote Trinity Bay, where it was reported a few times last month, as recently as 28 June.

*From The Birding Community E-Bulletin, July 2023

“STELLA” PERSISTENCE AND DOLLARS

Devoted readers of the *Birding Community E-bulletin* will recall that we have been following the Steller's Sea-Eagle – “Stella” - that has crossed the continent and delighted hundreds – if not thousands – of birders across North America. Indeed, for 2022 alone, we reported on it three times, and this year already in the March, June, and July issues.

Well, Stella continues to be seen and photographed near Trinity, Newfoundland, sometimes even perched atop an old Bald Eagle nest.

Last month, a report was published on the economic impact of Stella's time in the winter of 2020–2021 when the sea-eagle spent nearly a month on the New England coast as thousands of people travelled to see it. The report is the result of an online survey of individuals who went to see the sea-eagle to estimate the “individual and collective non-consumptive use value” of this vagrant raptor.

The researchers estimated that between 2,115 and 2,645 individuals travelled to see the sea-eagle between December 2021 and January 2022. This generated a total expenditure of between \$380,604 and \$476,626, or between \$584,373 and \$731,809 when accounting for travel time. Also, based on the travelers' willingness to pay, researchers estimated a non-consumptive use consumer surplus of between \$139,036 and \$174,114.

You can check it out: “The Steller's Sea-Eagle in North America: An economic assessment of birdwatchers travelling to see a vagrant raptor” in *People and Nature*, a journal of the British Ecological Society, written by Brent S. Pease, Neil A. Gilbert, William R. Casola, and Kofi Akamani.

*From The Birding Community E-Bulletin October 2023

If I Were the Wind

“The wind that makes music in November corn is in a hurry. The stalks hum, the loose husks whisk skyward in half-playful swirls, and the wind hurries on.

In the marsh, long windy waves surge across the grassy sloughs, beat against the far willows. A tree tries to argue, bare limbs waving, but there is no detaining the wind.

On the sandbar there is only wind, and the river sliding seaward. Every wisp of grass is drawing circles on the sand. I wander over the bar to a driftwood log, where I sit and listen to the universal roar, and to the tinkle of wavelets on the shore. The river is lifeless: not a duck, heron, marshhawk, or gull but has sought refuge from wind.

Out of the clouds I hear a faint bark, as of a faraway dog. It is strange how the world cocks its ears at that sound, wondering. Soon it is louder: the honk of geese, invisible, but coming on.

The flock emerges from the low clouds, a tattered banner of birds, dipping and rising, blown up and blown down, blown together, and blown apart, but advancing, the wind wrestling lovingly with each winnowing wing. When the flock is a blur in the far sky I hear the last honk, sounding taps for summer.

It is warm behind the driftwood now, for the wind has gone with the geese. So would I—if I were the wind.”

From “A Sand County Almanac, with Essays on Conservation from Round River”

.... by Aldo Leopold, first published in 1949.

**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 _____

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