

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXX, NUMBER 6**  
**JUNE, 2023**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**FIELD TRIP TO CHICHAQUA—SATURDAY, JUNE 10<sup>th</sup>**

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, June 10 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 Inn (used to be Best Western Motel) located in the SW corner of the Ankeny 1st Street Interchange on I-35. This is also the location of the Ankeny Diner. Dress for conditions that could include walking in grasses. Chichaqua Bottoms includes over 8,000 acres along the Skunk River, with prairie, wetlands and riparian woodlands supporting at least 227 species of birds. The area's natural features include old oxbow river channels and backwaters, marshes, and wetlands. Chichaqua also includes sandy upland hills with reconstructed prairies and native prairie remnants. Target species include: Sandhill Crane, Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat and Henslow's Sparrow. Dress for conditions. Contact Denny Thompson for more information at [cnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cnthomps@gmail.com) or 515-254-0837.

**NO PROGRAM MEETINGS IN JUNE, JULY OR AUGUST**

~~~~~

**Our Logo, The American Redstart**

Our original logo was designed by an early member, Joseph Brown.  
That logo was used for this newsletter for many years until our new logo was designed by Lynn Marsh of Ankeny.  
Thanks, Lynn!

## Yellow Warbler: Sweet Singer

- **Scientific Name:** *Setophaga petechia*
- **Population:** 93 million • **Trend:** Stable
- **Habitat:** Breeds in wet woods, thickets, and riparian areas; winters in open woodlands, on farms and gardens with scattered trees, and in mangrove forests.

*\*Reprinted in this newsletter with permission, American Bird Conservancy, <http://www.abcbirds.org>*

### About the Yellow Warbler

The Yellow Warbler is the most widespread American wood-warbler. It nests from Alaska to northern South America (including the Galápagos Islands), and in much of the Caribbean, and winters as far south as Peru. Tail tip to forehead, this is also the yellowest North American warbler, even more so than the Prothonotary or Blue-winged. Cinnamon breast streaks embellish the male's gleaming plumage.

The Yellow Warbler's cheerful *sweet sweet sweet, I'm so sweet* song is familiar to most birders. But it voices a distinctive alarm note in response to one specific danger.

### Seet Success

One of the Yellow Warbler's calls, a repeated seet, serves specifically as a Brown-headed Cowbird alert. When a female hears another Yellow Warbler make this call, she rushes back to her nest to prevent the cowbird, a notorious nest parasite, from laying eggs there. Other birds, including Red-winged Blackbirds, also understand this warning; when they hear it, they zip back to their own nests to protect their eggs.

### Breeding and Feeding Insect Patrol

The Yellow Warbler feeds mainly on insects and spiders, gleaning them from shrubs and tree branches or sallying out from a perch to grab winged insects in mid-air. This diminutive hunter sometimes hovers while seeking prey that might be hiding on the undersides of leaves. Like many other migratory songbirds, the Yellow Warbler adds fruit to its diet in winter.

Winter or summer, this warbler provides valuable pest control: One study, conducted on its Costa Rican wintering grounds, showed that the Yellow Warbler and other insectivorous birds ate large quantities of invasive Coffee Berry Borer beetles, helping reduce infestations on coffee plantations in that country by 50 percent.

### Mate-Guarding and a Clutch Performance

A male Yellow Warbler quickly claims a territory on the breeding grounds, chasing off intruding males. He courts prospective mates through incessant singing. In fact, one Yellow Warbler may sing more than 3,000 times in a day to attract a female! Once mated, the male attends the female closely as she builds her nest, wary of other males, which often invade established territories and attempt to mate with resident females.

Females build and maintain the cup-shaped nests, incubate the eggs, and brood the hatchlings. Meanwhile, male Yellow Warblers aggressively guard nest sites and bring food to females sitting on eggs or young. Both sexes share chick-rearing duties: After the nestlings fledged, some may follow the mother, while the rest remain with the father.

Like many other birds such as the Kirtland' Warbler and Wood Thrush, the Yellow Warbler is frequently parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds, which only lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. This problem is especially common in fragmented habitats, which provide easier access for female cowbirds. But the Yellow Warbler fights back. It seems to recognize the foreign eggs, and often covers over the cowbird-parasitized clutch with new nesting material. If the cowbird returns and re-lays, the warbler will cover them again — sometimes resulting in nests with up to six tiers!

Continued the next page.....

## **Region and Range So Many Subspecies**

Another superlative associated with the Yellow Warbler is the species' incredible diversity – 37 subspecies are recognized, divided among four groups. Subspecies vary mostly in plumage color and pattern.

The Yellow Warbler nests throughout most of Canada, Alaska, and at least two-thirds of the area covered by the U.S. lower 48 states. As long-distance migrants, few if any of these birds remain north of the Mexican border in winter. However, several resident (nonmigratory) groups are found in Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and even the Galápagos Islands off of Ecuador's Pacific coast.

Males in these resident populations have varying amounts of chestnut color on their heads, from just the cap in the case of the “Golden” Yellow Warbler to most of the bird's head in the “Mangrove” Yellow Warbler. Some authorities consider certain populations of these chestnut-headed Yellow Warblers to be separate species, but definitive classifications remain unclear.

## **Conservation Warblers on the Landscape**

Although still numerous, Yellow Warblers are threatened by habitat loss, chiefly destruction of riparian habitats, and the overuse of pesticides. One subspecies, the “Barbados” Yellow Warbler, has been listed under the Endangered Species Act since 1970.

American Bird Conservancy's (ABC) work helps to conserve the Yellow Warbler and other migratory birds across their full annual life cycle through its BirdScapes approach to conservation. Several BirdScapes in the southwestern United States protect riparian areas for the Endangered western subspecies of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and these BirdScapes also shelter the Yellow Warbler and other birds. ABC also has several initiatives in place that tackle threats, including their CatsIndoors program, which encourages pet owners to keep cats and birds safe.

---

## **Red-headed Woodpecker by Carol Berrier**

A native of Scotland, ornithologist Alexander Wilson was awed by the sight of a Red-headed Woodpecker. The year was 1794, and Wilson had just arrived in Delaware. The spectacular nine-inch bird's entire head was bright red and its back solid black. Large white wing patches, and a white rump and belly added to its beauty. If Wilson hadn't seen the bird, he surely would have heard its loud drumming or its emphatic queeah ! calls. Wilson was so inspired that he set out to describe birds of the New World in his American Ornithology ( 1808 -1814 ).

The Red-headed Woodpecker in Wilson's time was more plentiful in the eastern United States than the American Robin. Even as late as the 1940's and 1950's, redheads were numerous, enjoying their favorite habitats of open deciduous woodlands, savannas, and tree-lined city streets. But as dead wood was cleared from woodlots and from forested land, the woodpeckers lost many favorite nesting sites and their numbers began a steady decline.

Vacant woodpecker cavities are used by many birds and mammals. In 1890-91, one hundred European Starlings were brought to the United States. Unfortunately, they thrived, reaching the mid-west by 1920, and the west coast by the 1940's. Now hundreds of millions of these aggressive birds make our native woodpeckers' lives difficult. Red-headed Woodpeckers nest high in long-dead barkless trees, and are prime targets for starlings. Starlings do not wait for nests to be vacated, but enter the cavities, tossing out eggs and nestlings and attacking the adult woodpeckers, leaving the cavities foul-smelling and unusable after their own young have fledged.

Red-headed Woodpeckers eat insects (including flying ones which they catch on the wing), ants, beetle larvae, grasshoppers, and caterpillars. They also eat corn, acorns, beechnuts, wild berries, and tree sap, storing enough in tree crevices for their winter food supply.

Male and female redheads look alike, but juveniles have brown heads.

**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 \_\_\_\_\_

***THE WARBLER***  
**VOLUME XXX, NUMBER 6**  
**JUNE 2023**  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**9871 LINCOLN AVENUE**  
**CLIVE, IA 50325**

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**



**Nonprofit  
Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Permit No. 1142  
Des Moines, IA**