

***THE WARBLER***  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXIX, NUMBER 8**  
**SEPTEMBER 2023**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



**Des Moines Audubon Field Trip: Brenton Slough**  
**Saturday, September 9, 8:00 a.m.**

Meet in the parking lot of the Grimes Library at 8:00 a.m. The parking area is just northwest of the corner of First Street and James Street. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) will partner with Des Moines Audubon for this field trip. Brenton Slough was recently purchased by the Foundation which is currently raising funds to transfer the property to Polk County Conservation and open it to the public. The 1,114-acre property lying between Grimes and Granger is a haven for many migratory birds and has documented nesting Trumpeter Swans and Sandhill Cranes.

Beginners are welcome; this is a great way to improve your birding skills by joining a wide range of birders. An INHF staff person will be on hand to answer questions about the property. Dress for muddy or grassy conditions and bring binoculars if you have them. Long pants and closed-toe shoes are recommended. You may also want a water bottle, bug spray and sunscreen. Contact Denny Thompson at (515) 254-0837 or email [cdnthomps@gmail.com](mailto:cdnthomps@gmail.com) for more information. Learn more about this project at: <http://www.inhf.org/Brenton-slough> .

**Birds of Ecuador**  
**By Rex Andersen**  
**Tuesday, September 19 at 7:00 p.m.**

Our September meeting will feature wildlife photographer Rex Andersen presenting a slide show of "Birds of Ecuador". Rex has taken up wildlife photography in retirement, traveling to Costa Rica, Ecuador, and several places in the U.S. for photography workshops. He has had several photos exhibited in the Iowa State Fair and one of his photos was recently recognized by the National Audubon Society as one of the top 100 bird photos for 2023 from over 9,000 photos submitted. In Rex's 2020 trip to Ecuador, he photographed various wildlife - primarily birds. His slideshow on Ecuador will feature many species of hummingbirds, tanagers, plus a collection of toucans, aracari, macaws, kingfishers, and herons. Ecuador is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world with 1,627 species of birds (including 152 species of hummingbirds), almost twice as many as in the U.S., which is 35 times larger!

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 [jrc Clark@radiks.net](mailto:jrc Clark@radiks.net) .

# **Red-headed Woodpecker: Research and Recovery**

## **By Carl Nollen**

The Prairie Sportsman show on Iowa Public Television had an interesting 15-minute segment on Red-headed Woodpeckers August 2 (repeated August 5). The Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis is involved with its citizen science project coordinated with the University of Minnesota Department of Conservation Biology. Dr. Elena West was featured on this show as leader of this research project.

Red-headed Woodpeckers are among many species in decline. This species is much admired for its neat, bold-patterned red, white, and black plumage. It is of more than average value in the world of nature because it creates habitat by drilling holes and cavities that other birds use. It is also a facultative or irregular migrant. You may find a few individuals on a Christmas bird count.

Although they will never be as common as in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there is hope. I have noticed more red-heads this year than previous years at several places, including my front yard where year-round bird feeders help attract them. Mainly grain and seeds are on the ground below the feeders.

The TV show informed us about the research at the Cedar Creek Reserve north of Minneapolis where Red-headed Woodpeckers are thriving. The oak savanna habitat there is ideal for red-heads and 60-100 adults may be found on its 5,600 acres. This project aims to find why they do well there and if that success can be done elsewhere.

Audio recorders are set in different places which capture their calls within 150 meters. Nest sites are marked and a camera on a long pole is used to peer into the nest, 20' high on average. Holes are cut with a porthole door so young and adults may be fitted with transmitters. Dr. West pointed out that a female mated with two different males and had two nests nearby. This kept the males busy because they do most of the cavity construction and help feed the young. Red-headed Woodpeckers may also produce two broods in a summer.

Standing dead trees are important for woodpeckers' success. This research and recovery project began in 2008. Although it takes place in Minnesota, the habitat for red-heads there is the same for Iowa. There is good information online, such as [www.rhwresearch.org](http://www.rhwresearch.org), or [www.minneapolisaudubon.org/rhwo](http://www.minneapolisaudubon.org/rhwo), and a news story on Minneapolis Public Radio June 26 2023.

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### **LAUNCH OF BIRD CITY NETWORK**

**FROM: THE BIRDING COMMUNITY E-BULLETIN, July 2023**

The concept of a "Bird City" may have come into being two decades ago at a meeting of the Urban Habitat Committee of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative (WBCI). What was envisioned was a model for bird-focused urban conservation and education, and what followed were several years of refinement and a search for the right home. By 2010, there were 15 communities in the state of Wisconsin with the Bird City moniker and program.

Other states and cities followed in launching their own Bird City efforts. But we are now witnessing the concept taken to another level.

The Bird City Network, connecting cities across the Americas is an effort to expand conservation actions for birds in urban settings that was formalized last month by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and Environment for the Americas (EFTA). This Bird City Network should serve as a cooperative platform to promote sustainable urban planning, create bird-friendly communities, and raise awareness about the crucial role that people can play in supporting bird populations, all by "fostering cooperation within and among communities."

The Network is intended to encourage participating communities to implement a range of conservation actions, such as the preservation and restoration of natural habitats, the reduction of hazards posed by built structures, and the promotion of community events that raise public awareness of birds and their protection. At the same time, Bird City Network participants will receive guidance and support from ABC and EFTA, including access to resources, educational materials, and best practices in urban bird conservation.

Read more about the Bird City Network launch here: <https://abcbirds.org/bird-city-network/>  
and review existing programs and community efforts here: <https://birdcity.org/communities-and-programs-map>

# **THE INDIGO BUNTING**

## **“A Blue Canary”**

### **By Ray Harden**

I was surprised to see an Indigo Bunting at my bird feeder this spring. I had not seen the little blue bird at my feeder for the past two years. The derecho windstorm in 2020 destroyed a lot the trees and shrubs on my property that the bird needs for cover.

The sparrow-sized male has a brilliant cobalt blue color; this makes it one of Iowa’s most conspicuous songbirds. He is not to be confused with the eastern bluebird which is larger and has an orange breast.

The male Indigo Bunting is easy to spot because of his bright coloration. The females are harder to find and identify. She is a brownish tan color with only a hint of blue showing on the wings and tail feathers. Also, the female stays low to the ground and in thick shrubbery as she feeds making her difficult to see.

She does most of the work of building a nest, incubating the eggs, and feeding the young. Her small cup shaped nest is built a few feet off the ground in the fork of a shrub. It has a diameter of three inches and is one and a half inches deep to hold her four bluish-white eggs. The nest is usually lined with a soft material such as thistle down or animal hair.

The young hatch in two weeks and fledge two weeks later. The chicks are fed by both parents and develop quickly on a diet of insects that is rich in protein. Frequently a mated pair of Indigo Buntings will raise a second brood. In most cases males are monogamous but sometimes he mates with two or more females in his territory.

These little birds are summer residents of Iowa and they are found across the state and most of the time the birds return to the same area where they were born. Their preferred habitat is woodland edge, hedgerows, suburbs, and small towns. They are seldom seen in urban areas, deep woods, or in cultivated fields.

The Indigo Buntings arrive in early May and most leave Iowa by mid-September. They have a nearly two-thousand-mile journey to their wintering areas in Central America and the northern parts of South America. They fly during the night and use stars to navigate their course.

The Indigo Bunting’s range is east of the Rocky Mountains, covering two thirds of the United States and parts of southern Canada. Ornithologists report that they are expanding their range and they are increasing in numbers in some areas, but populations are declining in places with intense agriculture.

Several studies have shown that the female brown-headed cowbird frequently lays its eggs in the Indigo Bunting’s nest. According to a study done in Iowa of forty-one Indigo Bunting nests, it was found that twenty-nine nests contained cowbird eggs.

Besides being a beautiful little bird, the male Indigo Bunting has a very nice song. It is described as a rapid warble with each high-pitched note and phrase sung twice- it is often paraphrased as “Sweet sweet, where where, here, here”. The male begins singing in May and continues into August, which is much later than other song birds.

Gladys Black in her book Iowa Bird Life, says that, “The Indigo Bunting’s singing is not deterred by high temperatures like other birds, in fact the hotter the day the longer he sings.” She goes on to say that he will often sing his song six times per minute.

Because they are very pretty and have a pleasing song they are often kept as caged birds in Latin America and in some parts of Europe. Because of their singing ability they are sometimes called a blue canary. They are fantastic little birds to have in your yard. They eat many weed seeds, spiders, mosquitoes, and insects that harm plants. You can invite them to come to your yard by having a bird feeder with small seeds, bushes for cover, and a source of water.

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

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