

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



FIELD TRIP TO CHICHAQUA—SATURDAY, JUNE 13th

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, June 13 and the destination will be Errington Marsh and Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt in northeast Polk County. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of the Ankeny Diner, 133 SE Delaware Avenue, located in the SE corner of Ankeny 1st Street off the Interchange on I-35. 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, and is owned and managed by Polk County Conservation. 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 cndthomps@gmail.com or 515-229-9615.

Please note, No program meetings in June, July, or August

The fall schedule of program meetings begins in September.

September 15—Grassland Birds by Lindsey Page, Polk County Conservation

October 20—Nebraska Birds by Ty Smedes

November 17—Wood Thrush Report by Anna Buckhardt Thomas, Iowa DNR

Birding Des Moines in June

Migration is over and the breeding season has commenced. One of the better places to find southern species at the edge of their range may be the trails at Polk County Conservation's Brown's Woods on the southwest corner of the metro area. Here you may be lucky enough to find a pair of Acadian Flycatchers, a Mississippi Kite, or a Summer Tanager. Great-crested Flycatchers will certainly be nesting as will regular species such as Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, and numerous woodpeckers. You may even see or hear a Pileated Woodpecker

Brown's Woods is Iowa's largest urban forest. This 486-acre forest in West Des Moines features a canopy of oak and hickory trees stretching from Brown's Woods Drive to the Raccoon River. The rolling hills and small streams of Brown's Woods are a joy to explore at any season. This wildlife area is named after Tallmadge E. Brown, a successful Des Moines lawyer who acquired large tracts of land around Des Moines in the late 1800s. One of them was this beautiful forest acquired by the Polk County Conservation Board in 1972. Be sure to check the Des Moines Audubon website at dmaudubon.org and check the "Recent eBird Sightings" in the right column.

NEW USPS STAMP WITH SIBLEY ART

In May, the U.S. Postal Service issued a new set of Forever postage stamps, displaying Bald Eagles at five stages: one week old, four weeks old, one year old, two years old, and adult. The artwork for these stamps is by David A. Sibley, renowned bird artist and author.

Almost fundamental to American identity since the early days of the nation, the Bald Eagle has been a favorite stamp subject since 1869. These latest stamps can provide a new perspective on this American icon, featuring illustrations of the bird at different stages of life. It is also significant to note that this species has made a remarkable recovery from the past spread of DDT, which interfered with calcium metabolism, causing thin-shelled eggs that would often break during incubation and lead to reproductive failure. The rebound of the Bald Eagle is generally considered as one of the most successful wildlife conservation stories in U.S. history.

According to Sibley, the stamp series is intended to spark curiosity and appreciation for Bald Eagles, noting that while most Americans can surely recognize an adult Bald Eagle as the national symbol, few know about the bird's transitional plumages and life challenges. He hopes the stamps "emphasize that the familiar adult eagle has already lived through a series of transitional plumages, finding food, migrating, and surviving all of life's challenges"

Derry Noyes, an art director for USPS, designed the stamps using the original paintings by Sibley. Of course, as Forever stamps, they will always be equal in value to whatever is the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price. They will be available in sheets of 20 stamps, and you can view an image of the sheet here:
<https://www.stampsforever.com/stamps/bald-eagle-hatchling-to-adult>
From: Birding Community E-bulletin, May 2026

Eastern Warbling Vireo: Summer's Favorite Singer

The Eastern Warbling Vireo is a quintessential species of spring and summer across much of eastern North America. This rather drab bird is often hard to spot, hidden up high among the leaves of tall deciduous trees, but its buoyant, easygoing song is hard to miss. One of the most persistent singers through summer, this vireo's song is considered by many ornithologists and naturalists to be among the most beautiful in its range. Males do most of the singing, but females sing as well — an unusual trait among songbirds in temperate regions. Even more unusual, these birds will even sing while sitting on their nests!

Unfortunately for the vireos, Brown-headed Cowbirds seem to cue in on this species' habit of singing from the nest. Cowbirds are "brood parasites," laying their own eggs in the nests of other species, often resulting in the death of some or all of the host's young. Female cowbirds are quite crafty, even using the movements of parent birds to determine the location of a nest; the more often a parent uses the same paths to and from the nest, the more likely cowbirds are to find it. However, Eastern Warbling Vireos are remarkably efficient at removing cowbird eggs, often puncturing the offending eggs with their bills before discarding them.

Eastern Warbling Vireo populations are increasing overall, and the species does not appear to be at immediate risk. However, these migratory insectivores still face a variety of threats, especially from insecticides and hazards they encounter during migration.

The Eastern Warbling Vireo is fairly adaptable and will forage and nest in non-native trees used in landscaping. However, they run into trouble when trees are sprayed with pesticides. Eggs and nestlings can be harmed if sprayed directly, but even if these trees are just used for foraging, the loss of their insect prey can negatively impact these birds.

There is some evidence that Eastern Warbling Vireos are at risk of collisions with structures such as radio towers and wind turbines. The switch to renewable energy sources is better for our planet's fragile climate, but without proper siting, it can come with steep costs to birds.

From: American Bird Conservancy
BirdOfTheWeek, April 10, 2026

BIRDING AT UNION SLOUGH

By Margaret and Ray Harden

On May 2nd, Margaret and I left for our favorite birding spot in north-central Iowa, Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge near Algona, Iowa. The official address of Union Slough is 17103 60th Street, Titonka, Iowa. It is about 160 miles from Des Moines.

For overnight lodging, there are several motels in Algona, but there is a fascinating motel in Bancroft, Iowa, called the Sisters Inn. It is a former convent home for Catholic sisters. It has excellent accommodations and is reasonably priced.

Our goal was to see and photograph yellow-headed blackbirds. However, there are many other species of migrating waterfowl, songbirds, and shorebirds that can be seen.

Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge consists of 3,334 acres of marsh, grasslands, and timber. This biological diversity provides habitat to over 240 species of birds. The main body of water is nine miles long from north to south, and there are several disconnected tracts of grasslands that have been re-established as prairies, which were formerly used for row crops. The prairies on the higher ground stand out like islands in an ocean of corn and soybeans. Several species of sparrows and bobolinks inhabit these grasslands.

The slough is the remnant of a river that existed before the last glacial period. It is the connecting point or union between the Blue Earth River, which flows north into Minnesota, and the south end of the slough, which is the beginning of the East Fork of the Des Moines River. The wind determines the direction of the water's flow due to the flatness of the land. Union Slough is a critical breeding habitat for migratory waterfowl in the Great Plains area. Many species nest and raise their young here.

The auto route is one-way, and it's not always open for visitors. It is a wise idea to call the slough's headquarters and see if the auto route is open for driving on the road. It is open in late summer and on special occasions. The dirt road parallels the main body of water on the east side of the slough for four miles. This allows for wonderful viewing of wildlife. But you must stay in your vehicle. The water is on the right side of the road, and the prairie is on the left. Occasionally you can drive very close to the birds in the water.

Furthermore, there are county roads that cross the slough, which allows for excellent viewing of wildlife. We spent several hours on the Class B Road, 370th St. This location allows a vehicle to get close to the water's edge and view the north and south arms of the slough without traffic zooming past.

This trip was one of the best we have experienced during all our past visits. The heavy rains this spring had filled some of the ephemeral pools of water and made it easier to see waterfowl.

We saw and photographed many species of birds, some we had not seen for many years, such as the American bittern, Sora rail, Virginia rail, green heron, and several species of sandpipers. One bird we saw was the black-bellied plover—this was a life bird for me. In the grasslands there are bobolinks and several species of sparrows that can be seen. We are planning on a return trip in the fall.

**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 515-707-7648.
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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