

**THE WARBLER**  
**DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY**  
**VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 3**  
**MARCH 2015**  
**EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK**



### **SATURDAY, MARCH 14<sup>th</sup> FIELD TRIP**

Meet in the parking lot of the Visitors' Center at Saylorville Lake at 8 a.m. on Saturday, March 14. We'll observe birds around the Visitor's Center and feeders and then we'll venture out in search of species that might be found at various sites around the lake. Dress for conditions and bring a beverage and snack for break. Contact Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 for information about field trips. All levels of birdwatchers welcomed.

### **Des Moines Audubon Program, Tuesday, March 17** **Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring** **By Kevin Murphy**

Kevin Murphy joined the Wildlife Diversity Program in a partnership position with Iowa State University as the biologist for the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring project. Iowa's Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring (MSIM) Program is a statewide program that focuses on documentation, monitoring, and conservation of Iowa's Species of Greatest Conservation Need. After receiving his BS in Environmental Sciences from the University of Iowa, Kevin went on to earn a Master's degree in Wildlife Ecology from Iowa State University in 2013. His research there focused on migratory waterbird use of sheetwater wetlands in Iowa. In the fall of 2013, he worked for the MSIM program conducting surveys of mussels, birds, and odonates. He also worked as AmeriCorps Wildlife Management Technician at the Clear Lake Wildlife Management Unit, and as a seasonal Wetlands and Wildlife Aide at the Clear Lake Wildlife Research Office. Kevin enjoys birding, hunting, and wildlife photography.

Meetings of Des Moines Audubon Society begin at 7 p.m. and are held in the lower level of Westminster Presbyterian Church which is located at the corner of Beaver and Franklin Avenues in Des Moines. Parking is available on the north and west sides of the church and an elevator can be accessed at the west door. For information about this program, please contact Jane Clark at [jrclark@radiks.net](mailto:jrclark@radiks.net) or 515-223-5047.

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### **Volunteer Recognition** **Congratulations, Rogers!**

The Des Moines Parks and Recreation recently honored Des Moines Audubon member Rogers Shell as Volunteer of the Year at their January Park Board meeting. "In the 1930's, bluebird populations dwindled due to habitat destruction and the illegal introduction of the European Starling and the House Sparrow. These birds competed for remaining cavity nesting space. Volunteer of the Year Rogers Shell led efforts to bring bluebirds back and make Des Moines, Iowa a Bluebird City. Shell locates, removes and repairs old boxes, creates and installs new boxes, monitors and identifies box locations and gets utility provider approval to ensure their safety. In addition to this, he recruits additional volunteers and created two new Bluebird box trails in two Des Moines city parks, installing twenty-three new boxes in Grandview and Gray's Lake Parks. Shell helped the City reach their goals a year in advance. Thanks to his volunteer efforts, there were 15 bluebirds and 8 tree swallows fledged during the 2014 nesting season."

## **Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program**

### **2015 Bird Nest Monitoring Workshop**

**Forest Park Museum, Perry**

**Saturday, March 14**

**10:00am - 3:00pm**

**Registration: \$10.00**

**Meal and Materials included**

### **2015 Frog and Toad Monitoring Workshop**

**Forest Park Museum, Perry**

**Monday, April 13**

**5:30m - 9:00pm**

**Registration: \$10.00**

**Meal and Materials included**

**From Chris Adkins, Dallas County Environmental Education Coordinator/Naturalist**

Imagine your favorite wild place. Go there— relax— listen. Do the voices of the wild ones grace your favorite haunt? Bird songs? Frog serenades? Will the music continue? What can you do to ensure that it does?

If you enjoy Iowa's wild places, and the wildlife we share our place with, here is your opportunity to not only improve your understanding of the wilds, but to also serve as a citizen scientist, becoming part of the conservation process which protects and preserves our wilds. Dallas County Conservation, in cooperation with the Wildlife Diversity Program the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, invites you to join us in keeping wild Iowa, wild. Could 2015 find you as one of the new recruits into the Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program (VWMP)?

Participants at the Frog and Toad Survey Workshop will receive a CD of the breeding calls for the 16 species of frogs and toads found in Iowa. Their ears will be tuned to utilize these songs and identification guides to come to know these wild amphibians. Iowa's frogs do not sing "ribbit." But they do fill our nights with easily recognized tunes that the workshop will help you master. Armed with these new skills you can travel the study routes of the survey following the survey protocol and help collect vital data on the amphibian populations of Iowa. Who is out there? Where are they? And, how many are there? Volunteers that collect the field data will allow the staff of the Wildlife Diversity Program to answer these and other questions. This much we do know— amphibian populations are declining globally and we need to find answers to these population questions to ensure that we do not lose this music of our nights.

Participants at the Bird Nest Monitoring Workshop will be trained to locate and monitor a raptor nest (with a special focus on Bald Eagles) or colonial waterbird rookery, such as herons or egrets, and report on the nest /rookery location and their productivity.

The training and volunteer activities of these programs are most appropriate for adults. Pre-registration is required for both workshops. Workshops will be limited to 20 volunteers. The \$10 registration fee associated with the workshops covers all the materials provided (frog and toad call CD, identification guides, workbooks, safety equipment), the VWMP biannual newsletter, and a meal served at each workshop. Checks should be made out to Iowa DNR.

Let's fill Dallas County in 2015 with citizen scientist volunteers working to provide the field data necessary to help the Wildlife Diversity Program keep wild Iowa, wild. A registration form can be obtained from Dallas County Conservation, downloaded at: [www.iowadnr.gov/volunteerwildlifemonitoring](http://www.iowadnr.gov/volunteerwildlifemonitoring) or by calling the Wildlife Diversity Program at 515-432-2823 x102, or the Dallas County office at 515.465-3577 or emailing them at [conservation@co.dallas.ia.us](mailto:conservation@co.dallas.ia.us) to register .



*"There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds... There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night and spring after the winter..."* Rachel Carson

## 2015 Prairie Chicken Festival

The Kellerton Grassland Bird Conservation Area will be hosting a Prairie Chicken Festival on Saturday, April 4, 2015. This marks the completion of a very successful four-year translocation of Nebraska Prairie Chickens to Iowa. There will be a Prairie Chicken viewing at the Kellerton lek site that will begin before dawn (approximately 6:30AM) and run until 9AM with professionals and spotting scopes available.

### **Marsh Dancers– A Natural History of the Sandhill Crane in Iowa By Pat Schlarbaum**

As their haunting calls suggest, Sandhill Cranes are prehistoric birds. They are among the oldest living bird species with a lineage in the fossil record dating back some ten million years. Long missing from the Iowa landscape, crane populations are increasing and these calls are resonating through more and more Iowa wetlands.

James Dinsmore, author of *A Country So Full of Game*, writes: “Prior to European settlement of Iowa, Greater Sandhill Cranes probably were a common nesting species and abundant migrants across the state. Even in the 1890s, it was not uncommon to see flocks of hundreds or even thousands of cranes in Winnebago and Hancock Counties in spring.”

As wetlands were drained across Iowa and hunting pressure increased, nesting of these majestic birds declined, with the last nest being reported in 1894. Migrants were a rare sight for most of the twentieth century, until wetland restoration on the breeding grounds in Minnesota and Wisconsin led to gradual population increases. The number of Sandhill Cranes reported in Iowa increased significantly in the late 1980’s, culminating in their return as a nesting species in 1992.

Much of this improvement can be tied to wetland restoration. As with many other species, cranes will respond by pioneering into rejuvenated habitat. Cranes have been included in bird counts in at least 55 counties during recent years, and reproduction was noted in 24 counties in 2014.

In the misty pre-dawn light in wetlands across the state, Sandhill Cranes perform elaborate mating dances, leaping into the air and waving their wings. Throughout the revelry, cranes are constantly bugling, which can be heard a half-mile away. They nest in shallow wetlands with dense vegetation, where a pair will lay two eggs that hatch in late spring. The dense vegetation of the wetlands hides the young brown colts. Though they do not have webbed feet, hatchling cranes are good swimmers and may leave the nest to follow parents through the wetlands, sometimes within hours of hatching. At three months of age, the young begin to fly, but the colts remain with their parents throughout their first winter.

Cranes are social birds, constantly communicating with each other with their distinctive bugling calls. Their impressive beaks are not only used for getting food and preening feathers, but also as weapons. When cranes are threatened, they use their wings to maintain balance as they jump up and strike at the attacker with beak and sharp talons.

As crane nesting increases across the state, reports of their whereabouts are appreciated. Each year Iowans assist the Annual Midwest Sandhill Crane Count conducted by the International Crane Foundation from Baraboo, Wisconsin. The Count, which began in 1976, is used to monitor the general population trends and distribution of Sandhill Cranes in the Upper Midwest, and promote the awareness of cranes and wetland conservation. More information can be found at [www.savingcranes.org/annual-midwest-crane-count.html](http://www.savingcranes.org/annual-midwest-crane-count.html).

It’s pretty incredible to welcome Sandhill Cranes returning to Iowa marshes each spring. So join the fun and leap on down to your favorite marsh to enjoy nature’s orchestration and dazzling courtship dances.

From: Wildlife Diversity News  
*A Publication of the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program*  
Volume 13, Issue 3, Summer 2014

## **Brrr! How Do They Do It?**

**By Carol Berrier**

February in the Midwest was a bitterly cold month, made even worse by wicked, unrelenting winds. Nearly half of North America's eight hundred bird species head south for the winter, as do many of us. They leave, not to escape the cold as we do, but to find an adequate food supply. However, many of our birds choose to tough it out. How do they do it?

My favorite year-round resident is the tiny Black-capped Chickadee, a common visitor to our feeders where we see it dart in, grab a seed and take it to a branch to open, grasping the seed with its feet and hammering the hull loose with its strong little bill. When hunger has abated, the chickadee finds places under bark or house siding to cache seeds for future use when food may not be as plentiful. In fact, in the fall the chickadee generates new brain cells needed to recall the locations of those larders.

Chickadees are not dependent on feeders, although they need at least twenty times as much food in winter as in summer. They obtain as little as 20 % of their energy needs from feeders, finding the rest in woods and fields. Seeds, waxy fruits, cocoons, hibernating insects, and insect and spider eggs make up their winter diets. Up to 25% of chickadees fledged in the spring die their first winter. However, our feeders do help with survival rates when temperatures dip below ten degrees. In extreme cold the birds need to ingest the equivalent of 60% of their body weight daily in order to survive the night. Chickadees can turn energy into heat by shivering, but that energy must soon be replaced with food or they will die. We can assure them quick energy on cold mornings by keeping our feeders full.

Finding a sheltered night roost in a tree hollow, thick conifer, or even a bird house is essential to survival. Chickadees conserve fat reserves at night by tensing skin muscles to fluff up their insulating down, and by sitting on their feet they can cover bare legs and feet with down. They can allow their body temperatures to drop from 108 degrees F. to about 50 degrees F. If they wake up to 20 degrees below zero, the birds will further conserve energy by waiting until it warms up before venturing out.

Look for that sprightly little acrobat, the Black-capped Chickadee, and admire its fortitude.

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**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**