



THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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APRIL 2015
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK

APRIL FIELD TRIP

For our Saturday, April 11 field trip, meet at Casey's in Grimes at 7:30 a.m. From there we will travel to Guthrie County to bird at Bay's Branch, Lakin Slough, and other local birding areas. We'll be visiting a variety of habitats that could include marsh, wetland, restored prairie and upland looking for waterfowl and early migrating shorebirds. A visit to some "migrant trap" woodlands in the open country could turn up migrant songbirds. Bring binoculars and a snack and beverage, and dress for the conditions, which might include walking in wet grasses. Contact field trip leader, Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837 for more information. Please note the early starting time of 7:30 a.m.

TUESDAY, APRIL 21 PROGRAM **Cuba – 90 miles away, a world away**

In April, 2013, Denny and Cecille Thompson spent two weeks on a bird survey in Cuba. The trip was put together by Sharon Stilwell (Des Moines Audubon member) through the Caribbean Conservation Trust (CCT). The CCT is based out of Connecticut and is the only American group licensed to lead ornithological study trips to Cuba. There are 28 bird species found only on Cuba and our group managed to see 26 of them.

Come join Denny and Cecille as they provide a glimpse into the biological, architectural, and cultural aspects of this fascinating island. (And yes, there will be classic car pictures.)

Denny Thompson is long-time Des Moines Audubon member who has always been interested in the outdoors. He is an avid birder and has led monthly field trips for Des Moines Audubon for over 25 years. He's also compiler of the Des Moines Christmas Count. Denny and Cecille have developed an interest in birding other countries over the past few years. While not as avid a birder as her husband, Cecille enjoys experiencing other cultures and serves as trip photographer. For information about this program, please contact Denny Thompson at 515-254-0837.

This meeting of Des Moines Audubon Society will begin at 7 p.m. and it will be 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.

Please note that this will be the last meeting of Des Moines Audubon Society at this church. The church has notified us that they will be focusing on those groups which fit within the mission and ministry of Westminster. New meeting arrangements will be announced in future newsletters.

Polk County Conservation Volunteers of the Year

On March 8th, Polk County Conservation hosted the annual Volunteer Appreciation Banquet at the Jester Park Lodge. The Banquet honored individuals with at least 10 hours and groups with over 25 cumulative hours of volunteering during 2014.

Three Des Moines Audubon members were honored with awards. David Johnson (Volunteer of the Year) has volunteered in numerous ways throughout the Polk County park system. He has been involved in a number of clean-ups and woodland and prairie restoration workdays, monitors the Jester Park golf course bluebird trail and kestrel boxes. He has constructed and installed barn owl, bat, bluebird and kestrel boxes.

Rogers Shell and John Gersib (Volunteer Duo of the Year) have worked hard to improve the success of the bluebird trail at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. They relocated several boxes and "paired" others to promote better success by bluebirds. They also redesigned the box doors to make the boxes easier to check while monitoring and they installed improved predator guards to help limit nest loss to mammalian and reptilian predators. Thanks to David, Rogers and John for their volunteer efforts!

Cooper's Hawk An Attack at the Bird Feeder By Ray Harden

In the afternoon on a cold February day I witnessed a flight for survival. I was taking food to my bird feeders but before I rounded the corner of my house the sparrows, juncos, and chickadees exploded from the feeding area chirping noisily, flapping their wings, and flying into the nearby bushes.

A Cooper's hawk had dropped down near the feeder from a high branch in the apple tree. The hawk had zeroed in on a black-capped chickadee that was flying for its life. It was a short flight to the safety of a lilac bush and the hawk was inches from its tail. The little bird made it and began to work its way lower into the center of the shrub for more protection. The hawk landed on a branch several feet higher. The other birds continued their chattering while the hawk and chickadee sat still eyeing each other. I was shivering in the cold.

When I moved toward the feeder the hawk flew away and a little later the chickadee was also gone. I filled the feeder, cleaned the water dish, hung a suet block for the woodpeckers, and came inside out of the cold.

Watching from the window I waited to see what would happen. In just a few minutes the news must have spread to the birds that the hawk was gone and the human had put out fresh food. The feeding began and the yard returned to normal. The chickadee had a narrow escape and the Cooper's hawk had to go elsewhere for its supper.

Cooper's hawks have been in my yard several times in the past year and I have seen them flying over downtown Perry. Last summer there was an active nest in a large maple tree on Iowa Street. They are common in central Iowa.

The hawks have learned that bird feeding stations are an excellent place to get a meal. Their favorite hunting tactic is to sit in a tall tree and watch the feeder below. The hawk will swoop down and grab an unsuspecting smaller bird at the feeder or if the birds are flushed into flying, the faster and more agile hawk can catch them in the air.

The Cooper's hawk is the size of a crow. Its back is a slate gray-blue color; the breast is a mottled white with brown spots. Its most distinctive feature is its long tail marked with two black horizontal bands and rounded at the end.

The bird is named after the ornithologist who first described the species, William Cooper. It is in a group of hawks called "accipiters" and it is the most common member of this group that is seen in Iowa. The sharp-shinned hawk is similar but smaller and is more frequently observed in Iowa's dense woods. These two species are difficult to tell apart and both are found across North America. Both have long tails and short rounded wings, which help them fly between trees when they chase prey. They feed primarily on other birds, but they will also eat small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles.

The population of Cooper's hawks has increased since the 1970s when their numbers were greatly reduced by the use of pesticides like D.D.T. The main problem facing the hawks today is the loss of woodland habitat that the bird requires for its nesting and hunting territory. As the woodlands are disappearing the hawks are moving into smaller woodlots, fencerows, and suburbs with well-established trees. During the winter months when food is scarce the hawks have learned to come to birdfeeders to hunt for prey.

**THIS IS THE FIRST RENEWAL NOTICE OF MEMBERSHIP DUES
PLEASE CALL 515-223-5047 IF YOU ARE NOT SURE IF YOUR DUES ARE UP-TO-DATE**

Des Moines Audubon Society membership is for one year, from June to May.

**Dues should be mailed to our Treasurer,
Jim Clark, 9871 Lincoln Avenue, Clive, IA 50325**

Please make checks payable to “Des Moines Audubon Society”

Membership Levels and Dues:

Student (under 18).....\$1.00
Individual Adult..... \$10.00
Family.....\$15.00
Life.....\$125.00
(May be paid in five annual payments of \$25.00)

*Additional Contribution for Conservation Projects _____

*Additional Contribution for Bird Feeding Projects _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip Code _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

That Wise Old Owl **By Carol Berrier**

Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, was accompanied by a Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) that was considered sacred by the ancient Greeks. Historically, many Little Owls nested on the Acropolis in Athens, where the temple to Athena is found. Why was an owl chosen to symbolize wisdom? Perhaps because of its nocturnal habits, silent flight, large forward-looking eyes, eerie calls, and/or prowess as a hunter.

Owls, hawks, falcons and eagles are termed *raptors*, or birds of prey that kill with their strong talons. Owls are especially adapted for the hunt with keen eyesight and hearing. At night an owl's eyes dilate fully and are capable of excellent night vision. Its pupils contract in daylight to retain acute day vision as well. Unlike other birds, an owl's eyes are stationary in their sockets. Extra neck vertebrae and strong neck muscles enable the bird to quickly turn its head 180 degrees or more when watching an object. The Great Horned Owl can manage 270 degrees, or three-quarters of a circle!

Owls usually hunt in low light conditions, some exclusively at night when there is no competition from other raptors - - - so good hearing is essential in locating prey. Many owls have decorative "ear tufts" that bear no relationship to their ears, which are oblong slits on the sides of their heads, well hidden by feathers. Hearing is so acute that an owl can detect a tiny vole's movement under the snow. The ears, at about eye level, are asymmetrical with one ear slightly higher than the other. This allows the owl to accurately triangulate the exact location of the little vole and pluck it unseen from the snow.

To grab a rodent, an owl must arrive on silent wings. This it can do with its soft velvety feathers. The leading edge of each wing has a fringe of comb-like serrated feathers that breakup any turbulence. Firmly in its grasp, the owl will swallow the prey whole, later coughing up pellets of fur and bone.

Owls that we are most likely to see or hear in central Iowa are the Great Horned, Screech and Barred. In winter we also look for Snowy and Saw-whet Owls.

Now, what about wisdom? An owl's specialized eyes and ears take up much of the bird's skull space, so that little room is left for its proportionally small brain. An owl is no match in smarts for the crows that like to mob it when they discover its day roost.

BOOK NOTES: SUBIRDIA

Are urban and near-urban regions simply dead-ends for birdlife? John H. Marzluff takes on a healthy contrary view in his new book *Welcome to Subirdia* (2014, Yale University Press) that assesses the significance of these inevitable and long-lasting habitats. The book reviews mostly U.S. cities and suburbs, but also borrows constructive examples from Europe, Asia, and Australia. From these perspectives Marzluff measures the adaptability of bird species to human urbanization.

He deftly places many of our species' responses to the growth of cities and suburbs into three general categories: avoiders (those sensitive species which leave the altered areas), exploiters (those species which arrive or thrive as soon as changes begin to occur), and adapters (those species which accommodate to the spread of subdivisions). A well-written book, *Welcome to Subirdia* takes a refreshing look at such issues as feeding, backyard management, cats, creative architecture, night light, golf courses, schoolyards, derelict land, urban redesign, and our conservation ethic in an urban age.

The final three chapters of the book - Beyond Birds, Good Neighbors, and Nature's Tenth Commandment (i.e., "Enjoy and bond with nature where you live, work, and play!") - are, perhaps, the most constructive, challenging, and uplifting sections of this thought-provoking new publication..

For a taste of Marzluff's book, specifically how we should make life better for birds in Subirdia, see this summary from The Nature Conservancy's most recent magazine: <http://magazine.nature.org/features/finding-subirdia.xml> .

From: The Birding Community E-bulletin, March 2015

You can access all the past E-bulletins on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website:
<http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

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