

THE WARBLER
DES MOINES AUDUBON SOCIETY
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JUNE 2025
EDITOR: JANE R. CLARK



FIELD TRIP TO CHICHAQUA—SATURDAY, JUNE 14th

The Des Moines Audubon Society field trip will be held on Saturday, June 14 and the destination will be 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 SW corner of the Ankeny 1st Street 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 cnthomps@gmail.com or 515-254-0837.

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.

Procreation & Death in my Back Yard

By Ty Smedes

This spring, a pair of Eastern Bluebirds set up housekeeping in a nest box located between our back porch and the treed ravine behind our house. I needed to test some new photography equipment, so I decided to use the pair as test subjects. The female lays an egg each morning, until a full clutch of perhaps five eggs has been accumulated - and she already had two eggs.

From a photo blind, I watched her fly away from the nest box at 9:00 am one morning, and having likely spotted an insect, I saw her land amongst the foliage in the ravine. I knew her watchful mate would soon join her, as usual. But something else briefly caught my attention, and when I returned my gaze to the ravine, a hawk flew into the back of the large white oak near where I had last seen the female bluebird. I quickly trained my lens on the raptor, thinking it was probably a Cooper's Hawk, but could only see a head and breast behind thick foliage.

But I was surprised to learn it was a Broad-winged Hawk. In a few moments, the hawk flew to a limb on the back-side of the same tree. While in flight, it was apparent a small animal was clutched in one foot. Upon landing a second time, I could see most of the hawk, including the prey animal it held in its grasp. My heart sank! It was a bluebird. My first thought was that it had picked off the female when she was occupied with the insect she had just caught. But I also knew the male would have flown in to join her when she left the nest. Which one was it?

I zoomed in for a closer look and could see the bluebird's namesake blue tail. But, knowing both the male and female have blue tails, I couldn't tell the shade of blue, and if it was male or female, due to the angle and poor lighting. Interestingly, the hawk did not attempt to eat its prey at either sitting, and soon left our yard. I wondered if it was taking the meal to its mate, perhaps waiting at a nest somewhere close by? Later that afternoon I learned which bird had been predated when I spied the female peeking from the nest box, looking for the mate that would never appear. She initially maintained loyalty to the nest when the next morning I found she had laid a third egg. The Broad-winged Hawk was a new yard bird, but it was small consolation for the potential loss of the bluebird brood. At this writing, I can only speculate whether she will incubate, hatch, and raise a brood by herself. Stay tuned...

EAGLE MEGA-STARs

Interest in birds – from backyard bird-feeding, to small community field trips, to popular entertainment – was given a real boost during the pandemic, and much of that trend persists. One corner of interest for one species stands out: Bald Eagle cams at active nests.

There are several very good eagle-cams, and they have been highlighted before, but one clear and current stand-out among them is the Big Bear Eagle Nest Cam. The nest is in Big Bear Valley in the San Bernardino National Forest in Southern California. It is about 145 feet up in a Jeffrey Pine, and it is the home for a pair of eagles, named Jackie (a 12-year-old female) and Shadow (a 9-year-old male), and their young.

The solar-powered camera on the nest has operated for almost a decade, and the adult Bald Eagles have “added so many sticks over the last few years, we’ve had to raise the camera up because they were covering it,” according to Sandy Steers, Friends of Big Bear Valley Executive Director.

In the process, viewership has grown significantly, with 40,000+ viewers at any one time not being uncommon. (How many individual viewers have visited the eagle-cam is debatable, ranging from the hundreds of thousands to many more.)

“People are very emotionally connected with the eagles,” added Steers. “They have been looking to the camera to help them feel better about the world. It is the one place they go to get uplifted. They go watch Jackie and Shadow.”

This nesting season has been a good one. Three eaglets hatched, and although one died in a mid-March snowstorm, the other two appear healthy.

Highlighted activities at the nest are collected by loyal members of Friends of Big Bear Valley and posted on the organization's informative Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/FOBBV/> and the actual live-stream at the nest is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4-L2nfGcuE>

From: The Birding Community E-Bulletin, April 2025

**Loon Lessons: Uncommon Encounters with the Great Northern Diver,
by James D. Paruk. University of Minnesota Press, 2021. 256pp.
Book Review by Doug Harr**

My growing up at the edge of an 85-acre lake in central Minnesota has made the Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) a mesmerizing avian species for me. Loons always stopped there during migration, and a pair even successfully nested on the edge of that lake. So, when I learned about this new book about loons, I had to quickly purchase and read it.

This work contains scientific information collected by author James Paruk, likely the world's most knowledgeable loon expert, making it a valuable read for ornithologists, wildlife biologists, and field technicians. Mixed within Paruk's technical information, he also includes fun-reading about his experiences while capturing and living with loons, making it very enjoyable for many birders, northern lake canoeists, or other nature-lovers. Common Loons nest in the lakes of virtually all our northern states bordering with Canada, the country where loons are most common nationwide.

The first chapters of *Loon Lessons* cover the evolutionary history of Common Loons, as well as Yellow-billed Loons, Pacific Loons, Arctic Loons, and Red-throated Loons. The next chapters feature behavioral ecology of Common Loons, including pairing, nesting, feeding, chick-raising, migrating (with maps showing a major continental route crossing Iowa), and even details about their beautiful calls, wails, and yodels. In the last portion of this book, a chapter focuses upon "Saving the Loons We Love" with the threatening effects of lead, mercury, oil spills, and climate change.

Something Paruk brought up near the end of this book briefly mentions his visits to Clear Lake, Rice Lake, and Eagle Lake in northern Iowa. These lakes, plus many others across northern Iowa, once hosted nesting loons, with the last pairs nesting on Clear Lake in 1902. Most Iowans may not have known that Common Loons once nested as far south as in this state. Perhaps it is surprising that they also once nested in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and even northern California—now all gone due to human changes to our nation's environment.

I found this book interesting and enjoyable to read, learning much more about Common Loons, even after living near them on the lake next to our old farmhouse. While it contains his scientific work, Paruk manages to make much of his writing quite fun to read. That makes this recommendable to anyone with an interest in the natural history of such a beautiful water bird, seen so often and sometimes in large numbers on lakes and reservoirs when migrating through Iowa.

*Iowa Audubon Newsletter, April 2025, Volume 22, Number 1

**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_____

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PEREGRINE FALCONS IN TROUBLE... AGAIN

Concerning avian disease, it may be worthwhile to touch on the problem of declining numbers of Peregrine Falcons, a pattern noticed in this species in at least a dozen countries around the world.

In the 1960s and 1970s the species was in very serious trouble, due to the widespread use of the pesticide DDT. But the removal of DDT from the market in the U.S. and elsewhere produced impressive successes, with the raptors' numbers increasing nationally by more than 5% annually for decades. In 1999, the Peregrine Falcon was finally removed from the Endangered Species List.

Now, losses in these raptors are again troublesome, with coastal numbers looking worse than interior numbers

What is the source of the problem? It might be neonicotinoid pesticides, flame retardants, or exposure to toxins in the air, or the HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza). Many raptor researchers are convinced that it is HPAI and that the vector could be the waterfowl, shorebirds, gulls, and other seabirds that many Peregrine Falcons feed on.

According to the USDA, avian influenza has now been confirmed in more than 50 dead Peregrine Falcons since 2023. And it could easily be many more.

For more on this problem, you may want to review these pieces from Biographic
<https://www.biographic.com/coastal-peregrine-falcons-mysterious-decline/>
and Audubon

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/why-are-peregrine-falcon-numbers-falling-united-states-again>

From: The Birding Community E-Bulletin, May 2025