

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



Des Moines Audubon Field Trip
Saturday, March 14, 8:00 a.m., Saylorville Lake

Meet at the Saylorville Visitors' Center at 8:00 a.m. We will check the feeders and the viewing platform at the Visitors' Center. Later we will check below the dam and other areas around the lake, depending on bird activity. Hopefully, waterbirds will be on the move. Field trips provide outdoor experiences for Des Moines Audubon members and guests. Not only are these opportunities to see some good birds, they are also times of socializing with people who enjoy the same things that you do. Beginners are welcome and this is a great way to improve your birding skills by joining a wide range of birders. Dress for conditions and bring binoculars if you have them. Please contact Denny Thompson at 515-229-9615 or cnthomps@gmail.com for more information.

Des Moines Audubon Program Meeting
Tuesday, March 17, 2026, 7:00 p.m.
Birding and Wildlife at Sax-Zim Bog

Doug Harr has been to Sax-Zim Bog in northeast Minnesota four times over the past several years. It is a very popular place for anyone to find winter birds and mammals that are rarely or ever seen in Iowa. His most recent trip was in March 2025, getting photos and videos of a Great Gray Owl and an American (or "Pine") Marten. This program will cover many other different birds seen there along with some mammals, and the unusual habitat that makes Sax-Zim Bog such a great place being preserved to protect so many north country creatures.

Doug lives in Ogden, and is a retired Iowa DNR Wildlife Biologist and Wildlife Diversity State Program Coordinator. He is currently the president of Iowa Audubon and serves on the advisory board for National Audubon's Upper Mississippi River regional office. Doug has previously given other presentations for Des Moines Audubon.

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 jrelark@radiks.net or 515-707-7648.

Iowa DNR, Wildlife Diversity News December 30, 2025

Icon of the wetlands, Iowa's trumpeter swan population continues to grow

Iowa's trumpeter swans attempted a modern-day record 158 nests in 2025, which is an increase of 17 percent over 2022. The nesting data is from the most recent statewide observation survey completed in December. "It is a neat story about the restoration. We spent a lot of time and effort to get the population established and its really taking off right now," said Orrin Jones, state waterfowl biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Recovery has taken time, he said, but is a true modern-day conservation success story.

The restoration effort was supported by the Iowa DNR's Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund; a constitutionally protected fund where hunting, fishing, and trapping license fees are deposited and used, in part, to protect, restore, or manage fish and wildlife.

The largest waterfowl in North America, trumpeter swans have come a long way since the 1930s, when conservation efforts began to protect small populations in Montana and Alaska. Native to Iowa, trumpeter swans were once as widely distributed as Canada geese, but had been extirpated by the early 1880s. Early and aggressive reintroduction efforts in the Midwest by Minnesota and Wisconsin, followed a few years later by Michigan, and then Iowa, sought to return these iconic waterfowl to their traditional place on the prairie wetlands.

Iowa began with a restoration plan in 1993, followed by the first release of four swans in 1994. The plan included monitoring the swans to evaluate reintroduction success. The DNR released a total of 1,218 swans, ending in 2022,

Iowa's first trumpeter swan nest in the modern era was in 1998, in Dubuque County, followed two years later by one in Winnebago County. Nesting attempts increased slowly following the growing number of released swans. After averaging in the mid-50s for nearly a decade, nest attempts jumped to more than 120 in 2020, followed by nearly 140 in 2022.

"Reintroduction has been successful and we continue to monitor the population as time goes on," said Taylor Ballard, wildlife research technician with the Iowa DNR's Clear Lake office. "We ask our staff to record any observations of swans – active nests, swans with a brood – let us know if they see a successful nest and the number of cygnets that nest has, which gives us our number of cygnets of per successful nest." Ballard said the active nests average 4.4 cygnets, or young swans, which is helping grow the local population. Of the 158 active nests, Ballard said 98 were known to be successful in hatching.

Population surveys begin in mid- to late-April, with peak surveys from May to September. Iowa DNR staff, along with staff from local county conservation boards, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private citizens check areas with preferred habitat or where nests have previously occurred. The data is passed along to the Mississippi Flyway Council, who coordinates management with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"The birds are doing best on the large semi-permanent wetlands in the prairie pothole region and their trend is continuing to expand in abundance, like we thought it would," said Jones. "It takes time for swans to reach maturity but once they begin nesting, they are productive and we have vacant habitat available for them." The Iowa DNR has captured and collared cygnets as part of a survival study. Swans live as a family unit with parents providing protection and teaching the young skills needed to survive. More than 70 percent of cygnets that fledge in September will survive to March.

"Trumpeter swans are emblematic of healthy wetland systems, clean water – and are a way to tie a species to the habitat," Jones said. "It's a neat story about the swan restoration – and we're seeing a similar response with the sandhill cranes – they're expanding, too – and likely will increase until population reaches the carrying capacity of the habitat."

Iowa swans, along with swans from Minnesota and Wisconsin, are part of the interior population of trumpeter swans. Some of these birds follow traditional winter migration to Missouri and Arkansas, while others will remain in Iowa, to be joined by swans from up north. The 2025 midwinter waterfowl survey recorded more than 4,700 swans in Iowa.

While the population has been increasing, threats do remain.

Collisions with powerlines is a major problem, as is ingesting lead. In the last few years, avian influenza has claimed some swans, as well.

2026 Loess Hills Seminar, 49th Anniversary

Come explore, learn, and relax in the Heart of the Loess Hills
in Monona County, Iowa.

Save The Date:

May 29-31, 2026

Friday - 4:00 PM - 10:00 PM

Saturday - 6:00 AM - 10:00 PM

Sunday - 6:00AM - 12:00 PM

*Meal orders will be available closer to the event. Primitive camping & car camping on site. No electrical hook ups. No running water. Potable Water available. Porta-johns available on site.

A solar-powered phone charging station will be available.

PLEASE NOTE: Updating the website for the 2026 seminar is taking place. Many of the schedules and events are left from 2025 as examples of what our attendees can expect at the seminar in 2026. We will begin updating the schedule in Spring of 2026. Thank you for your patience, feel free to reach out with any questions in the meantime! Be on the lookout for more info in the coming months!

<https://www.loesshillsprairieseminar.com/home>

"Getting people; getting children acquainted with what's out here will make people concerned about what is happening here. If we get acquainted with natural communities we feel at home. Any place we feel at home, we feel like protecting."
~Sylvan Runkel

KESTRELS HELPING CHERRY GROWERS?

Some fruit farmers have been working symbiotically with American Kestrels for years, adding nesting boxes to their cherry orchards and reaping the benefits of the falcons by eliminating or frightening off the mice, voles, and smaller songbirds that feed on the cherries.

A study published recently in the Journal of Applied Ecology suggests that the kestrels do serve this function. Orchards with these falcons in nest boxes saw fewer cherry-eating birds than orchards without kestrels on site. This translated to an 81 percent reduction in crop damage—such as bite marks or missing fruit—and a 66 percent decrease in branches contaminated with bird feces.

“Kestrels are not very expensive to bring into orchards, but they work pretty well” at deterring unwanted species, said Olivia Smith, lead study author and assistant professor of horticulture at Michigan State University. “And people generally like kestrels a lot, so I think it’s an attractive strategy.”

Finding a good way to manage “pests” is essential for cherry farmers. Resorting to expansive nets covering the trees, noisemakers, scarecrows, pesticides, and even the removal of natural habitats around crop-growing areas can all be expensive and are not always effective.

The orchard study areas frequented by kestrels saw the amount of damaged fruit drop from 2.5 percent to 0.47 percent. The number of crops contaminated by bird droppings also saw a three-fold decrease, falling from 6.88 percent to 2.33 percent.

The bonus for the kestrels is that these falcons have been showing population declines for years – about 1.4% annually –so any nest-box effort could help address this problem.

From: Birding Community February 2026

**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 _____

Name _____

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Telephone _____ E-mail _____

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