

## *Iowa legislature continues threatening birds and all nature*

In this year's session of the Iowa Legislature, bills were introduced which, if passed, would take away chances of more natural habitat lands being saved. That could result in a continuing decrease of our birds, especially those grassland nesting species, many populations of which have declined by 30% to 70% since the 1970s.

One bill would restrict the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from purchasing lands offered through public auctions, even though the agency has not bid on auctioned properties for many years due to frequent budget shortages. Not only DNR, but also county conservation systems and private conservation organizations such as the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and others do not focus upon taking prime agricultural land away from our farmers, because all know how important Iowa's crops are to the nation and world-wide. Rather, the lands focused upon saving are forest areas, remnant native prairies, flood-prone river corridors, steep hills, wetlands, and other areas which should never be farmed or developed. But those kinds of lands continue being sold to corporate farming and commercial developers. This causes increasing losses of critical wildlife habitat, water runoff that causes increased flooding, agricultural chemicals which may threaten more avian poisoning, and additional dangers to our state's entire environment.

It's time to halt continuous legislative attempts to destroy any small remnants of Iowa's nature. Every one of us who loves the outdoors, birds, and all of nature must work to do that, without regard to which legislators we might often support. Famous conservation groups like the National Audubon Society have huge numbers of members, with more than 10,000 NAS members just here in Iowa. Among them are supporters of both major political parties, as well as independents. Hunting oriented groups such as Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited, have a great love of our outdoor heritage, also wanting more protection for their enjoyment of nature and all its creatures. Those organizations and many others have publicly announced their opposition to these annually continuous legislative attempts to stop protecting all of Iowa's nature and outdoor recreation.

Wyoming is one of America's most conservative states, but does all it can to save and restore its natural lands, even on private property. That's because they know just how much hunting, fishing, hiking, birding, and all kinds of outdoor recreation mean to the state. Iowa is far more important for crop farming than Wyoming, basically just a grazing livestock production state, but we must still protect all the tiny amounts of our remaining natural lands. That will allow Iowans and visitors to enjoy our outdoors, whether it's birding in the Loess Hills, paddling the Raccoon River, fishing at the Iowa Great Lakes, hiking the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail, hunting in the Kellerton area's famous grasslands, or biking the Duck Creek Parkway. Whatever happens in this year's legislative session or in future years, we must always do everything possible to stop destruction of our natural resources. This is the mission of Iowa Audubon and all of our conservation alliances.



**Northern Harrier, an Iowa endangered species that must have more prairie habitat to survive here**

*—Iowa Audubon editorial*

## *Five things you can do for wildlife at home*



- **PLANT NATIVE PLANTS:** One of the most impactful and easiest things to do on your property is to incorporate more plants - trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers - that are native to Iowa. A native plant is one that has not been introduced by humans and has historically been a part of Iowa's natural ecosystems. Native wildlife and native plants have a long history together and those established relationships can be used to provide a welcoming environment for both wildlife and people!

- **ADD WATER:** We all need water and for wildlife it can be particularly hard to come by during certain times of the year or during periods of drought. Providing a reliable, sustainable source of water will make your space a haven year-round.

- **USE THE RIGHT LIGHTING:** The lighting we use outside and even inside our homes during certain times of the year can really cause problems for wildlife. We'll share some simple actions you can take to make your lighting wildlife friendly.

- **REDUCE HAZARDS TO WILDLIFE:** We may be cheating a little with this one as there are several things that fit into this category. From windows to rat poison, to our beloved feline companions, we can sometimes unintentionally make the world more dangerous for our local wildlife. We must avoid a few of these hazards.

- **EMBRACE WILDNESS:** This element references both a way of thinking and some very concrete actions you can take. Wildlife usually appreciates a little bit of "messiness" in their homes, and there are likely quite a few of us who would rather not have to mow or weed every square inch of our land or would be thrilled to save the garden cleanup for later and instead watch a skipper butterfly taking advantage of the last of the autumn blooms. Iowa DNR can provide some easy ways you can embrace some "messiness" on your property and benefit both wildlife and people.

—*Iowa Department of Natural Resources*

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## *President Jimmy Carter was a birder?*

Last January, former President Jimmy Carter passed away at age 100, oldest former U.S. president. Although serving only from 1977 to 1980, he did much to help preserve our nation's natural habitats and wildlife, especially by adding eleven national parks (eight in Alaska), new national forest lands, and national wildlife refuges. He was also the first president to push for development of renewable energy and talking about his concerns for climate change.

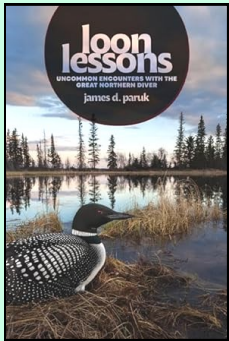
Older Americans might recall what he did, but many may not know that he was also an avid birder. Through his life, Carter birded all seven continents and in 1994 was awarded by Audubon for his work in conservation that protects birds. From 1989 to 1996, Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosaline also conducted North American Breeding Bird Surveys near Plaines, Georgia, where they lived. A newsletter sent to all BBS volunteers nationwide told a humorous story about this. While the Carters stopped every half mile to count all birds seen and heard for three minutes, a passing person wondered why black cars kept parking behind them as they counted. Then it was learned that those were Secret Servant agents following the Carters, something always done to protect all of our past presidents.



## Book Reviews

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

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 of 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.

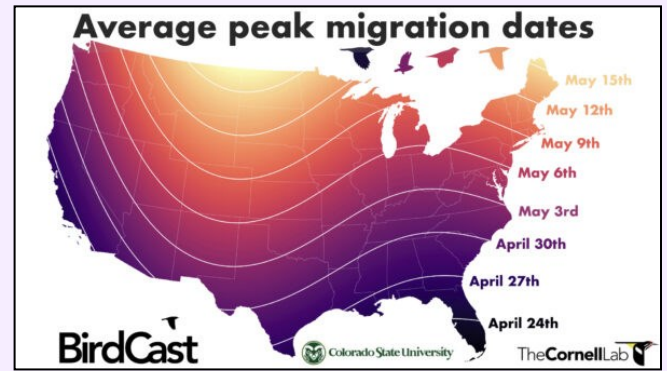
Something Paruk brought up near the end of this book briefly mentions his visits to Clear Lake, Rice Lake, and Eagle Lake here in northern Iowa. These lakes, plus many others across northern Iowa, once hosted nesting loons, with the last pairs nesting on Clear Lake in 1902. Most Iowans may not have known that Common Loons once nested as far south as in this state. Perhaps it's 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 fun 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.

--review by Doug Harr

## Migration is underway

It's that time of year again for Spring migration here in Iowa, with lots of blackbirds, waterfowl, and other types of birds already moving through in large numbers this past March. Shorebirds will start appearing this April, then the bulk of all songbirds showing up later this month and peaking in early to mid-May. A map from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology included here shows peak migration dates across our lower 48 states. To get more information on a daily basis, starting each year on March 1, the Cornell lab begins predicting nocturnal migration 3 hours after local sunset and updates it every 6 hours. To see when daily peak migrations are passing through Iowa, simply go to their link at <https://birdcast.info/>. And just as a reminder, *World Migratory Bird Day* this Spring will be on Saturday, May 10.



## Iowa Audubon's 2025 small grant winners

The following small grants were awarded in March by the Iowa Audubon Board of Directors:

- ◆ **Purple Martin Apartment Project**—Awarded to Jackson County Conservation Board to help purchase and install Purple Martin nesting structures at the Hurstville Interpretive Center Marsh.
- ◆ **Barn Owl Nesting Box Additions**—Awarded to Madison County Conservation Board for adding ten new American Barn Owl nest boxes in MCCB's Clanton Creek Wildlife Area and Iowa DNR's nearby Heritage Hills Wildlife Management Area.
- ◆ **Birding Backpacks for Sioux County**—Awarded to Loess Hills Audubon Society to provide five birding backpacks that will include binoculars, bird field guides and other birding booklets, to be used by Sioux County Conservation and Hawarden Public Library.

Our congratulations to these new small grant winners.



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***Short notes, coming events, or needed actions***

**How we all help science track avian numbers**

February's Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was another four-day treat as hundreds of thousands of birders contributed sightings from across the globe. All-time records were broken again, this year with a total of more than 700,000 participants recording 8,004 species.

Canada is quickly moving higher in the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) participation. According to *Birds Canada*, this past winter's CBC in Edmonton, Alberta, had more people participate than any other location in the Western Hemisphere! Thanks are due to our Canadian friends for their tremendous participation in the CBC, this past winter being Audubon's 125<sup>th</sup> annual count.

Even people who just use eBird to report what they are seeing (and add information to assure correct identification or rare locations) have greatly increased the information now useful for ornithologists to help determine populations and range changes.

**Iowa Ornithologists' Union (IOU) spring meeting**

The upcoming IOU meeting will actually be held in South Sioux City, NE, just across the Missouri River from Sioux City, Iowa. It will be a three-state joint event, including both the Nebraska IOU and South Dakota IOU,

with field trips to be held in all three states. The event will be held May 16-18, with information about programs and a featured guest speaker yet to be fully announced. Visit the following web page to find more information when updated: <https://iowabirds.org/IOU/Meetings/NextMeeting.aspx>

**Iowa DNR has new birding web pages**

DNR has new web pages for anyone interested in birding, with good information on getting started in birding. One link to check out is: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/things-do/bird-watching>.

Another link that is fun and informational is called the *StoryMap*. It has much more information about becoming a birder, along with Iowa maps that show the locations of all public lands, statewide locations of birding blinds or viewing platforms, DNR's state-designated Bird Conservation Areas, and maps of Iowa's major habitat types. The *StoryMap* link is: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9d5b56b9e3bc4658b075049f9063696b>

