

Birds of the Raccoon River: What They Tell Us about Ecosystems & Ecological Change

Tufted Titmouse

Delaney Cabin
December 2007

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All photos by Leland Searles unless otherwise credited



Identifying Birds

- One or more good field guides
 - National Geographic
 - 5th edition available
 - Peterson



Identifying Birds

- Guides to local/regional species
- Books on bird behavior & migration



Merlin,
Waveland Golf
Course, Des
Moines, Jan.
2009



Common Iowa Birds



**A BIRDWATCHING GROUP AT BRENTON
ARBORETUM**

Northern Cardinal, female



House Finch, male



Canada Goose (“Chinstrap”)



Ruby-Throated Hummingbird
(male)



White-Throated Sparrow



White-Breasted Nuthatch



Bald Eagle



Red-Winged Blackbird
(male)





European
Starling
(winter
plumage)



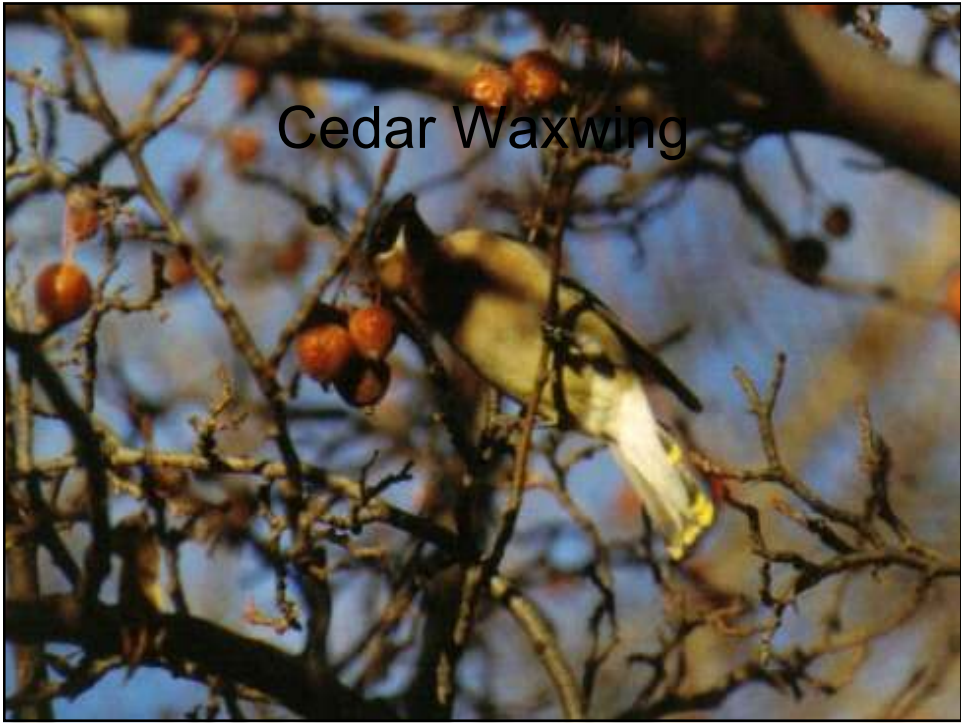
Eastern
Bluebird
(male)



Downy
Woodpecker
(female)



Common
Grackle
(male)



Cedar Waxwing



Black-Capped Chickadee

Blue Jay



Eastern Kingbird



Dark-Eyed Junco



American
Crow





Ecosystems & Bird Life

- A good strategy for birdwatching, especially beginners:
 - Explore the ecosystems at a given site you'll visit
 - Prepare a list of potential common birds
 - Review field marks, flight patterns, silhouettes
 - Listen to CDs or tapes of bird calls & songs

Xavier Avenue, south of Granger, Iowa (Beaver Creek/Des Moines River watersheds)



Lakes & Shorelines

- Ducks
- Geese
- Shorebirds
- Gulls & Terns
- Blackbirds & Orioles
- Sparrows
- Raptors: eagles, ospreys

Lakes & Shorelines



Clockwise from upper left: American Coot. Canada Goose, the "Iowa Tree Goose." Mallard. Northern Shoveler (R. Harden). Solitary Sandpaper (R. Harden).



Lakes & Shorelines



Clockwise from upper left: Common Loon (M. Delaney). Killdeer. Pied-Billed Grebe. Osprey. Ring-Billed Gull.





Riparian Waters & Banks

- Shorebirds
- Raptors: Osprey, Bald Eagle
- Herons: Green, Great Blue
- Wood Warblers
- Vireos
- Ducks: Wood, mergansers
- Kingfishers
- Sparrows

Riparian Waters & Banks



Clockwise from upper left: Bald Eagle. Belted Kingfisher (R. Harden). American Goldfinch. Green Heron (R. Harden). Great Blue Heron.







Prairies & Savannahs



Clockwise from upper left: Rough-Legged Hawk (T. Lawson). Red-Headed Woodpecker (R. Harden). Brown-Headed Cowbird (R.Harden). Indigo Bunting. Dickcissel. Northern Cardinal male. Red-Tailed Hawk.



Prairies & Savannahs



Clockwise from upper left: Brown Thrasher (Ray Harden). Eastern Kingbird. Eastern Meadowlark.





Wetlands & Potholes



Above left: Swamp Sparrow. Above: Yellow-Headed Blackbird.

Pastures & Feedlots

- Introduced species
 - Ring-Necked Pheasant
 - European House Sparrow
 - European Starling
 - Rock Dove (Pigeon)
- Native species
 - Savannah sparrow
 - Bobolink
 - Eastern & Western Meadowlarks
 - Mourning Dove
 - Lincoln's Sparrow
 - Dickcissel
 - Eastern Bluebird
 - Short-Eared Owl

Cropland, Fencerows, & Edges

- Horned Lark
- Vesper Sparrow
- American Crow
- Ring-Necked Pheasant (exotic)
- Meadowlark (2 spp.)
- Northern Harrier
- Red-Tailed Hawk
- American Kestrel
- Shrike (2 spp.)
- Red-Winged Blackbird

Cropland, Fencerows, & Edges



Clockwise from above left: Common Grackle male. House Sparrow male. Short-Eared Owl (c. Sadeghpour). Turkey Vulture. Mourning Dove.



Places to Go in the Watershed

- Swan Lake: marsh, lake, shoreline
- Walnut Woods & Brown's Woods: mature woodlands, woods openings
- Xavier Avenue/Brenton Slough: marsh, lake, riparian, woods, farmland
- Clive Greenbelt: urban riparian & woods, prairie restoration
- Kuehn Conservation Area: upland prairie & savannah, riparian & upland woods
- Big Bend: riparian, woods, prairie

Voas Nature Center

Dallas County Conservation Board

Voas Nature Area

DALLAS COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

PARK HOURS
ONE-HALF HOUR
BEFORE SUNRISE
TO 10:00 PM

Prairie restoration, pothole/wetlands, woods margins, woods

A photograph of a landscape at Whiterock Conservancy. In the foreground, a group of people is standing on a grassy bank, looking towards a river. The background shows a steep, eroded bank with exposed soil and some sparse vegetation. The sky is overcast.

Whiterock Conservancy

- Middle Raccoon River
 - Border between the Wisconsin glacial surface (N & E) & older drift plains
- Local birding list based on several years' observations
 - Wide variety of ecosystems, including riparian, prairie, crop & pasture lands, & savannah restoration
- Accommodations for overnight & longer visits

A photograph of a forest at Des Moines Water Works Park. The scene is dominated by tall, thin trees with sparse green foliage. The ground is covered in a thick layer of green grass and some fallen branches. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day.

Des Moines Water Works Park

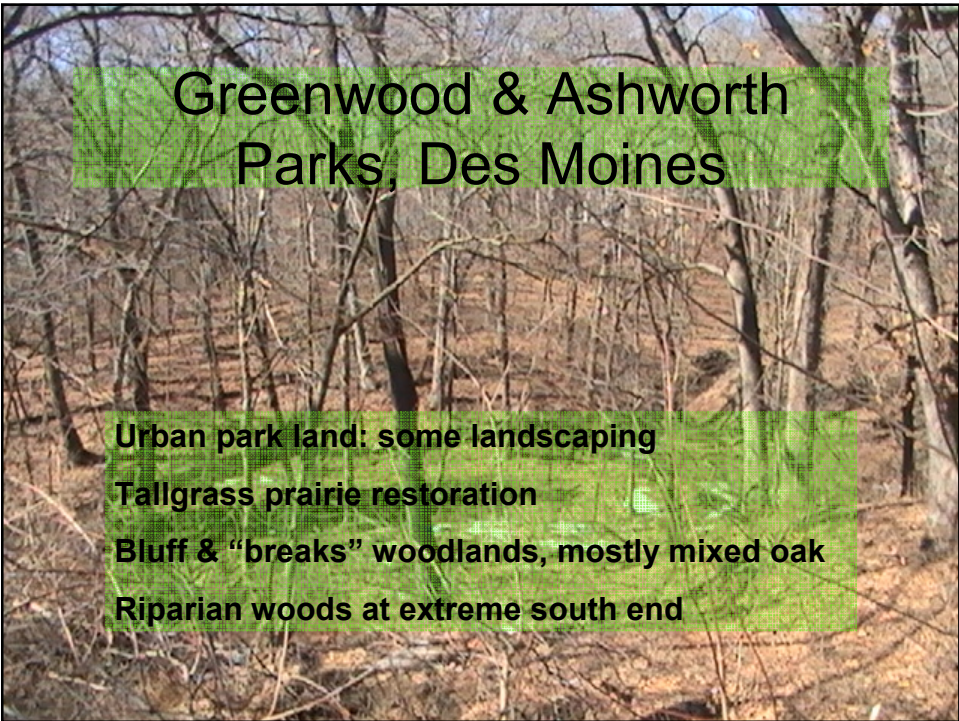
Riverine woods

Savannahs & edges

Open fields

Arboretum with
pines & spruces

Waterways & ponds



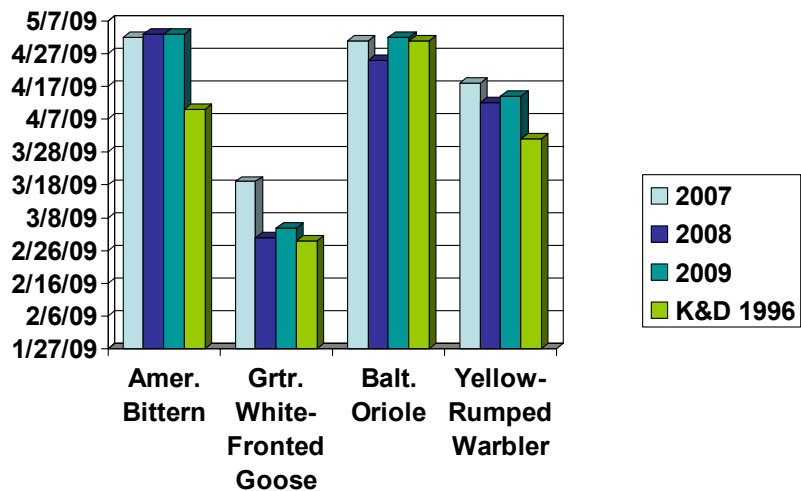
Gray's Lake & Donald McCrae Park, Des Moines

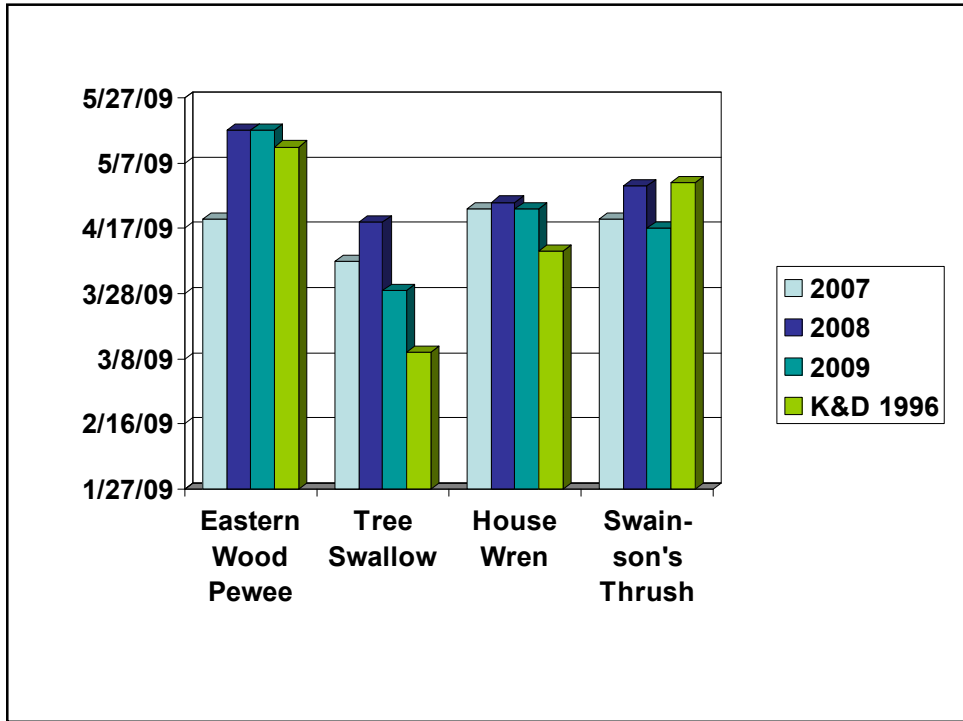
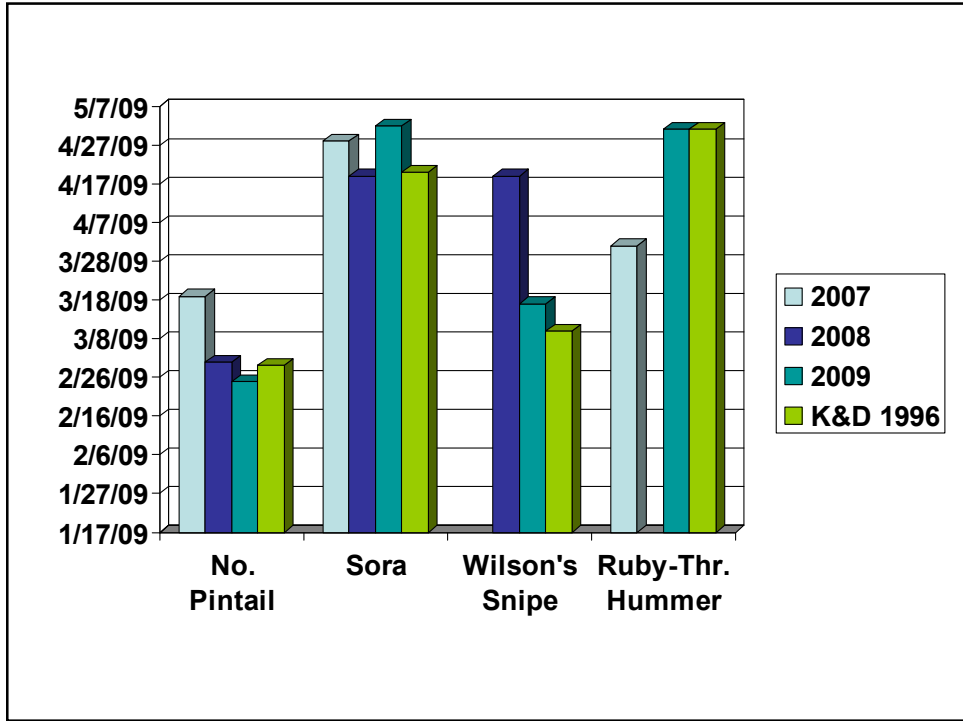
Oak savannah on slopes (McCrae)
Lake, shoreline, & grass (Gray's)
Riparian banks, floodplains, & woods



Migration & Phenology

- Comparison to historical records for Iowa suggests:
 - Watershed-specific differences
 - Somewhat later arrivals for many species
 - Species responses to climate & habitat changes
 - Loss of prairie pothole wetlands, absence of fire
 - Timing & chosen location of observers' field trips
 - Experienced watchers' knowledge of early arrivals





Birding Activities

- Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs)
- Great Backyard Bird Count
- Breeding Bird Surveys
- Individual & small-group bird hikes
- Documentation of rare & unusual sightings



Ornithology Web Sites

- Iowa Ornithologists' Union
– www.iowabirds.com
- Whatbird.com
- National Audubon Society
- www.birdingpal.com

