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Research Corner: Cerulean Warbler Habitat Selection in North East Iowa. By Paul Skrade, PhD

Jon Stravers of Driftless Area Bird Conservation has been searching for and monitoring Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) nests in northeast Iowa for over forty years. He began documenting songbird species within these hawk territories in 2001 after his son, Jon Jr., pointed out the unusually high number of Cerulean Warblers (*Setophaga cerulea*) in the Sny Magill complex in Pool 10 of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. In 2006 and 2007 the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) sponsored initial bird surveys in the North Cedar/Sny Magill Wildlife Management Area which led to the discovery of dozens of clusters of this uncommon and declining bird species.

Cerulean Warblers are an insectivorous neotropical migrant primarily found in both the breeding and non-breeding seasons in large, contiguous forest tracts. They are often associated with steep valley slopes in riparian deciduous forests or within large blocks of floodplain forest and (are a literal pain-in-the-neck as) they typically forage and nest high in the forest canopy. Ceruleans spend their winter months in the northern Andes of South America and return to breeding territories in eastern North America in early May.

According to Partners in Flight, Cerulean Warblers are listed among the highest priority species for land bird conservation in the U.S. Reports of population declines of this species have persisted in the last two decades throughout much of their North American range and in some instances these declines have been considered both drastic and long-term. Fragmentation and the loss of large blocks of deciduous forest are often considered primary factors in Cerulean Warbler population declines. There are still many large forested areas along and near the Mississippi River in Effigy Mounds National Monument, Pikes Peak State Park, and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge just to name a few of the public lands. Covering over 8,800 acres across six units, Yellow River State Forest (YRSF) contains some of the largest tracts of deciduous forest in the region and is a major breeding area for this species.

Surveys for Cerulean Warblers in YRSF began in 2008 and for the next decade the State Forest funded annual bird surveys through designated Resource Enhancement

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Cerulean Warbler
Photo: Audubon Society

Cerulean Warbler Research



Overlook in the Paint Creek Unit of Yellow River State Forest. Photo: Paul Skrade

and Protection (REAP) grants, which were supplemented with funding first from the National Audubon Society, then later from Iowa Audubon and the Quad Cities and Upper Iowa Audubon Chapters with smaller contributions from Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, and Prairie Rapids Audubon Chapters. We also received small research grants from the DNR (funded by donations from the Fish & Wildlife Protection Fund “Chickadee Checkoff” and Natural Resource License Plate funds) and also from the Iowa Ornithologists’ Union’s Projects Committee. Driftless Area Bird Conservation has also held numerous local fundraising events to support the efforts. Additional surveys for Cerulean Warblers and other breeding bird species have been conducted in public lands along the Mississippi River in conjunction with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Heartland Network of the National Park Service at Effigy Mounds National Monument.

Over the past decade we have documented not only a surprising number of breeding Cerulean Warblers, but also a high rate of annual reoccupation of nesting territories in YRSF. Darwin Koenig documented Cerulean Warbler activity within YRSF in a

variety of locations and kept records of Ceruleans between 1979 and 1990. When we began these surveys in 2008, we consulted with Koenig and found that most of his suggested locations for Ceruleans within YRSF were active. As our investigations continued and expanded, we found that all of the Cerulean territories originally located by Koenig as well as most of the other active territories have continued to be active in subsequent years. Future research will include banding birds to determine if these are the same individuals returning to the sites or if there is much movement and dispersal among the territories.



Emilee Novak recording Cerulean Warbler song. Photo: Paul Skrade

Cerulean Warbler Research

This ongoing project has provided opportunities for several Upper Iowa University students to not only gain valuable field experience but also experience in grant-writing, data analysis, and public presentations and some were able to have their work be a part of their senior research projects. Cory Thielen was able to use the long-term survey and landscape data to examine the relationships between Cerulean presence and distance to water, slope, aspect, and stand management. EmiLee Novak looked at Cerulean song characteristics and how they changed throughout the day and across the breeding season. Chase Grabau gathered vegetative data within regularly-occupied territories and areas where Ceruleans are infrequently found to determine fine-scale habitat characteristics.

Cerulean Warbler activity in our area appears to be strongly associated with relatively large forest tracts and in close proximity to creeks and waterways where there are large-diameter trees present. Even though riparian forest structure and species composition varies, we found relatively high Cerulean densities wherever there are large-diameter trees with a heterogeneous canopy, structural and tree species diversity, and occasional canopy gaps. Simply put, we



Chase Grabau and Jon Stravers collecting Cerulean Warbler vegetative habitat data. Photo: Paul Skrade

found that in YRSF any area within proximity of a stream that has a collection of large-diameter black walnuts or oaks also has a cluster of active Cerulean Warbler territories in the vicinity.

Some of these Cerulean clusters are associated with upland habitats in YRSF and these birds also seem to prefer similar vegetative characteristics. Our observations suggest a positive relationship between Cerulean occupancy and stands that have recently been managed to re-create a more savanna-type habitat, specifically in the Paint Creek Unit in the upland habitat between the Paint Creek and Sawmill Overlooks. Similar savanna-type timber cuts are planned in YRSF and those management actions will provide an opportunity to see if Ceruleans will occupy these sites in the future.

We are very grateful to all that have provided funding and support for this project over the years, in particular Bruce Blair, Iowa DNR Area Forester.



Cerulean Warbler habitat. Photo: Paul Skrade

Paul Skrade is an Associate Professor of Biology at Upper Iowa University.

Midwest black bear population likely to expand into parts of Iowa in the not too distant future

Management Corner

Iowa DNR Press Release

There's a pretty good chance that, in the next several weeks, Northeast Iowa will be visited by a few wandering black bears coming down from Minnesota and Wisconsin ahead of the breeding season. It's been an annual occurrence in this region each spring since 2014.

While much of Iowa does not have the habitat necessary to support a black bear population, certain locations do, primarily northeast, eastern and southern parts of the state. As black bear populations in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Missouri are stable to increasing, it is possible that a small population could set up residence in Iowa.

"Within the next three to five years, I think we can expect to see cubs show up and a small breeding population become established. If that occurs, we should look to our neighbors in Wisconsin and Minnesota who have learned to live with bears," said Vince Evelsizer, furbearer and wetland wildlife research biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). "It won't be perfect and there will be bumps along the way, but we need to start having conversation about the idea of bears coming back to Iowa, at least in certain places along the Mississippi River and Northeast Iowa where suitable habitat exists."

Wisconsin's black bear population is estimated at close to 30,000, Minnesota's 15,000 and Missouri, which is holding its first bear hunt later this fall, as many as 1,000.

"For example, in Wisconsin, with that many black bears, residents have learned to make a few adjustments to minimize bear conflicts, like putting away their bird seed in the spring, putting away their



A black bear is looking for an easy snack from a backyard fly trap near Osage, Iowa in 2015.

barbeque drip pans, and by keeping pet food and garbage in places bears can't access. There are still occasional problems, but these basic precautions result in much fewer negative encounters between bears and humans," Evelsizer said.

Bears are omnivores and their diet changes with the seasons. In the spring, bears emerge from their winter dens hungry. They'll feed heavily on newly emerging tender grasses and sedges. In summer, its berries, ants, various plants, and grubs. In the fall, its acorns and other tree nuts. They are also known to feed on nontraditional sources, like row crops, orchard fruits, and honey – which is similar to striped skunks and raccoons.

"They're like a big raccoon, motivated by hunger and willing to take advantage of whatever food is available, from fawns to eggs, bee hives, bird feeders – this is where making some changes can minimize

Iowa Black Bears

Iowa DNR Press Release



This black bear was photographed hundreds of times in June 2020 by scores of onlookers in eastern Iowa.

nuisance bear interactions,” he said.

Black bears are native to Iowa. However, Iowa has been without a resident bear population for more than 100 years. In the Iowa code, black bears are not listed as a species of wildlife found in Iowa because they were not present in the state when these laws were created, nor have they been since. This means the Iowa DNR does not have the legal authority to manage black bear populations through actions such as designating protection status or adding a limited hunting season if the population eventually support it in the future. Iowa is the only state among its Midwest neighbors where the state’s wildlife agency does not have regulatory authority to manage bear populations, which typically includes handling nuisance conflicts and conducting research.

While the Iowa DNR does not regulate bears, it does have a bear response protocol.

“The objective with the response protocol is to provide guidance for our staff in dealing with any potential human-bear conflicts that arise. A proactive

strategy will increase the odds for a better outcome for both the bears and for humans. For example, trap and transport of bears is a common scenario shown on TV shows, however in reality most states have moved away from this method because it often results in simply moving the problem to someone else’s backyard. It’s all about reducing conflicts where bears are instead,” Evelsizer said. “We want to keep Iowans informed about this interesting and emerging wildlife story and increase our collective knowledge about bears in order to live with them successfully and minimize conflicts.”

Since 2002, there have been 43 confirmed black bears in Iowa, and two to five per year since 2014. As bears have become more of a regular visitor, the chance to encounter a bear, although small, is a possibility.

“Black bears have some general tendencies and habits, but individual bears may go against the norm. Some are shy, others are not. They are typically secretive and want to be left alone – while others are bold and may be more daylight active,” he said. Bears are typically nocturnal but get more active during the June to July breeding season, especially at dawn and dusk. Most of Iowa’s bear sightings start in late May continuing into July.

“If you encounter a bear, avoid running away,” Evelsizer said. “Instead, back away slowly and cautiously while facing it. Make noise so they know you’re there.”

There are a number of resources available to help people minimize conflict with bears, Evelsizer said, including www.bearwise.org

Vince Evelsizer is the Furbearer and Wetlands Biologist for the Iowa DNR.

Species Spotlight: Red-headed Woodpecker



Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)

If you're like me, you learned in your college Vertebrate Biology class that Red-headed woodpeckers are year round residents in Iowa. Apparently the redheads on my farm in Lucas County didn't get that memo. Although it's pretty good woodpecker habitat around the place, lots of big bur oak trees and old dairy pasture, these birds disappear every fall and show up again by late April.

In the 1996 book *Birds of Iowa*, by Kent and Dinsmore, Red-headed woodpeckers are noted as uncommon winter residents, preferring deep woods in colder months. Winter populations are also known to vary greatly, dependent upon the year's acorn crop. Although common, and in some areas even abundant in summer, most Red-headed woodpeckers in Iowa head south and east by early September.

The 2020 *Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas* by Dinsmore and Ehresman lists the Red-headed Woodpecker as

found throughout all counties in Iowa. However, this species most often inhabits oak savannas and oak woodlands, especially when standing dead trees are available for constructing cavity nests (I guess I won't feel so bad about that hollow oak that caught fire and died when I was burning my pastures last fall—I was just creating woodpecker nesting habitat). Some pairs may return to the same nest sites for several years in a row.

Unfortunately, habitat loss has led to a population decline for this woodpecker since the 1960's. Conversion of small diversified farms to industrial scale agriculture, as well as overall loss of oak savanna habitat are the primary culprits. There has been some documentation to show that restoration of oak savanna habitat can lead to an increased density of local Red-headed populations. Recently it's been suggested that the wave of emerald ash borer moving across Iowa and killing ash trees may temporarily increase woodpecker populations as more dead trees become available.

Wildlife managers wanting to improve habitat conditions for Red-headed Woodpeckers should provide multiple dead snags or dead limbs on live trees, for nesting birds, maintain open savanna-like habitat with low density ground cover for foraging, and managing for mast producing tree species, especially oaks.

Pete Eyheralde is an Associate Professor of Biology at William Penn University.

Minutes of the Iowa TWS Business Meeting February 9, 2021

Iowa TWS Business Meeting February 9, 2021 Virtual Zoom Meeting

Meeting Attendance - 105
Start Time - 2:30 pm
End Time - 4:12 pm

Call to Order (Kelsey Fleming)

Welcome – Kelsey Fleming Winter 2020 Meeting
Minutes – Nathan Schmitz read the 2020 Winter Meeting Minutes. There was no discussion. Motion to Approve Minutes by Matt Dollison. 2nd by Todd Bogenschutz. Motion passed by all ayes, no nays.
Treasurer's Report – Nathan Schmitz gave a recap of the previous year's financials. He also discussed that the chapter would be receiving a refund on their donation to the North American Prairie Conference because they were unable to have their conference due to COVID. There was no discussion. Motion to Approve Minutes by Adam Janke. 2nd by Stephanie Shepard. Motion passed by all ayes, no nays.

Committee Reports

Audit Committee - Travis Russel was not able to be present so Kelsey shared the audit report, which was completed 4/1/2020, and discussed the findings. The committee's findings were: "All financial records from August 1, 2015 through December 31, 2019 have been thoroughly reviewed and fairly represent the current status of the Iowa Chapter of the Wildlife Society."

Awards Committee - Stephanie Shepherd talked about the challenges that the award committee has had with getting the Hall of Fame award to Al Ferriss. He should have received his award in 2020 but was unable to make the meeting. They plan to

give him the award at the next in-person meeting. Richard Bishop had been nominated for the Hall of Fame award and will receive it at the 2021 Winter Meeting (assuming it is in-person). Luke Gran threw out Carl Kurtz and Steph with get with him to run it through the correct channels to get him nominated. Stephanie also mentioned that she will be working to get a form on the new website to make nominations much easier.

Conservation Review - Katy Reeder had Kelsey read a statement since she wasn't available to speak: "The Conservation Review Committee did not take any specific action on legislative or policy issues in the past year. Partly this is because the Covid 19 pandemic shut the Iowa Legislature down early. As this year's legislative session proceeds, the Executive Board will decide if they desire any analysis from the Conservation Review Committee. In terms of National issues, there will likely be opportunities to weigh in on Bills such as the reintroduction of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, or policies that impact wildlife. Lastly, at the most recent annual member's meeting of the North Central Section, the chairs of the Section's Conservation Affairs Committee proposed starting a monthly check-in with each state Chapters' Conservation Affairs Committee Chair. This will provide us an opportunity to compare notes with states across the Midwest, and determine whether there are regional issues that we may wish to weigh in on as a Section. Please contact Katy Reeder if you are interested in joining this committee.

Education and Information - Pete Eyheralde was teaching and not able to be present. Kelsey read a note from Pete that he is always looking for information for the newsletter

Minutes of the Iowa TWS Business Meeting February 9, 2021

Membership - Matt Dollison noted that as of the start of the meeting the chapter had 166 members but 66 had just expired and needed to be renewed. He encouraged people to renew their membership and also mentioned that checks could be sent in if the people were uncomfortable with online payment. Matt had counted the number of people on the call who worked for DNR and only 32% of the crowd was DNR, which was great to see as it is usually 75% DNR. Lots of new faces and names. Lastly he made a pitch to have auto renewal added as an option when renewing. Later in the meeting Matt Dollison announced that Ryan Kurtz will be taking over the Membership Committee. Also later in the meeting Matt Made a motion to have auto renew as an option for membership, Jorgen Rose Seconded the motion. There was no discussion. All Ayes and Nathan has set it up.

Resolutions and Public Statements - Brian Sauer had Matt read his report, as he could not make the meeting. Matt said there was nothing new to report.

Nominations and Elections - Nick Baumgarten announced that Nathan Schmitz defeated Megann Schmidt, Sarah Nizzi defeated Ryan Kurtz, and Laura Leben defeated Matt Shanklin. Nick thanked all those who volunteered to run and encouraged them to get involved with the committees.

ISU Club Update - Carley Spading gave an update on what the chapter has been up to. She expressed that they had been limited by COVID and were not able to do their annual camping trip. They were able to work with trail and thermal cameras and were hoping to be doing some local research on jackrabbits.

Old Business

Wild Apricot – Website / Member services – Approved for 700 came in at 540. Only allows one

email, need to make sure that we are only using one email. Wild Apricot will be sending out email reminders for those that didn't renew.

New website is up, please take a look at it and give feedback on issues you encounter or improvements that could be made.

Operational Manual – Coming along and still need to flesh out the timelines for the officers. Hope to have it completed by this fall.

ICA Update – Todd Bogenschutz. Not a lot to report currently. Nathan spoke to the fact that we will have very little income but would be able to absorb the cost of continuing our membership. Matt Dollison made a motion to continue our membership at the same level as last year, which was \$2,500. Nick Baumgarten seconded the motion. Todd spoke that the Iowa Conservation Alliance is a group of NGOs that came together to have a presence at the capitol. They hire a lobbyist to represent the group. Lobbyist keeps ICA aware of bills that affect the group. When bills interest the group, Members will take a vote and if all groups aren't in agreement on the bills then ICA will not take a position. If all groups are in agreement then they will take a position. Matt Dollison asked if ICA was doing anything to push IWLL. Todd said ICA has not been promoting it other than supporting the legislation. All ayes and Nathan will send a check for \$2,500.

Reap Update -Karen Kinkead. REAP similar to ICA except she doesn't think they have a lobbyist. Primarily for the promotion of REAP. Not much of an update. Karen requested we maintain our dues. She also wanted to say they do support IWLL and there should be a local REAP assembly this fall. Todd made a motion to continue our membership at \$150. Stephanie Shepard seconded the motion. All Ayes and Nathan will send a check for \$150.

Minutes of the Iowa TWS Business Meeting February 9, 2021

New Business

Midwest Meeting 2022- Karen Kinkead said that Iowa will be hosting the conference at the Des Moines Hilton and Matt Dollison will be chairing that on behalf of Iowa TWS. Iowa TWS provides judges for student presentation and posters. The chapter also pairs up with AFS for T-shirt sales and throwing a raffle. Karen encouraged members to consider giving a talk or organizing a symposium. Lastly DNR staff that would be interested in attending need to work with their supervisors.

Interconference Committee of the Iowa Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference – In 2011 the Interconference Committee of the Iowa Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference (ICIMFWC) was formed under a 401(c)(4). This tax exempt committee was established to manage 2011 Midwest F&W Conference funds and funding for subsequent Iowa Midwest Conferences. A charter was developed with the assistance of DNR legal staff so it would meet both federal and state requirements. The Charter requires submitting an annual report on the status of the ICIMFWC account to the ICIMFWC Chair and to Iowa Wildlife Society and the Fisheries Society chapter's presidents. Kelsey then read through the financial report which showed no new income for 2020. Announcements Midwest Fish and Wildlife Meeting Feb 13-16, 2022 to be held in Des Moines.

Adjourn Move to adjourn- A motion was made by Nick Baumgarten, 2nd by Steve Dinsmore Meeting adjourned at 4:12 P.M.

Spring Turkey Season Update



Turkey Hunting Success. Photo: NWTF

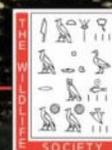
The 2021 Iowa wild turkey season harvest was down from the COVID-19 pulse of last year, but back in line with five year averages. If you remember, the pandemic social distancing of last spring led many hunters into the woods, that normally would have not been able to get time off work, were busy running kids to ball games, or were attending graduations and other indoor social functions.

Last spring season hunters reported taking 14,600 birds, the highest number recorded since mandatory reporting was required in 2007. The previous high for the spring turkey season had been 12,173 birds in 2016. In 2021 Iowa hunters harvested 11,695 turkeys in 98 counties.

The Iowa DNR was able to catch and fit several turkeys with radio telemetry equipment this winter in south east Iowa. Field Technicians are currently monitoring the nesting activity of these birds.

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Upcoming Events

- **American Society of Mammalogists**
14 June- 18 June 2021. The **100th Annual Meeting** will be **VIRTUAL**. For more information, visit : <https://mammalmeetings.org>
- **Annual Iowa Project A.W.A.R.E.**
Join us on the Middle and South Raccoon rivers on July 11-16, 2021 www.iowaprojectaware.org
- **Grassland Restoration Network Workshop**
August 2021 at The Barrington area, near Chicago. <https://grasslandrestorationnetwork.org>
- **Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting: Virtual Connections in Ecology**
August 2—6, 2021 VIRTUAL. For more info go to: [Theme – Vital Connections In Ecology | Annual Meeting of the Ecological Society of America \(esa.org\)](#)
- **Society for Conservation Biology International Congress for Conservation Biology.**
December 12-16 2021. Kigali, Rwanda at the Kigali Convention Center. For more information go to: [About \(conbio.org\)](#)

2021 Iowa Chapter The Wildlife Society Committee Chairs

Audit: Travis Russell
Awards: Stephanie Shepherd
Conservation Review: Katy Reeder
Education and Information: Pete Eyheralde
Membership: Ryan Kurtz
Resolutions and Public Statements: Brain Sauer
Nominations and Elections: Nick Baumgarten

National TWS Conference



November 1—5 2021

The Wildlife Society's 28th Annual Conference will be held **VIRTUALLY** this November. The Wildlife Society (TWS) conference is where wildlife students and professionals meet with their colleagues, present groundbreaking science and enhance their interdisciplinary skills. This conference is your opportunity to LEARN, NETWORK and ENGAGE with other members from across North America and beyond. To register go to: [TWS Annual Conference \(twconference.org\)](https://twconference.org)

Pete Eyheralde
Newsletter Editor
(eyheraldep@wmpenn.edu)

2021 Iowa Chapter The Wildlife Society Executive Committee

President: Matt Dollison
President-Elect: Nathan Schmitz
Past President: Kelsey Fleming
Secretary-Treasurer: Sarah Nizzi
Member at Large: Laura Leben