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The Voice for Iowa's Birds

STATE OF THE BIRDS--2022

A new edition of the annual *State of the Birds Report* for the U.S. was released this past October, reporting that waterfowl species and populations have shown good increases where wetland conservation & restorations have been. But there is quite bad news due to collected data proving that our birds are declining in grassland habitats, forests, deserts, and oceans.

The new 2022 U.S. State of the Birds report is the first look at the nation's birds since a 2019 showed a loss of 3 billion birds in North America since 1970. While ducks and many aquatic birds have increased substantially since the 70s, now more than half of U.S. bird species are in decline. Grassland birds are among the fastest declining, with a 34% loss in 50 years. If climate change, habitat loss and environmental concerns such as too much insecticide use continue to increase, we may lose another half of our remaining birds in the next 50 years, including several kinds of warblers, albatrosses and many other species.

Five different sources of data have been examined in order to determine current population patterns. Two of the longest surveys collecting data have been the North American Breeding Bird Survey (a USGS federal agency annual count since the 1960s) and Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, conducted for more than a century now.

"The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Federal Duck Stamp Program, grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and regional Joint Ventures partnerships are all part of a framework that has a proven track record with restoring and protecting wetland-dependent species," said Martha Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Now we want to use that precedent to work with our partners to restore bird populations, conserve habitat, and build a foundation for how we respond to the loss of other bird groups."

The report said we must require a importantly strategic combination of partnerships, incentives, science-based solutions, and our personal dedication to dramatically increase conservation efforts. This new U.S. State of the Birds report was produced by an association of government agencies, private organizations, and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. You may read and download the report at: StateoftheBirds.org.

Grasshopper Sparrow is an Iowa species in steep decline



RESIST-ACCEPT-DIRECT

How to deal with climate change

Two years ago, the National Park Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and other federal land management agencies partnered in a new plan called *Resist-Accept-Direct* (RAD). Purpose is to find a simple set of options for public land and resource managers to consider when ecosystems face concerns due to rapidly increasing climate change.

Nature always changes, cycling from winter to summer each year, or from drought to floods between decades. But recent dramatic climate change has spread changes to habitat and ecosystems that many kinds of fish, wildlife, insects, plants, and other living things have been unable to deal with. This has caused population declines in several species, because they often cannot quickly change their lifestyles or needs for food, water, and places to live. It usually requires millennia of time for often-slow evolutionary processes to allow sufficient changes for creatures to survive.

Most of the past twentieth century had more stable climate conditions which allowed wildlife and park managers to utilize standardized management methods. But rapidly changing climate cycles and temperatures in the past few decades have forced professionals to find a new way of protecting our natural resources. Climate change will continue to affect wild creatures, natural landscapes, and protected areas for future decades to come, transforming those areas and endangering many living things. Natural resource agencies must now consider and determine the best new ways to protect this environment or find new ways to change management methods in a realistic manner. That is the purpose of RAD.

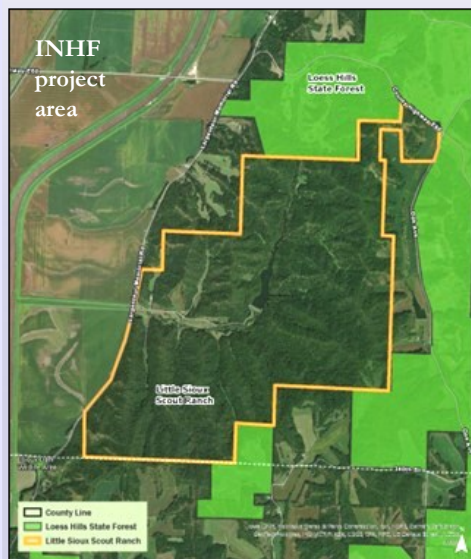
The Resist-Accept-Direct decision plan provides a relatively simple tool for responding to often irreversible ecological changes. It can assist natural resource managers for making informed and preferred choices about responding to climate change. The three RAD categories will help resource managers make decisions via these definitions:

- **Resist**—some ecological changes can be resisted, especially when an existing resource has significant societal or ecological value. Managers then find a way to maintain or restore a resource in acceptable basic conditions.
- **Accept**—There are some ecological changes that might be acceptable because existing climate or societal change actually has some reasonable value. Accepting some resource loss may help establishment of others.
- **Direct**— When local resistance is impossible in certain places, some ecological changes can be directed by managers to a different status at better locations, in new conditions, and for an overall better future.

RAD can help natural resource managers do a better job in dealing with effects climate change has on our ecosystems.

INHF to expand public land near Loess Hills State Forest

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) is currently working with the Mid-America Council of the Boy Scouts of America to purchase the nearly 1,800-acre Little Sioux Scout Ranch (LSSR) in Monona County. This exciting new project would eventually allow the Boy Scout ranch to become public property land link two portions of the Loess Hills State Forest (see map), western Iowa's largest area of public land.



The LSSR was hit by a tornado in 2008, causing 48 boys to be injured and four to be killed. Since then a memorial chapel has been built, and a memorial plaque was created in honor of the Boy Scouts who died. The camp has continued for Boy Scout use, but numbers attending the famous old camp have declined in recent years. Now, acquisition by INHF would allow the scouts to continue using this spectacular natural area and trails while also opening it for public use.

Iowa Audubon often donates funds to assist INHF with acquiring and protecting Iowa's most natural lands, and for this project we provided our largest donation in the past several years.

Funding comes from our Special Projects Budget and is enhanced by a gift to us from the Wilson B. Reynolds and Juanita E. Reynolds Fund. This is an especially exciting project because it is the first in western Iowa for us to donate. The LSSR lies within an *Important Bird Area* designated by Iowa Audubon and approved by National Audubon. In addition, it is also within Iowa DNR's *Loess Hills Bird Conservation Area*, one of 24 sites across the state designated for emphasizing preservation of critical habitat to help protect both resident and migrating birds.

This article is now asking our members and any other readers to consider making a personal donation to INHF, helping them reach a goal of \$2 million raised by this coming December 31, 2022. A total of \$7 million will be needed to purchase the LSSR, but meeting this December's amount deadline will exercise a purchase option and allow three years to raise the total amount needed. If you wish to contribute, go to the following URL:

<https://www.inhf.org/what-we-do/protection/little-sioux-scout-ranch/>

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Iowa Audubon official changes



We are pleased to welcome **Paul Skrade**, from the Upper Iowa Audubon chapter, to serve as Iowa Audubon's new vice-president. Paul has a BS degree from Luther College, with MS and PhD degrees from ISU's Natural Resource Ecology and Management Department, specializing in ornithology and the study of Mountain Plovers. Paul is now Associate Professor of Biology at Upper Iowa University, in Fayette, IA. He has been an active participant in Cerulean Warbler studies with Jon Stravers at Iowa Audubon's Yellow River Forest /Effigy Mounds National Monument, a *Globally Important Bird Area*. Paul also assists the Iowa Young Birders organization and conducts other many avian and conservation related activities.

We also wish to offer sincerest thanks to **Carol Rogers**, Iowa Audubon's retiring vice-president who represented the Quad Cities Audubon chapter on our board of directors for many, many years. Carol was very active with lots of bird and conservation projects conducted by Quad Cities Audubon, while also assisting Iowa Audubon with our events such as the annual Pelican Festival. We will miss Carol and her long dedication to our organization.

Book Review

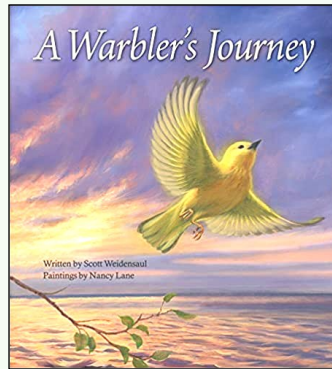
A Warbler's Journey, by Scott Weidensaul. Gryphon Press, Edina, MN, 2022. 32pp.

For youngsters age five or above, *A Warbler's Journey*, is an excellent story about a year's life of a Yellow Warbler. It focuses especially upon the difficult migration that this warbler—and many other birds—must make from Central and South America to North America each year, for returning to familiar and preferred nesting sites.

What's interesting about this new book by Scott Weidensaul, one of the best writers about birds for adults, is its aim at teaching young people about birds, migration, and how they are able to survive incredibly long annual journeys. Making it even more noteworthy is that while the female Yellow Warbler begins and ends her long migration, she is viewed by youngsters and their families of cultural diversity. In its wintering home of tropical Nicaragua, the warbler is seen by a young Nicaraguan girl and her family, who discuss it using the warbler's Spanish name of *reinita amarilla*. The young child is told by her grandfather that this little bird is important because it eats insects that could hurt their coffee plantation.

After the tiny warbler flies over the Gulf of Mexico and lands at the U.S. Gulf coast, a young African American boy spots the bird and is helped to identify it by his grandmother as they are working in their garden. Continuing on across the United States, the female Yellow Warbler finally arrives at her own remembered previous nesting area in a coniferous forest and lake area of Canada. There she is viewed by a girl and her family from a First Nation tribe, a group of native people focused upon saving natural habitat for total protection, helping protect creatures like the Yellow Warbler. At the book's end, this tiny female warbler is on her nest while her mate sings a song that makes this species of bird recognizable to anyone who hears one say, "Sweet-sweet-sweet-you're-so-sweet."

This new book for young people to learn about birds and the human diversity of our world is made beautiful by the cover and page after page of paintings by artist Nancy Lane. Her goal is to create paintings that inspire everyone to become deeply connected to



nature, which should result in more of our natural world to be conserved by all who view her works. That's a great addition to Scott Weidensaul's writing. This book should be an important gift to young people, and even adults can enjoy reading it to those who may be a bit too young to read it themselves.

...review by Doug Harr and
the Iowa Audubon Board

EPA maintains dangerous loophole for pesticide-coated seeds

This past September the Environmental Protection Agency denied a petition request from American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and other parties seeking to change a dangerous regulatory loophole for pesticide-coated seeds. Instead of regulating these coated seeds as the agency does other pesticide uses, the EPA says it will review labeling language and requirements as well as conduct a general review of seed treatment use. The EPA also announced that it "may explore the option" of issuing a rule to ensure coated seeds are used properly — a process that could take years to have any meaningful impact.

This decision means that pesticides applied as a seed coating will continue to be used without being tracked, quantified, or regulated like other pesticides. It has been made in spite of scientific evidence that seeds coated with particularly toxic insecticides called neonicotinoids ("neonics") are known to kill birds like Red-winged Blackbirds, invertebrates, and other wildlife while providing little benefit to most crops.

Pesticide coated seeds are the most poorly regulated pesticides, due to the "Treated Article Exemption," introduced to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act in 1988. The amendment makes so-called "pesticide-treated articles" exempt from registration, labeling, and tracking. Because of this loophole, farmers might not even know whether they are buying treated seeds or not.

Hardy Kern, Director of the ABC's Pesticides and Birds Campaign said, "The EPA's decision... represents a blow to grassland and insect-eating birds. The U.S. and Canada have nearly 3 billion fewer birds than in 1970, in part due to pesticide-caused prey loss and poisoning. This is a lost opportunity to mitigate these threats."

...short edited version of article from
the American Bird Conservancy

The Voice for Iowa's Birds



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We're on the web: www.iowaaudubon.org

Short notes, events or needed actions

Christmas Bird Count

The 123rd annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) will be conducted between this December 14 2022 and January 5 2023. CBC is the oldest citizen science project in history. If you haven't participated before but want to sign up for a bird count here in Iowa or anywhere, go to the website below:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count>

Check out the link to a map of all CBC locations, click on a CBC site, and you'll find an email address to contact for participation. Red circles all need more volunteers, but even yellow circles that have enough help will still welcome you to join with a team.



Sometimes a fall or winter season brings fairly uncommon species into Iowa, often indicating a shortage of seed sources in their typical northern ranges. This past autumn Iowa has had a number of Evening Grosbeaks appearing across the state, so it may be a good bird to see for adding to your CBC list. Other uncommon species to look for might include things such as Red Crossbills, White-winged Crossbills, Hoary Redpolls, Snow Buntings, or Pine Grosbeaks.



Try the new "Bird Migration Explorer"

National Audubon and partner organizations released a new digital program free to the public late this year, created for anyone to learn precise migration information about more than 450 avian species travelling between North and South America.

Users can choose any individual species to learn about its travel history, explore travel route locations, and understand challenging effects caused by climate change, power lines, light pollution and human activities.

Routes of thousands of birds have been followed with tracking devices used by western hemisphere scientists, and that data has been used to depict migration routes on this new website.

You can find tips and more information about how to use this exciting new tool by going to the following link:

<https://explorer.audubon.org/home>