

JOHNSON - CEDAR COUNTY BREEDING BIRD ATLAS NEWSLETTER

As you can see, we've expanded a county since the last newsletter. I'd still like to concentrate on Johnson this year, maybe get it 80% done. That's at least something to aim for. The coordinating committee will be meeting in late May during the IOU meeting. Pass along any comments or suggestions. The short article in the Press-Citizen generated three new contacts, which I thought was spectacular. There's still a lot of birders out there not tied into our network so keep spreading the word.

That pair of European Tree Sparrows in West Branch are in a breeding block. Wouldn't it be great if they stayed! I hope you've all had a good time out looking for owls. I now know of two nests, neither in breeding blocks. There has been a Red-tailed Hawk nest found though which is very exciting.

The birds I've chosen to discuss in this newsletter are either very common or very rare, but they all seemed like good choices. Let me know which birds you'd like to know more about. Good birding!

Canada Goose

Most reports of nesting for this species are confined to northwest and south-central Iowa, but I know there are a few in Johnson Co. It is an early nester, laying in late March or April with the young hatching in May. They nest on artificial nest baskets, in addition to natural islands and muskrat houses. Many birds summer outside of their nesting area so good evidence of nesting is needed for confirmation.

Turkey Vulture

This is an uncommon breeding bird in the state, although non-breeding birds may summer here. Laying occurs in late April or May, the young hatch in June and remain in the nest for 8-10 weeks. Vultures prefer caves or crevices in rock outcrops, but will utilize hollow trees or abandoned buildings. Preferred nesting habitat is in woodlands along larger streams.

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Available nesting data is spotty. Likes large remote woods and prefers nesting in conifers. Nesting occurs March through July. Identification of this species from the similar Cooper's Hawk is very difficult.

Cooper's Hawk

A rare nester, lives in both large and small woodlands, prefers a dry, upland, oak-hickory forest. Nesting occurs from April through June. The species has been blue listed since the 1970's. It will not tolerate the presence of a Sharp-shinned Hawk in the same woodland. As above, field identification is very difficult.

American Woodcock

The population distribution of this species is little known because the birds are hard to find. They are best looked for at dawn or dusk when the males perform their courtship flights. Their preferred nesting grounds are along bottomlands with boggy, damp ground. They nest on the ground. At dusk, the male seeks out a clearing in which to perform his aerial courtship ritual. Nesting occurs late March to May.

Owls

Nesting season is almost over for Great Horned and Barred (they should both be feeding young by now). Screech Owls are just beginning. Look in small woodlots with mature trees with holes.

Horned Lark

This is another of our early breeders, nesting from March to May. Larks also perform a courtship flight climbing as high as 800 feet and then circling while singing. They are open country birds nesting on the ground. Check pastures, golf courses, and fields. The black tail is a distinctive mark when in flight. I would not be surprised to find these birds in most of our blocks.

American Crow

These birds prefer conifers or other trees with heavy cover. Nesting starts in early April and the young hatch in early May. Renesting may occur. They build stick nests about one foot in diameter. They should be in all of our blocks.

Black-capped Chickadee

One of our most common winter birds it also nests here. The nesting sites are holes excavated in rooted trees. They will also use old woodpecker holes. They are abundant and easy to find. Nests in April and May.

Carolina Wren

Lives in dense undergrowth near streams. May be more common than believed. It is easiest to find this species if you know its song. Nests in or on trees, roots, birdhouses. Nesting begins in April and lasts through June.

Loggerhead Shrike

Another early nester (April-May) with most nesting occurring in the southern four tiers of Iowa counties. The breeding population appears to be diminishing. Prefers open country with scattered trees, pastures, orchards, thickets along roads and hedges. Nests are built 8-15 feet above ground in a bush or tree.