

Conservation Corner

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The Pocahontas County Master Gardeners 2017 Garden Extravaganza is in the books! To our speakers, exhibitors, and volunteers – thanks for a job well done. To everyone who attended – thanks for sharing your enthusiasm and love for gardening.

Spring is here, this time to stay we hope. The Cubs have taken the field; can the farmers be far behind? Here at Conservation, the tree room and bee hives are ready and waiting for spring shipments. Throughout the county, the fields and skies are ready and waiting to be filled with the sights and sounds of returning songbirds, migrating waterfowl, and nesting birds of prey.

Returning songbirds are busy staking out their territories, attracting mates, and building nests. Last weekend we drove to Cedar Rapids to watch our son Luke's 8th grade robotics team, the Circuit Breakers, compete in the FIRST Tech Challenge. Of course, the wildflowers were not yet blooming along Highway 20, but there was a redwing blackbird singing from atop most every one of the young sapling bur oak trees bordering the roadway.

Beginning in February, waterfowl began making their way north across Iowa. Last week we received a report of an injured snow goose north of Pomeroy. Perhaps you've noticed snow geese feeding on area cornfields and wetlands. Flocks have been compared to a rippling white blanket eating its way across cornfields or marshes while watching the huge flocks swirl down from the sky is akin to standing inside a snow globe.

By 1900, overhunting had reduced snow geese numbers to only 2,000 - 3,000 birds. Populations have grown rapidly since the mid-1900s, perhaps due to warming conditions in their arctic breeding grounds, and today their breeding population is estimated at 5 million. That makes snow geese the most abundant waterfowl in North America. To help control the population growth, in addition to fall hunting seasons snow geese may also be harvested in Iowa from January 28 - April 15.

Snow geese are strong fliers that spend half of the year coming and going between their Arctic breeding and Mexican over-wintering grounds. They are also strong walkers, and goslings may walk up to 50 miles with their parents in search of a good home. Here in Iowa, snow geese arrive in February and March as soon as the ground is free of snow and there's open water for roosting. They usually don't hang around too long and quickly migrate northward every day the wind blows from the south.

Many birds of prey have also returned to the area. Last week we also received a report of a Bald Eagle aerie under construction in a cottonwood stand along Lizard Creek. And while eagle sightings are becoming more frequent each year, as far as we know this will mark only the second active nesting site in Pocahontas County.

Between gardening, planting, and following baseball, we encourage everyone to take time this busy spring season to stop, watch, and enjoy our avian neighbors.

