

# Prairie Rapids Audubon Society

## General Meeting

April 14, 2026

April showers were definitely in the air as President Tom Schilke called the April 14, 2026 meeting of the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society to order at 7:00 p.m. A sizable crowd of 54 people was in attendance while 12 more individuals tuned in on 9 devices.

A prompt from Tom to shop through the items displayed in the final silent auction of the season ultimately yielded \$60 in sales. An additional \$20 was put into the Little House donation box.

Our joint financial accounts contain \$41,909.57. The bird feed fund holds \$1,139.33 according to treasurer, Francis Moore. As always, donations are welcome.

The May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting will begin with our traditional potluck at 6:00 p.m. Please bring a dish to share and your own table service. Desserts will be set back and served after the regular meeting. Get ready to enjoy a delightful program from Doug Haar, president of Iowa Audubon and retired DNR Wildlife Management Biologist.

The theme for World Migratory Bird Day 2026 is, "Every Bird Counts-Your Observations Matter". If you're able please join us for the day at Sweet Marsh as we participate in this traditional Citizen Science project to help protect the birds. We will meet at the south parking lot of the marsh at 7:30 on May 9<sup>th</sup>. Come for part or all of the day.

As promised after a computer malfunction at last month's meeting, Bob Frenchick, PRAS member from Iowa Falls returned with his selected photographs titled, "Just wait, they'll come to you". This was sage advice that came from an older friend that paid off for Bob.

Most of his photos are taken locally around Pintail and Legacy marshes and Maynes Grove near Bob's home turf. Waterfowl are a favorite topic but patience and presumably answered prayers produced beautiful shots of American Avocets. Travels out of state generated images of an Atlantic Puffin, Roseate Spoonbill, Roadrunner and a rattlesnake.

Bob had noticed how his photos were connected in subtle ways. He grouped his shots according to *eyes*, *wings*, *relationships* and *oddities*. It was an interesting way to view his subject matter.

It was a surprise to me to learn that Bob is a scuba diver. His photos of bluegills and an approaching northern pike were fascinating.

Our featured speaker for this evening was Terry VanDeWalle. He had brought his expertise on reptiles to us before while presenting a program on snakes a few years ago. Tonight's focus was directed at a "Natural History of the Turtles of Iowa".

They are one of the five groups of reptiles on this planet today and are characterized by having dry, scaly skin, leathery shelled eggs and an ectothermic or cold-blooded system.

Turtle shells consist of two parts: the upper or carapace and the bottom or plastron which are both parts of their skeletal system. Contrary to cartoonists depictions they cannot crawl in and out of their shells. That would be a bloody mess!

The shell is formed by bone covered by scales called scutes that shed as they grow. This is true in all of Iowa's 13 native turtle species with the exception of the smooth and spiny soft-shells that have cartilage making up their shells.

Nearly all of our native species lead aquatic and terrestrial life styles at some point in their lives. Most commonly seen are the painted turtles lined up along a sunny log along a river bank and the snapping turtle.

Two species that we may be fortunate to see in our area are the threatened Blanding's turtle and the endangered wood turtle. Stay focused for the Blanding's yellow throat and wood turtle's characteristic wood ring scute pattern.

Among the other Iowa species are the map group: the Northern, Ouachita and the Northern False. The Red-eared Slider is common all over the world. Endangered Yellow-mud turtles are only active for 60 days. Eastern Musk turtle, sometimes known as stinkpots, are also state threatened.

Midland Smooth and Eastern Spiny soft-shells are very difficult to tell apart from a distance and often slip into the water before you can get near them for closer inspection. Both are fish eaters.

Turtles are omnivorous meaning they eat a wide variety of plant and animal tissue depending on the species. Terry described an interesting behavior of the Wood turtles known as worm stomping to trick the earthworms to come to the surface. The worms "thinking" they are escaping vibrations created by predatory moles are consumed by the turtles instead. I'm curious who conducted that study.

Like all reptiles the turtles are cold-blooded with their body temperature controlled by thermoregulation. Both ambient air and water temperature determine each individual's body warmth. We often see turtles stacked up along a log basking in the sun. Another theory for this behavior is that it helps to remove leeches attached to their bodies.

Several threats confront many of the turtle species. Among them are mesopredators, the mid-size animals that prey on both the eggs and young. Raccoons are particularly devastating to buried eggs.

Climate change is also having an effect on the turtle population. Gender is somewhat determined by the incubation temperature in the nest with temps above 88-degree F producing more females.

Vehicles and other machinery also pose threats as turtles try to cross roads to more favorable breeding grounds. Their hard shells aren't much protection from a fast-moving vehicle.

Iowa turtle trapping regulations have changed since 2017. The season is open from July 16-May 14 prohibiting taking of turtles during nesting season. Only snapping, spiny and smooth soft shells and painted turtles are allowed to harvest. Most meat is shipped to Asian markets.

Since I was watching from home after suffering an unfortunate accident this is where my notes ended. The PRAS online feed went black but I think that covered most of it. For more in depth information on each species check out these web sites:

***iowaherps.com*** or ***herpnet.net***

Or purchase our speaker's most recent book, "The Natural History of the Turtles of Iowa". Thanks to Terry VanDeWalle for an enlightening presentation.