



Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 20 Number 3

December 2000

Calendar

Field trips, unless otherwise noted, leave from the **Dodge Street Hy-Vee**; meet in the southeast corner of the parking lot near the recycling bins. Destinations may be changed at the discretion of the leader; please contact the leader in advance if you plan to meet the group at the trip destination.

Meetings are generally held at 7:00 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month at Lucas Elementary School, 830 Southlawn Drive, near Towncrest in eastern Iowa City.

December 12, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Christmas Bird Count Planning Meeting at Jim Fuller's house, 6 Longview Knoll (follow Dubuque St. north of Iowa City, turn right at Longview Knoll). If you would like to participate in the count but cannot attend the meeting, or would like to be a feeder watcher on count day, please call Chris Edwards at 626-6362.

December 17, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count. We will meet at noon at the Coralville Recreation Center and at 5:30 at The Mill Restaurant for a compilation. For more information call compiler Chris Edwards at 626-6362.

January 21, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Local areas of Iowa City for winter finches. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

February 3, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Annual Amana Turkey Hike and Feast. Join us for an early morning hike to look for turkeys followed by breakfast at the Amanas. Meet at the Shopko parking lot on Highway 6 West in Coralville. Please call Jim Fuller at 338-3561 if you plan to attend.

February 15, Thursday. Meeting. Bob Black will speak on "Fall Hawk Migration in Eastern Iowa."

February 17, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Burlington area for Eurasian Tree Sparrows, Winter and Carolina Wrens, and Lapland Longspurs with local birder Chuck Fuller. Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot near the intersection of Riverside Drive and Highway 1 South. Bring your lunch, as this trip returned to Iowa City at 4 p.m. last year. Call Bob Stearns at 846-3286 for more information.

March 11, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. Cone Marsh. The spring thaw should bring geese, ducks, raptors, and other early migrants. Chris Edwards, 626-6362.

March 22, Thursday. Meeting. Neil Bernstein will present "An Ornithologist Who Looks at the Ground: Ongoing Studies of Ornate Box Turtles." Please note that due to spring break, this is the fourth Thursday of the month.

March 24, Saturday 7:30 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area for ducks, geese, early woodland migrants, and possibly returning pelicans. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

Other Dates of Note

December 16. Cedar Rapids Christmas Bird Count. Call Weir Nelson (848-4846), Jim Durbin (377-7194), Pete Wickham (363-6884) or Dale Fye (364-1638) for details.

December 27. North Linn County Christmas Bird Count. Same contacts as above.

January 6-7. Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days Environmental Fair and Wildlife Art Show. QCCA Expo Center, Rock Island. Sat. 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.; Sun. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. (309) 788-5912.

January 13. Dubuque Bald Eagle Day.

January 13-14. LeClaire Eagle Watch.

January 20-21. Keokuk Bald Eagle Appreciation Days.

March 6, 7:00 p.m. Prairie Preview at Montgomery Hall, Johnson County Fairgrounds.

In Memoriam

Jean Sanders, 59, died on September 22, 2000 of breast cancer at the Iowa City Rehabilitation and Health Center. Jean was missed at the August picnic. Very few people were aware of the fight Jean was making in overcoming breast cancer. Jean was a loyal and dedicated member of the Iowa City Bird Club. She attended the meetings with regularity and participated in discussions.

The last time I saw Jean was a beautiful May evening in the Shopko parking lot. We talked of gardening and birding. Jean had misplaced her newsletter and needed a copy of the field trip schedule. I had made copies which were fortunately at hand in my car. I encouraged Jean to come to the June field trips. She had been on the night sounds field trip. She thoroughly enjoyed the "conversation" Margrieta Delle had with the screech-owl using a tape and seeing the woodcocks performing their spring ritual of winnowing at Williams Prairie. We talked of gardening which Jean had been engaged in earlier that week.

Jean Sanders participated in many clubs in Iowa City. I am sure many people will miss her smile.

– *Karen Disbrow*

News

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED. The Iowa City Bird Club has been approached to find people interested in participating in two areas as volunteers.

Professor Bob Black of Cornell College in Mt. Vernon is requesting people interested in participating in a fall 2001 raptor banding project to contact him for training. Prof. Black is particularly interested in finding volunteers that are available on weekends. Please contact Prof. Black at 624-3999 or 895-4227 or bblack@cornell-iowa.edu for further details if interested.

Professor Ed Wasserman of the University of Iowa is interested in measuring the

intelligence of raptors. Prof. Wasserman is looking for a volunteer who is willing to work on a daily basis with a raptor in a study similar to the one he used to measure intelligence in doves and pigeons. Please contact Prof. Wasserman at 335-2445 for further details if interested.

RENEWAL NOTICE

Our annual \$5.00 membership dues are payable now for the new year. Your dues will pay for an entire year of Eastern Iowa Birdwatch. Check your mailing label for the most recent year for which you have paid. If your label says '00', please send \$5.00 for 2001. Make your check payable to 'Eastern Iowa Birdwatch' and send it to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City, IA, 52246.

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

September 10, Hickory Hill Park. This trip was cancelled due to stormy weather.

September 16, Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve. Although the hawk watching was rather slow during much of the day, once again we enjoyed great weather and had a large turnout of visitors. Approximately 200 people visited the Macbride Raptor Center, and at least 100 stopped by the hawk watch. An adult and an immature Bald Eagle were seen, and small numbers of Broad-winged Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Ospreys, and Turkey Vultures, as well as many American White Pelicans, passed by closely overhead. Patient observers were rewarded with several small kettles of Broad-winged Hawks which were seen very high in thermals after noon. A highlight of the day occurred when Bob Black brought over an adult female Cooper's Hawk which had just been captured and banded at the nearby banding station. Everyone got a great look at this beautiful bird before it was released.

Totals (7 species): Turkey Vulture (16), Osprey (2), Bald Eagle (2), Cooper's Hawk (2), *Accipiter* sp. (2), Broad-winged Hawk (35), Red-tailed Hawk (2).

Other Species (21): Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Canada Goose, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch.

Participants: Jean Allgood, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Drew Dillman, Judith Dillman, Karen Disbrow (co-leader), Mike Dooley, Chris Edwards (co-leader), Julie Englander, Eric Haley, Roger Heidt, Kay James, Li-Hsien Lin, Christopher Lu, John McLure, Connie Mutel, Mary Noble, and many non-club members.

– *Chris Edwards*

October 8, Redbird Farms Wildlife Area. Braving one of the season's first hard frosts, our small group arrived at Redbird about 8 a.m. and birded until noon as the temperature warmed from below freezing to the mid-40s in bright sun and occasionally brisk breezes. Bow-hunters were quiet and unseen by us. Birds were plentiful from the parking lot and along a woodland edge trail, where we were usually out of the wind. There were considerable numbers of White-throated Sparrows, both Ruby and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers and a couple of other warblers we couldn't positively identify; the Stearns spied one or two with yellow cheeks and we all saw others with olive backs and lighter breasts. We were highly entertained by a series of aerial dogfights between a Sharp-shinned Hawk and one or more crows, and a long walk on a woodland trail produced a Winter Wren for the list. Other wildlife seen included a couple of butterflies, a grasshopper, deer, frogs, and one plump but deceased mole lying belly-up in the trail.

Participants: Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble (leader), Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

Birds (30 species): Canada Goose, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, House Wren, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Mary Noble*

October 19, Meeting. Ed Wasserman, from the University of Iowa Psychology Department, gave a fascinating and entertaining talk on "Bird Brains." Prof. Wasserman has been measuring the intelligence of doves and pigeons. These birds are unique in that they mate for life, drink with their heads down and have two high-density areas in their eyes. Pigeons are easy to keep, breed and are relatively cheap to obtain. By using a feeding box with four different shapes the birds could register recognition for pictures. By repetition and

testing with similar pictures the ability of the birds to recognize and give a positive response was measured. Prof. Wasserman is now looking for a volunteer to help with a similar study using raptors. Raptors have both eyes facing forward as opposed to the pigeons whose eyes are on either side of the skull.

Redbird Farms WMA needs our help. We are asked to take along a trash bag and pick up trash, take clippers and cut thorny branches that are growing out into paths, and pick up small branches and toss them off the paths. If you see a big fall, call or e-mail Don Lund at 683-2864 or donald-lund@uiowa.edu. If you see something illegal, call Tim Thompson (DNR) at 354-8343 or call our local DNR enforcement person.

Attendees: Ed Allgood, Ann Bagford, Jack Bagford, Margrieta Delle, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, James Miller, Mary Noble, Ann Perkins, Ed Perkins, Rosemarie Petzold, Jim Scheib, Sharon Scheib, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns, and our speaker, Ed Wasserman.

– *Rick Hollis / Karen Disbrow*

October 22, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area. With Cone Marsh short on waterfowl but teeming with waterfowl hunters this weekend, it was decided to forgo the scheduled destination and give Pleasant Creek the old school try. Waterfowl numbers on the lake at Pleasant Creek were not terrific, but from the several good overlooks we were able to spot several Ruddy Ducks, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls, and Pied-billed Grebes. A lone female Blue-winged Teal posed an identification challenge.

Yellow-rumped Warblers, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets were abundant, and a short walk on a trail along the lake shore turned up good numbers of sparrows, mostly White-crowneds with some Foxes mixed in. A Harris's Sparrow put in a brief appearance among a group of Cedar Waxwings at the top of a willow, but quickly flew and was not relocated. James Huntington located a well-camouflaged Lincoln's Sparrow picking at the mud on the water's edge. Evidently there was something quite delicious in there, as the bird stayed in the same spot for over ten minutes, allowing everyone good looks at it through a spotting scope. Song and Swamp Sparrows were found also working the captivating mud nearby. As we headed back to the cars, a female Purple Finch showed up in some weeds by the roadside.

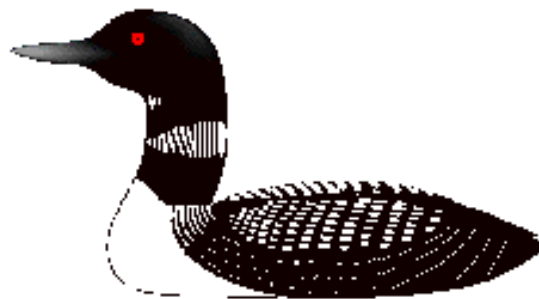
The next stop was nearby Palo Marsh, which proved to be almost completely birdless. A stop at Cedar Lake on the way back added Lesser Scaup and Mallard to the trip list. Upon returning to Iowa City, James Huntington, Karen Disbrow and I went to the S&G sandpit pond south of town. This site is normally closed to the public but Mike Dooley had

graciously secured us permission for the visit from the owners. The sandpit was a haven for waterfowl, and had in particular good numbers of Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Canvasback, and Northern Pintail. An increasingly heavy rainfall at last drove us back into our cars.

Participants: Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Mike Dooley, Eric Haley (leader), James Huntington, Jim Miller, Darlyne Neff, John Neff, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

Birds (49 species): Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Canada Goose, Mallard, Gadwall, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Killdeer, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Rock Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Harris's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Eric Haley*



November 5, Lake Red Rock. This area in Marion County is a wide spot in the Des Moines River near Pella. It annually attracts large numbers of diving ducks and gulls moving south to avoid the advancing cold. As the waters in the reservoir freeze over, many of these birds will remain in the open waters below the dam spillway. A number of Iowa's very best birds have turned up there, including Ivory and Ross's Gulls, Pomarine Jaeger, and Common Eider. Given the possibilities, birding Red Rock is often worth the two-hour drive from Iowa City.

We left the Hy-Vee on N. Dodge St. in two vehicles and we stopped on the way in Williamsburg to add a third. On arrival we scoped the water above the dam from the pull-off on the east side and then from the dam headquarters building on the west side. Neither place provided us with much to see. There were some rafts of diving ducks, but all were so far out that identification was nearly impossible as the birds disappeared and reappeared from behind the waves. Closer to shore the group was entertained by a group of six Common Loons and a lone Franklin's Gull in winter plumage. A good number of Pied-billed Grebes were seen among the large flock of Coots in the water just above the dam. We also discovered a Horned Grebe, but it was not a good look.

Although the waters above Red Rock Dam can provide interesting birding I must warn those who have never been there to dress very warmly, bring a spotting scope, and be prepared to be very patient. It is also a good idea to empty your bladder before viewing. The distances across the open water are deceptive and the birds are often further away than you might at first think. Birds easily identified at close range can become quite challenging beyond a half-mile. On days when the cold north wind blows non-stop at your face as you attempt to focus through tearing eyes it becomes more than challenging. I've never had the patience to do it when I was really cold or in need of a bathroom. Fortunately the conditions on our trip weren't nearly as harsh as they could have been, but good weather also provides fewer migrating birds.

Below the dam we had much better looks at gulls. There weren't a large number of birds there by normal standards, maybe a hundred. About two-thirds were Ring-billed Gulls and the other third were Herring Gulls. Some were flying over the spillway area as White Pelicans sat on the water. Viewing here is extremely easy even without binoculars. Most of the gulls were sitting on a sandbar just below the spillway. This group provided ample opportunity for comparative study with a spotting scope. It is most important that the birder be able to first identify the different plumages of the Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Below the Red Rock Dam is maybe the best place I know of to do this. Once a birder is able to confidently "age" these gulls, the less common gulls will become much easier to find.

Opportunities to view birds with more experienced persons is certainly one of the benefits of field trip participation. We had one bird in our scopes that seemed to share characteristics of both Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Although it had a dirty black ring on its bill, we decided it was a Herring Gull based on its size and pink legs, the bill markings being a more variable characteristic. Engaged discussion of birds close at hand greatly increases the abilities of birders. Thank you James for being there.

Some of the hardest things for the beginning birder to learn are those details most useful or reliable for identification. The confusion begins with the way our field guides often focus our attention. For instance, when identifying peeps, most beginners are looking for green legs or a slightly longer and drooping bill. Although these details aren't ignored, they aren't as useful as the overall tonality of the bird: gray or brown, pale or darkish, streaked or clear, longish or puffy, etc. These more useful details are sometimes harder to convey through a guide, but with experience they become more readily apparent. Birds, like people, look somewhat different from individual to individual. Good birders develop a strong feel for a bird's general impression and structure or "gizz". This is something that transcends the field marks. It allows you to identify a bird without really seeing the specifics. And good birders are very familiar with the birds normally found in local habitats as the seasons change. This allows them to move more quickly through a flock of birds in search of the rarity. Like at a bird club meeting, we quickly notice the person we've never met before. The best way to become a good birder quickly is to go with other more experienced birders and identify individuals together. This builds confidence in seeing the right things. But like anything else, we have to work at it.

Certainly the best bird of the trip was a Mew Gull, seen flying with the Ring-billed Gulls just below the spillway. This bird looks very much like a Ring-billed Gull and it might have been missed if our very own Mike Dooley had not found it on the previous weekend. Mike is one of those individuals who has really worked at being a good birder. He is patient, attentive to detail, and spends a lot of time in the field. As a result, in the last three years he has discovered a number of great birds in our area including Yellow Rail, Oldsquaw, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, and Sabine's Gull. The Mew Gull was a life or state bird for everyone, which made the trip extremely satisfying. Thanks Mike. We all owe you a fresh cup of coffee. I would also like to thank the Knights for driving.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Eric Haley, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Cal Knight, Ramona McGurk, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

Birds (37 Species): Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-Crested Cormorant, Canada Goose, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Coot, Killdeer, Franklin's Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Mew Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Caster*

November 16, Meeting. Jim Fuller presented a lovely talk on chasing rare birds in Iowa. It is fascinating to consider how many unusual birds have visited Iowa, and how many of their visits have been during bad weather. In England such people who hear of a rare bird sighting and make an effort to immediately go see such a bird are known as “twitchers”. We do seem to have a fair number of twitchers in the bird club. Jim’s talk was interesting, informative and very entertaining.

The Bottle Bill is likely to be discussed in the legislature again. Contact your local politicians and the state house to remind them of this bill’s importance. True recycling of bottles and cans not only keeps our roadsides cleaner, but it makes environmental sense. We have to talk to our representatives, since the DNR seems to not see itself as having a major role in this.

Attendees: Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Margrieta Delle, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Mike Dooley, Jane Fuller, Jim Fuller, Thé rèse Gué don, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Tom Kent, Bernie Knight, Cal Knight, John McLure, Ramona McGurk, James Miller, Ann Perkins, Ed Perkins, Rosemarie Petzold, Bob Stearns, and Joan Stearns.

– *Rick Hollis / Karen Disbrow*

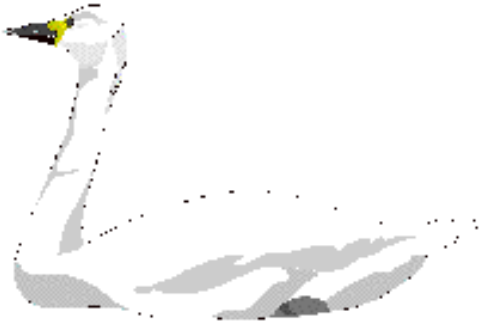
November 18, Allamakee County. The reward for a trek to Allamakee County in extreme northeast Iowa for five of the faithful and a team of five from Cedar Rapids Audubon was the sight and sound of upwards of 500 Tundra Swans. Pool #9 of the Mississippi River, where we viewed this spectacle, is one of the staging areas in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, where a large share of the continent’s population of Tundra Swans gather before heading for their wintering grounds in the Chesapeake Bay area. There were also large numbers of waterfowl, including a Ross’s Goose. The extended trip searched for Golden Eagles along the Upper Iowa River bluffs, and found many eagles (Bald) and other raptors with a bonus of three Pileated Woodpeckers. We finished the day with a brief hike at Yellow River SF in search of Ruffed Grouse. The weather was cold, but the scenery spectacular.

Participants: Jim Fuller (leader), Karole Fuller, Therese Guedon, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

Birds (52 Species): Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Tundra Swan, Ross’s Goose, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, American Black Duck, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Merganser, Hooded Merganser, American Coot, Ruddy Duck, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Cooper’s Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-billed Gull, Herring

Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Jim Fuller*



DID YOU KNOW?

Although the **Brown Thrasher** has far fewer imitations in its repertoire than its close relatives the Northern Mockingbird and the Gray Catbird, thrashers may have more than 2000 different song types – perhaps more than any other songbird!

Book Reviews

Birds of North America. Kenn Kaufman. Kaufman Focus Guides, 2000. 384 pages. \$20.00.

The Sibley Guide to Birds. David Allen Sibley. National Audubon Society, 2000. \$35.00

Two excellent new field guides have been published recently, each making its own distinctive claims to the state of the art in bird identification. The first of these released, Kenn Kaufman's *Birds of North America*, is designed to be a comprehensive field guide for beginning birders. About the size of Peterson's *Eastern Birds*, the Kaufman guide surveys all the regularly occurring North American birds, grouping them not taxonomically but according to their similarities. Coots and gallinules, for example, are lumped with grebes in the section covering swimming birds, while the other rails are grouped with small herons in the waders section. A color-coded thumb index is designed to help zero in on unfamiliar birds by general shape or behavior.

The most distinctive feature of this guide is the use of over 2,000 digitally retouched photographs, with Peterson-style pointers designed to bring field marks into sharp relief. Certainly the photos here are far superior to most of those in other photographic guides, as Kaufman has corrected each photo for normal variations in lighting, color, and contrast. On many pages, though, the cut-and-paste method Kaufman uses winds up making the birds look less natural on the page than a real photograph, or even an illustration, would. The groupings of Boreal and Burrowing Owls on page 129, for example, show strange white edges around the birds, and looks like a collage someone made out of their old copies of *Birdwatcher's Digest*.

Beyond the problems with the photographs, this is a remarkably informative and easy to use guide. The basic setup is similar to Peterson's, but Kaufman includes more detail, voice descriptions, and range maps on the page opposite the illustrations for easy reference. While this is not the guide to bring along on an outing where you're hoping to id a second-year Thayer's Gull, many birders will probably find it their guide of choice for most outings.

The Sibley Guide to Birds is a different breed of field guide altogether. Roughly the size and weight of a Tom Clancy hardcover, this is not a guide many birders will want to take into the field, even though you probably could use it to nab that second-year Thayer's. Designed for advanced identification, the Sibley guide offers over 6,600 illustrations describing 810 species, all drawn by David Sibley. The sheer wealth of detail here is staggering; there are at least four or five illustrations for most bird species detailing different plumages and perspectives. Most birds are shown in flight, and for many the wing posture and depth or shallowness of wingbeats is detailed as well. Over 300 subspecies or regional variations are included here as well for various species.

In addition to the detailed descriptions of individual species, the Sibley guide offers a gold mine of useful identification tips. Flip through this book and you'll find brief discussions of how to distinguish white herons by feeding postures and techniques, how to distinguish sleeping scaup by head shape, or how to recognize hummingbirds by the pattern of their courtship flights.

The one problem with this guide is that some of the colors—the reds and rusts, particularly—seem a little too intense, but most likely this will be corrected in later printings. Otherwise, this is the ideal field guide for those long Iowa winter nights.

— *Eric Haley*

Despicable Species: On Cowbirds, Kudzu, Hornworms and other Scourges. Janet

Lembke, illustrated by Joe Nutt. Lyons Press, 1999. 203 pages with notes and references.

Another fun natural history book. Read about all the yucky plants and critters out there. As much as some bother us, their lives are all interesting stories. In addition, what a wonderful title.

– *Rick Hollis*

The Bird Almanac: The Ultimate Guide to Essential Facts and Figures of the Worlds' Birds. David M. Bird. Firefly Books, 1999. \$19.95. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

I guess I had to look at this book, because I took Ornithology from a different Dr Bird. My professor was Mitchell Byrd at William and Mary. David Bird is at McGill. This book might be better called the Bird Book of Lists, as that is what it mostly is. The two longest sections are a list of the world's birds and a Who's Who in Bird Stuff. The rest of it is a compilation of lists and figures about birds. Want to know the relative frequency of trichostrongylid nematodes in the gizzards of North American birds, or the sizes of tympanic membranes or the red blood cell concentration in various bird bloods? They are here along with many other lists. There is a list of ornithological and bird watching groups. Neither the ICBC nor the IOU made these lists, but the Toronto Ornithology Club and the Kansas Ornithological Society did, but our Birdline did make it. There is a list of birding festivals – I checked for the most recent ones that I know about (Godwit Days and Aleutian Goose Festival) and one was there and one was missing. In all it is mostly lists of useless info, but info that would be hard to track down otherwise. The list of birds might be worth it, except for one problem. I tried to find out if the genus Pitohui and Ifrita were closely related. There is no index and short of looking through all the thousands of birds I had no way of finding them.

– *Rick Hollis*

Hummingbirds: A Celebration of Nature's Most Dazzling Creatures. Ben Sonder. Todtri Productions, 1999. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

There are so many wonderful photographs of hummingbirds already published, that I had some doubt that this book would add anything useful. I was wrong. The superb photos of hummingbirds perching, eating, nesting, etc. are wonderful. The inclusion of many foreign species is a real plus as many of the existing hummingbird books also have great pictures, but only show our species. The text strikes me as not the main reason to pick this book up. There are tidbits of interest, but if it had only been the text, you would not pick it up.

– *Rick Hollis*

Swampwalker's Journal: A Wetlands Year. David M. Carroll. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999. 262 pages plus a species list, bibliography and index.

What a treat. I rarely review a book before completing it, unless it is so bad that I do not finish it. This book is not in that category. It is a real treat – makes me want to put the boots on and head for a wetland to wade through. It is arranged in seven sections, each a different type of wetland: vernal ponds, marshes, etc. It is not the fastest, easiest-reading natural history book I have come across, but to repeat myself, it is a treat. My only regret is that the author lives in New England and the species he mentions are characteristic of that area. Some of that area's flora and fauna do not overlap with that of the midwest. (By the way, the reason I am not finishing it is two-fold: so my daughter who his home from UNI on break can read it, and so I can read one of the author's other books, *The Year of the Turtle*.)

– Rick Hollis

To report a rare bird or hear about
the latest sightings, call the

Iowa Birdline

(319) 338-9881

Rick's Ramblings

Rick Hollis

Bob Black's request for help at the hawk blind is partly as a replacement for our now out-of-state friend, Bud Gode. Every time I think about it, I am amazed at what Bud did in our community after he retired. Clearly this is a challenge to us all – to remain active and useful after we retire.

A neat place for information about the environment is the Nature section on CNN's web site. They collect news from a variety of sources. Several of the news notes came from my scanning of this site. The actual information on the page is more extensive than we summarize on these pages.

I stumbled across a wonderful archaic bird name: Bogsucker, for Woodcock. What a wonderful name.

The UN has created a new Biosphere Reserve in the Pantanal, in Brazil. This is the area that I visited a few years back. UNESCO has a program that has recognized 350 Biosphere Reserves in 85 countries around the world. These reserve designations are symbolic gestures, but often serve to make it easier for local governments to preserve land. Although the Pantanal is the largest tropical wetland in the world, covering an area about half the size of France in Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay, very little of it is protected. This action will help

make Brazil realize that there is worldwide interest in the Pantanal. This is especially important now as the Pantanal is threatened by a proposal to build a dam and barge pathway on the Rio Paraguay, which drains the Pantanal. Brazil pulled out of this multinational project three years ago, but Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, as well as interests in Brazil are still interested in this project. It pleases me to know that there is some action in other countries to preserve habitat – both for the plants and animals but also for us.

Periodically I visit the Biology Department to listen to seminars about birds. Recently I heard a seminar about woodpecker evolutionary history. The seminar left a great deal to be desired. In summary, there are many woodpecker species pairs with very similar appearances. Our own Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers are one such pair. It turns out that some evidence points to species pairs as having somewhat dissimilar DNA, and probably have evolved similar appearances while competing for the same resources. I had always figured these species' appearances were close as they were very closely related. That shows what I know.

It is amazing – our meetings this fall have had over twenty people in attendance. I have been unable to make a field trip for a good while, so I do not know if our field attendance is also up.

See you on the Christmas Count!

You Might Be a Birder If...

- Someone yells "Duck!", and you look up and shout "Where?"
- Vacations are planned to maximize the number of life birds.
- You criticize television programs and commercials that depict a Bald Eagle but play a Red-tailed Hawk call.
- Your kids are named Buteo and Accipiter.
- People stop and stare when you "pish" at the shrubbery at the local mall.
- Lunch breaks find you driving to check out your favorite hot spot.
- Your spouse says, "It's either me or the birds," and you have to think about it.
- You pay a neighbor kid \$20 to roll on a carcass and lay still while you search the sky for vultures.
- You try to talk your kid into going to college in Belize so that you have an excuse to go and bird there.
- You're out in a thunderstorm, the rain is horizontal, and a weather advisory has been issued, but it's big day and you need to up the day's list.
- Clouds take on the shape of birds, and you can distinguish male from female, and adult from immature plumage.

- A machine squeaks at work and you describe it to maintenance as sounding like a Black-and-white Warbler.
- The first time you meet your future in-laws, you demonstrate the courtship dance of the American Woodcock, complete with sound effects.
- You spend fifteen minutes preparing dinner for your family, and thirty minutes mixing and placing seed for your birds.
- You wake up your spouse at 5:30 a.m. and exclaim, ‘Is that a phoebe I’m hearing outside the window?’
- Preparing for trips to visit out-of-state relatives involves contacting local birders, securing local bird lists, and buying the appropriate birding guide.
- You identify calls of birds in the soundtracks of television shows and movies.
- You’re willing to fight with anyone who criticizes your optics.
- You participate in hours-long discussions about the pros and cons of using a certain field guide.
- You lose friends, and perhaps even your spouse, for fighting over the pronunciation of ‘pileated.’

Answering “yes” to any of these questions qualifies you as a birder!

– *Jim Fuller via IA-BIRD*

To subscribe to the e-mail discussion list for Iowa birders, send the message:

SUBSCRIBE IA-BIRD

to the e-mail address:

listserv@list.audubon.org

Great Backyard Bird Count

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society invite you to participate in the Fourth Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, February 16 – 19, 2001:

We want to know where the birds are. Now that winter has gripped much of the continent, where are the birds? Bird populations are dynamic, they are constantly in flux. We want to take a snapshot of North American bird populations and you can help us. For example:

- Where are the finches and other irruptive species?
- Compared to last year, how has this winter's weather influenced bird populations?
- Will late winter movements of many passerine and waterfowl species be as far north as they were last year?

And there are a multitude of other questions. Everyone's contribution is important. It doesn't matter whether you identify, count, and report the 5 species coming to your backyard feeder or the 75 species you see during a day's outing to a wildlife refuge.

Again this year, we ask you to fill out a survey that tells us a little about yourself beyond what we already know: that you are eager to give something back to the birds you enjoy!

The data that you collect will be combined with Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch data to give us an immense picture of our winter birds. Each year that these data are collected makes them more important and meaningful. So as we see patterns, discover new questions and insights, we'll update you. And we'll ask for your help again.

For more information, and to view results of previous counts, visit the BirdSource web site at: <http://birdsource.cornell.edu>.

Iowa City Bird Club

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch is published three times per year (usually April, August, and December). Members are encouraged to send articles, reviews, notes, and comments to editor Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317, or e-mail at credwards@aol.com.

Annual membership dues are \$5.00, payable by January 1st for the coming year to treasurer Bernie Knight, Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, 425 Lee St., Iowa City, IA 52246. Check your mailing label for the year you have paid through.

For general bird club information, contact Iowa City Bird Club president Rick Hollis at 665-3141.

To lead a field trip, contact field trip coordinator Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

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