



# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 21 Number 3

December 2001

## Calendar

**Field trips**, unless otherwise noted, leave from the Dodge Street Hy-Vee; meet in the SW corner of the parking lot near the recycling bins. 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 Robert Lucas Elementary School, 830 Southlawn Drive, near Towncrest in eastern Iowa City.

**December 11, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. Christmas Bird Count Planning Meeting** at Jim Fuller's house, 6 Longview Knoll north of Iowa City. For directions call Jim at 338-3561.

**December 16, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count.** If you would like to participate or be a feeder watcher but won't be attending the planning meeting, please call Chris Edwards at 626-6362.

**January 13, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. Bird Feeder Watch Social.** Come for coffee and rolls and see what Jim and Sharon Scheib have at their feeders this winter morning. The Scheibs live at 10 Longview Knoll north of Iowa City. For directions call Jim and Sharon at 337-5206.

**February 9, 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 Coralville Hy-Vee parking lot on Highway 6 West in Coralville. Please call Jim Scheib at 337-5206 if you plan to attend.

**February 21, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Rick Trine of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will talk about Otter Creek Marsh in Tama County, which is one of our spring field trip destinations.

**February 24, Sunday, 1:00 p.m. Owl Prowl.** We'll spend the afternoon searching for roosting owls, possibly including Saw-whet, Long-eared, Great Horned, Barred, or Eastern Screech owls. Chris Edwards, 626-6362.

**March 9, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Cone Marsh** in Louisa County for ducks, geese, and other early spring migrants. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**March 14, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Tom Rosburg of Drake University will present "Nature Photography: Tips for Creating Nature Images with Aesthetic Impact."

**March 30, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Otter Creek Marsh** in for Sandhill Cranes, waterfowl, and other migrants. This 3,400-acre DNR area is \_ marsh, \_ river bottom, and \_ semi-open timber. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

## Other Dates of Note

**December 15, Saturday, Cedar Rapids CBC.**

**December 29, Saturday, North Linn CBC.**

Contacts for both counts are Weir Nelson (848-4846), Jim Durbin (377-7194), Pete Wickham (363-6884) and Dale Fye (364-1638).

## RENEWAL NOTICE

**Our annual \$10 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 "01", please send \$10 for 2002. 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 15, Hawk Watch at Stainbrook State Preserve.** About fifty people attended our annual hawk watch at Stainbrook State Preserve, just north of the Mehaffey Bridge over the Coralville Reservoir. The event lasted from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Our location on the hill provided an expansive view of the Coralville Reservoir and the wooded ridge to the north. Many folks brought lawn chairs and stayed for several hours, while others dropped by for a brief visit. Many people also attended the hourly raptor programs held at the nearby Macbride Raptor Center.

The cloudy, cool conditions were not optimal for migrant raptors, because many species rely on air thermals caused by sunlight warming the ground to provide them with lift. However, there were two periods of sunshine which brought several kettles of migrating Broad-winged Hawks streaming past. During the

remainder of the day, the local Ospreys were always visible over the reservoir, and an occasional accipiter sighting provided added excitement. In the afternoon when the hawk watching was slow, we turned our attention to a large flock of warblers and other passerines in a nearby tree. In total, 135 raptors of 7 different species were counted (included Turkey Vultures, which technically are no longer considered raptors). This is slightly above our 10-year count average of 92 raptors and 7 species.

Thanks to all the folks at the Macbride Raptor Project, University of Iowa Division of Recreational Services, and Cornell College Biology Department who helped make the event a success.

*Participants:* Jodeane Cancilla (Macbride Raptor Project), Margieta Delle, Dara Dick, Robert Dick, Karen Disbrow, Mike Dooley, Chris Edwards, Julie Englander, Roger Heidt, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, Kay James, Tom Kent, Li-Hsien Lin, Christopher Lu, John McLure, Darlyne Neff, John Neff, Anne Perkins, Ed Perkins, Ed Saehler (University of Iowa Division of Recreational Services), Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns, Richard Tetrault, and many non-club members.

*Raptors (7 species, 135 individuals):* Turkey Vulture (37), Osprey (4), Bald Eagle (3), Sharp-shinned Hawk (6), Cooper's Hawk (2), *accipiter* species (1), Broad-winged Hawk (79), Red-tailed Hawk (3).

*Other birds (33 species):* American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch,

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Cedar Waxwing, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Edwards*

**September 16, Local Areas.** It was a mild, but overcast day, with rain developing late. As probably expected, we started at Hickory Hill Park for passerines and ended at Hawkeye Wildlife Area for shorebirds. My usual strategy was to head down from the north entrance along the edge watching for warblers where the first sun of the day was hitting the trees. We saw birds, small flocks of warblers, but they were moving so fast and the light was so poor, we couldn't identify them.

We headed down in the woods and along Ralston Creek where a few got to see a Sharp-shinned Hawk dart through the woods. We got to the south end of the park, then scrambled down and crossed a tiny creek, where a close Barred Owl announced we were in his territory.

In the cemetery there were very few birds. As we were trying to get a better angle on a Great Crested Flycatcher, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a small bird fly into a small, low evergreen. It was bright yellow below with obvious streaks. We tried to follow it as it flew from tree to tree but lost it. One thing I learned from birding Attu, is that a bird will often return to the spot where first seen. I think everybody, including me, was a little surprised to find the bird back where it started. We surrounded the bush. This time the bird was quite cooperative. It was a very handsome male Cape May Warbler.

In the south valley of the park we encountered a really nice flock of passerines. We saw a Red-breasted Nuthatch, and numerous Tennessee Warblers, Chestnut-sided Warblers, Magnolia

Warblers, Black-throated Green Warblers, Black-and-white Warblers, American Redstarts, Canada Warblers, and Ovenbirds. Mike Dooley spotted a Golden-winged Warbler. A little farther along, I heard the "chimp-chimp" of a Winter Wren. It was along the stream bed and then bounced up the hill like a brown ping-pong ball.

We got to our cars and headed to Hawkeye Wildlife Area, grabbing a snack in North Liberty. I was hoping that the juvenile Red Knot discovered by Jim Fuller along Greencastle Avenue would still be there. When we got to the end of Greencastle, John Rutenbeck was getting into his car. He had looked for two hours without seeing the knot. We checked the first spot, then walked northwest to another 'pond'. There was the Red Knot. It was really a beautiful shorebird. It had a breast which was almost a 'peach' color.

We returned to the first place where shorebirds fed. I spotted a mouse-gray shorebird which made me think of Dunlin, but this bird was smaller and had a smaller bill. It had sharp, fine streaks along the flanks, with an obvious supercilium. It had primaries which extended past the tertials. It was a winter plumaged White-rumped Sandpiper. White-rumps are rare in Iowa in the fall as most head to the east coast, so this was a treat. We then spotted a juvenile Baird's Sandpiper, so we could compare the two shorebirds. Mike Dooley was willing to get very muddy in order that we could see the white rump on the one shorebird. We stopped briefly at Babcock. We saw numerous Bobolinks in their yellow fall plumage.

*Participants:* Jack Bagford, John Cordell, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Mike Dooley, James Huntington (leader), John McLure, Jim Miller, Mary Noble, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns, Dick Tetrault.

*Birds (82 species):* Pied-billed Grebe, American

White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, American Coot, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, Sanderling, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Chimney Swift, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Blue-headed Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Winter Wren, Sedge Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Golden-winged Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Canada Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch.

– *James Huntington*

### **September 30, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.**

When our outing began it was chilly and foggy and the grass was covered with dew, but the sun quickly burned off the fog to reveal a bright blue sky. We met our Cedar Rapids contingent along James Avenue at Hawkeye Wildlife Area, and explored the surrounding area on foot. Our walk took us through a small wooded area with a

creek, where we saw several Indigo Buntings, kinglets, and White-throated Sparrows. We came to an open, grassy area with several small ponds, and dozens of spider webs sparkling with dew provided a memorable sight. While sweeping the vegetation James flushed a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, which perched in a small shrub just long enough for everyone to get a nice look. We made our way back to the road and walked along James Avenue, where there was a lot of passerine activity in the shrubby roadside thickets. We saw many handsome Lincoln's Sparrows, several female Purple Finches, a Red-breasted Nuthatch high in a spruce, and several warbler species including Nashville, Tennessee, and Orange-crowned.

We moved on to the small wood lot just north of Swan Lake. There wasn't a lot of activity, but we managed to find two Magnolia Warblers and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and had a terrific view of a Yellow-billed Cuckoo.

Next we headed to Greencastle Avenue to check out the shorebirds. The pressure was on James to relocate the five White-rumped Sandpipers (a rare species in Iowa during the fall) that he had discovered earlier in the week. We walked through the tall vegetation to the west side of Half Moon Lake and discovered several dozen shorebirds. They included Dunlin, Stilt Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, and Long-billed Dowitcher, but no White-rumps. We continued west to another mudflat without success. On the way back to the road we decided to check the first spot again, and the White-rumped Sandpipers had appeared! We all had a nice view and Jim attempted to document their presence with some photographs.

As the morning wore on it became warmer, and we observed several interesting insects, including a praying mantis which Jim captured for everyone to admire. We saw several dragonflies and over a dozen butterfly species, and

discussed the finer points of Monarch vs. Viceroy identification.

Our last stop was farther west along Swan Lake Road, where we walked through a wet, grassy field hoping to flush a Yellow Rail or a LeConte's Sparrow. We found only Swamp Sparrows, one Sedge Wren, and one Sora, and decided to call it quits. The day had included all the ingredients for a perfect fall outing: great weather, great birds, and great company!

*Participants:* Karen Disbrow, Mike Dooley, Jim Durbin, Joyce Durbin, Chris Edwards (leader), James Huntington.

*Birds (73 species):* Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Canada Goose, Mallard, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Sora, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Stilt Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Great Horned Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Sedge Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Chipping Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-

throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Edwards*

**October 6, Wickiup Hill.** Seasonal weather brought seven Iowa City Bird Club members to Cedar Rapids to meet our leader, Jim Durbin from the Cedar Rapids Audubon Society. Roger Heidt from Cedar Rapids also joined us. The temperature began at about 36 degrees, but the sun warmed us (a little) as we progressed through the varied habitats of the nature area. There was a brisk wind that moved between 5 and 15 mph to remind us that it was fall.

Work is still progressing on the main nature education center, which looks to be very nice when completion is expected sometime next year. Because of this, we parked across the road and walked up the driveway, passing through prairie grassland. On the right, we approached the marsh area, with a boardwalk extending into it, where we saw Belted Kingfisher, Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, American Coot, and Pied-billed Grebe. From an observation deck a little farther along, we had a shaded view of the marshland. Continuing along the wide, well-maintained, wood-chip trail, we came to groves of deciduous trees where warblers and woodpeckers greeted us (but you had to look closely for them since the leaves were still on the trees). The path provided an easy walk as we proceeded to scan the area for birds.

After stopping at a clean (and warm) porta-potty (which comes highly recommended), we were rewarded with the sights and sounds of sparrows, kinglets, and an Orange-crowned Warbler that caused some identification problems. Heading south above the spillway, we saw eagles and raptors. As we walked across the dike above the grasslands and approached the end of the trail, we observed House Wrens and sparrows.

While wrapping up our trip by discussing the list of birds we had seen, we were fortunate to see two Red-tailed Hawks flying high above us, displaying and taloning for our viewing pleasure. It was a very nice trip with a variety of habitats in a new area (for most of us) that we will surely revisit.

*Participants:* Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Mike Dooley, Jim Durbin (leader), Roger Heidt, Ramona McGurk, Diana Pesek, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

*Birds (46 species):* Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Bob and Joan Stearns*

**October 28, Cedar, Muscatine, and Louisa Counties.** Ten people met at the Hy-Vee parking lot at 7 a.m. James spotted two Sharp-shinned Hawks while walking to the parking lot. Our first stop was at Jim and Karole Fuller's woods in Cedar County. We stayed long enough to show everyone the area, and on the way out a Hermit Thrush gave us all a "good look." Next we drove to the two hilltop parks within Cedar Valley Park, walked around the

two quarries, and pointed out the trail that follows the river. This area is like a small Lacey-Keosauqua State Park but is only 20 miles from Iowa City. Birds seen included Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-throated Sparrow, Red-headed Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Belted Kingfisher, and Bald Eagle.

On the way to Rochester Cemetery we spotted Winter Wren, Purple Finch, and Fox Sparrow. After a stop at the cemetery we went to The Cove restaurant for pie, ice cream, and restrooms. Our next stop was Salisbury Preserve and White Oak Swamp in Muscatine County, where we saw Wild Turkey, Greater Yellowlegs, and Great Blue Heron. We finished the day at Cone Marsh in Louisa County, where we saw Trumpeter Swans, Rusty Blackbirds, a Cooper's Hawk, and a pair of Northern Harriers.

*Participants:* Ed and Jean Allgood (leaders), Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Therese Guedon, James Huntington, Mary Noble, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

*Birds (48 species):* Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Trumpeter Swan, Canada Goose, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Horned Lark, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Common

Grackle, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch,  
House Sparrow.

– *Ed and Jean Allgood*

**November 10, Johnson County.** Our first stop, the S&G Materials sandpit south of Iowa City, began on an uncomfortable note. The sandpit had been well-populated with waterfowl since late October, so we were somewhat dumbfounded to find virtually no sign of life out there when we made our first approach. We soon discovered the cause: a duck hunter set up on the southern peninsula, with decoys on the water and his dog wandering nearby. No sooner did we make this discovery than we heard gunshots from the smaller pit across Sand Road and a few of our party simultaneously watched two Canada Geese fall from a circling flock. I talked with the hunter on our side of the property and as it turned out he had permission from S&G Materials and had actually been hunting there occasionally for a number of years. When I told him about our outing he decided to leave for the pheasant hunting he'd been planning on later and for the record was entirely gracious about the whole affair.

Once our party made its way out onto the peninsula we did find plenty of ducks clustered in the northwest part of the water. Two American Black Ducks were spotted with six Mallards in a group that had just lifted. Prolonged examination at close range of two female scaups, with much discussion of their field marks, revealed them to be a pair of Greaters that had been spotted earlier in the week. An adjacent Lesser Scaup provided an example against which we got a great demonstration of the differences in head and bill shape between the two scaup species. The Greaters also obligingly raised their wings a couple of times and showed their strong white wing stripes extending well into the primaries.

*Continued on page 11*



## A Visit to Bird Hall

### Mary Edwards

You're standing on the beach, observing the wonders of nature around you. Birds surround you, as far as the eye can see. If you listen, you can hear the calls of the many different birds. As their songs quiet, a man – your guide – tells you about the history of this island. He tells you about the birds and the animals that live here, and of the people that have had great impact on this natural solitude.

But you're not really on this South Pacific Island. You're looking at the Laysan Island Cyclorama in the William and Eleanor Hageboeck Hall of Birds, located in the University of Iowa's Macbride Hall. Although the cyclorama remains unchanged, the Hall of Birds recently underwent an extensive renovation, ending in May. All of the exhibits have been improved, and there are even more interesting things to look at.

One of the exhibits I found interesting was the display of eggs, nests, and growth of birds during incubation. There are several nests, with rotating information panels in front of the display. There are over 125 eggs shown, ranging in size from as small as my thumbnail to as large as my closed fist. And the display of growth during incubation of a typical bird has three doors that open up to show the different stages of the growth. There are even several new videos on flight, including videos on flight control and the effects of different wing types. All of the videos are under 5 minutes, and are all very interesting.

There is also a display on Ratites and their eggs. The display shows how the breakup in the

landmass Gondwanaland caused separate continents and isolated species – all originating from one common ancestor. For each of the Ratites (Ostrich, Kiwi, Emu, and Rhea) there is a different continent of originality.

Another exhibit shows a cast of *Archaeopteryx Lithographica*, the “missing link” between lizards and birds – an animal that has both reptilian and avian features. Other exhibits cover information on migration, bird DNA, bird skeletal features, types of feathers, and many other interesting topics.

Of course, some of the displays remain the same. But some of the birds have been replaced, and the information panels have been updated on all of the displays. One of the newest features in the Hall of Birds is the touch screen computer that is set up in the corner of the room. On it is a program called “Why Birds Sing,” which plays different songs, calls, and other unusual sounds that birds make. The program is simple, but informative. There are song identification games, and a soundboard that has about thirty different bird songs.

Back to the island. The Laysan Island Cyclorama remains unchanged, but not for too much longer. Signs in the cyclorama show plans for restoration in 2002, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the museum staff's first visit to the island.

So, if you haven't visited the museum since its remodeling, now may be a good time to go. With all of the new exhibits and displays, a trip to the William and Eleanor Hageboeck Hall of Birds should be entertaining and educational for

the whole family.



## **Birding Rocky Mountain National Park**

### **Chris Edwards**

I arose before dawn and dressed in the darkness while my family slept. Grabbing my binoculars, I left the motel and headed for the entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. In the pre-dawn light, I began the long drive up Trail Ridge Road towards the continental divide. The scenery was spectacular as the steep, winding road passed through the open stands of aspen and ponderosa pines, where an occasional elk or mule deer was glimpsed among the trees. I continued to climb higher through the dense sub-alpine forest and then the gnarled, stunted trees just below timberline, trying to keep my mind off the lack of guard rails and the sheer drop-off at the edge of the road. Finally I emerged on the open, rocky tundra, and after parking I began my hike as the sun rose above the mountain peaks to the east. The tundra was blanketed with tiny, colorful wildflowers, and I stepped from stone to stone to avoid damaging these fragile beauties. As I explored the terrain, I flushed an American Pipit from its nest and heard a White-crowned Sparrow singing from a thicket. After more than an hour of wandering, I heard a low clucking noise, and my heart raced as I raised my binoculars to view my first White-tailed Ptarmigan. The bird was so trusting in its mottled brown and white camouflage that I was able to sit on a boulder twenty feet away and watch it forage for buds, preen its feathers, and then go to sleep.

This is only one of the great birding experiences that I have enjoyed while visiting Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado. It has been a favorite vacation spot of mine since our first visit in 1989. It is truly one of the most beautiful places in North America, a wonderland

of snow-capped peaks, forested valleys, rushing streams, and alpine lakes. During the summer months the wildlife is prevalent, the meadows are carpeted with wildflowers, and the bird life is varied and abundant. The park ranges in elevation from 7,500 feet in the lower foothills to 14,255 feet at the summit of Long's Peak, and contains a multitude of habitats between these extremes. It is located in north-central Colorado, about two hours northwest of Denver. The town of Estes Park serves as a convenient gateway on the park's east side.

One of the best birding areas in the park is Horseshoe Park, just a few miles from the Fall River Entrance Station near Estes Park. Horseshoe Park is a broad open valley surrounded by mountains, with a variety of diverse habitats including meadows, ponds, streams, and open forest dominated by ponderosa pine, quaking aspen, and douglas-fir. Each of these habitats supports a different community of birds. In the meadows, raucous Black-billed Magpies and pairs of Mountain Bluebirds are easily seen, and tiny Broad-tailed Hummingbirds are heard zipping overhead. MacGillivray's Warblers and Lincoln's Sparrows skulk in the willow thickets bordering the streams and ponds as Violet-green Swallows soar overhead. One of the most interesting residents is the American Dipper, which can be seen here and elsewhere in the park along rushing streams. This chunky black bird flies underwater and forages for insects along stream beds. The forests of Horseshoe Park are home to such varied birds as Steller's Jay, Western Tanager, Cassin's Finch, Black-headed Grosbeak, Red-naped Sapsucker, Williamson's

Sapsucker, Western Wood-Pewee, Pygmy Nuthatch, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Band-tailed Pigeon, Green-tailed Towhee and Townsend's Solitaire. Several flycatchers, including Dusky, Hammond's, and Cordilleran, can be found by the birder with enough patience to sort out their calls. Northern Goshawks are seen regularly. Horseshoe Park is also an excellent place to view the park's other wildlife. Elk and mule deer are common, and coyotes are often seen trotting across the meadow in search of a meal. A herd of bighorn sheep occasionally visits the meadow ponds in the summer, providing excitement for the lucky visitors who see them.

On one memorable June morning in Horseshoe Park, I was birding among the aspens near Fall River Road. The songs of the resident Warbling Vireos, American Robins, and Western Wood-Pewees provided constant background music. I heard a quiet tapping coming from the back side of a dead pine, and assumed it was another Red-naped Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, or Northern Flicker, since I had already seen several of each. Circling around the tree I was delighted to discover a female Three-toed Woodpecker excavating a nest hole. This rare park resident is attracted to wood-boring beetles found in dead and dying trees and is often found in burned-over areas.

Another popular and scenic location in the park is the Glacier Basin area, which is situated at a higher elevation where the sub-alpine forest is dominated by spruce and fir. During the summer months it is wise to arrive early in the day to avoid the crowds. There are many hiking trails in this area leading to such scenic spots as Alberta Falls, Dream Lake, and Nymph Lake. The bird life here is less abundant than at lower elevations, but offers a different mix of species. Steller's Jay, Gray Jay, Clark's Nutcracker, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Mountain Chickadee, Dark-eyed Junco, and

Ruby-crowned Kinglet are all common residents. Pine Grosbeak and Blue Grouse are among the rarer inhabitants that may be encountered.

A trip to Rocky Mountain National Park wouldn't be complete without a drive up Trail Ridge Road to the alpine tundra. It winds through four life zones between the foothills and its highest point at 12,183 feet. There are many pullouts on the way up where Clark's Nutcrackers, Gray Jays, Steller's Jays, ground squirrels and chipmunks are easily seen at close range, and the scenic vistas are incredible. Eleven breathtaking miles of the road wind across the open tundra. There are several trails which offer a chance to explore this fascinating habitat. American Pipit, Horned Lark, and White-crowned Sparrow are common nesting birds here. Aside from White-tailed Ptarmigan, the most sought-after species is the Brown-capped Rosy Finch, which nests on cliffs or boulder fields and can sometimes be seen near the Rock Cut and Lava Cliffs pullouts. Interesting mammals to watch for include the yellow-bellied marmot and the pika. After a stop at the Alpine Visitors Center, motorists can return the same way to Estes Park, or continue down the west side of the continental divide to the town of Grand Lake.

The best time for birders to visit Rocky Mountain National Park is from mid-May to September, and especially during June at the height of the breeding season. Trail Ridge Road typically opens for the season around Memorial Day. The tundra wildflowers are in full bloom in July and August, which is also the peak tourist season. During the summer, daytime temperatures are usually very pleasant, but visitors should always be prepared for cool or rainy weather, especially at higher elevations. There are several campgrounds in the national park, and all typical accommodations and amenities are available in Estes Park. Regardless

of where you stay, advance reservations are recommended during the summer months. If you drive from Iowa City, plan on a thirteen- to fourteen-hour trip.

If time allows, a stop at Pawnee National Grassland in northeast Colorado is also recommended. This expansive short-grass prairie is home to such species as Ferruginous Hawk, Prairie Falcon, McCown's Longspur, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Mountain Plover, Lark Bunting, Western Kingbird, Burrowing Owl, Say's Phoebe, and Brewer's Sparrow. Another interesting side-trip, especially on a rainy day, is the Denver Museum of Natural History.

Next time you plan a vacation, consider a trip to Rocky Mountain National Park. Like me, you might find yourself going back year after year!

## Two General Histories of Ornithology and Birding in America

Mike Dooley

Mark V. Barrow, Jr., *A Passion for Birds: American Ornithology after Audubon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Felton Gibbons and Deborah Strom, *Neighbors to the Birds: A History of Birdwatching in America* (New York: Norton, 1988).

Barrows's book centers mainly on the formation and development of the American Ornithologists' Union and several continuing issues in its early history, including the often heated controversies within ornithological circles over the place of collecting specimens via the shotgun and the role of "amateurs" within ornithology. The earliest argument in favor of using amateur observations was their usefulness in determining avian distribution and migration patterns, a new concern in the early twentieth century. Between the two books this one is the more straightforward scholarly history (as expected from a university press), though I would say it was eminently approachable by the casual reader. Barrows's book may prove surprising to folks who tend to order the topic of human relations with birds into a tidy black-and-white, Good Guys vs. Bad Guys model. Several of the main players, for example, worked toward bird protection laws while simultaneously insisting on the right of "legitimate" ornithologists to kill specimens. Well-covered is the issue that generated the founding of the modern-day Audubon Societies and the bird protection movement generally, the wholesale slaughter of every imaginable bird for the plumes on fashionable women's hats beginning in the late 1880s and continuing past

the turn of the century.

Gibbons and Strom's book is much more wide-ranging and is more of the "popular" variety, but this is not to say it is not a respectable history. Chapters include good introductions to the nineteenth-century ornithologist-artists Alexander Wilson and John James Audubon; naturalist writers such as Thoreau, John Muir, and John Burroughs; three chapters on the development of the Audubon Societies and the rise of the bird-protection movement from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth; nice sketches of some of the pioneering women in ornithology, three of whom were responsible for major prototype field guides in the pre-Peterson era; and a chapter on bird artists-illustrators circa 1890s to 1930s including Louis Agassiz Fuertes and Peterson's seminal field guide (the authors also critique our more contemporary Golden and National Geographic Society field guides in terms of art as opposed to pure documentary achievement, a long-overdue approach and dealt with in a stimulating manner).

A couple of miscellaneous chapters of interest include one on the "nature faker" controversy of about the 1890s into the 1900s, an issue I've read a complete separate study on elsewhere. These were authors, highly knowledgeable and experienced naturalists all, who wrote collected essays on their observations of wild animal and bird behavior which tended to impute rather fantastic powers of reasoning to their subjects and often presented a romanticizing, anthropomorphizing view of wildlife. Such books were immensely popular but often infuriating to certain circles within natural history studies. The redoubtable Teddy

Roosevelt actually became involved in the very public imbroglio over “nature fakery” while still in the White House.

Another such chapter is entitled “Introduced Species: Cats, Starlings and English Sparrows.” It turns out the feral cat issue is an old one, flaring up particularly in the first decade or two of the twentieth century. There are some surprising scenes in this little story. For example Mabel Osgood Wright, author of a pioneering modern-type field guide, co-founder and president of the Connecticut Audubon Society (the first such state organization to revive the failed original Audubon movement), and editor of the Audubon Societies section in the journal *Bird-Lore*, regularly boasted of the number of cats she eliminated at gunpoint which strayed into her home wildlife sanctuary. A rather startling photograph shows T. Gilbert Pearson, long-time president of the National Association of Audubon Societies in the first half of the century, standing next to a wooden armature from which hang the corpses of a dozen or more cats strung up by their back legs. On a side note, Gibbons and Strom write that current research of feral cats’ stomach contents indicate that birds are an insignificant portion of their diet, and that they mainly go after small rodents. It becomes clear throughout the book that Gibbons and Strom are devoted both to birding and wildlife protection, yet some readers may be taken aback at their lengthy criticism of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and still more so of wildlife rehabilitators. Both groups are seen as misguided contributors to an ultimately destructive attitude toward wild animals as “furry little people,” and the work of rehabilitators is deemed to be of little but sentimental value in the larger picture of protecting species.

## Field Trip and Meeting

## Reports (continued)

The Ross’s Goose which had been seen at the pit for more than a week was found in a large Canada Goose flock making repeated passes over the main water. We had several good profile views in flight of this one white goose among the Canadas and all agreed on the relatively small bill. Earlier, when first entering the property, a blue-phase Snow Goose was spotted in another flyover Canada flock. Two Bald Eagles gave us good looks as they perched in the surrounding trees.

From the sandpit we headed out to Red Bird Farms. As would be expected heading into mid-November, things were a little quiet, but we did find Fox and Swamp Sparrow in the brush, a kingfisher on one of the ponds, and three Brown Creepers feeding together in the woods. Purple Finches were found in a treetop as we headed back to the parking lot, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk was a flyover.

After Red Bird Farms, Bill Scheible, Chris Edwards and I continued on to Lake Macbride.

In a pool off 200<sup>th</sup> Avenue we found a late Lesser Yellowlegs in among a number of Common Snipe. A flock of loafing gulls seen on the north arm from the boat ramp off Cottage Reserve Road included six Bonaparte’s. We were excited to find a raft of seventeen Common Loons when we looked from the Twin View Heights subdivision turnout, and once we drove around to Sandy Beach, and a better angle on the sun, we discovered a considerable raft of diving ducks as well, though no species we had not already seen.

*Participants:* Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Mike Dooley (leader), Chris Edwards, Bill Scheible, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

*Birds* (51 species): Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Snow Goose, Ross’s Goose, Canada

Goose, American Wigeon, Gadwall, Mallard, American Black Duck, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Killdeer, Common Snipe, Lesser Yellowlegs, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Bonaparte's Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Blue Jay, American Crow, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow. — *Mike Dooley*



# Iowa City Bird Club

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**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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