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# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

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Volume 29 Number 3

December 2009

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## Schedule

**Field trips** depart from the Dodge Street Hy-Vee in Iowa City unless otherwise noted. Meet in the southwest corner of the parking lot. Please contact the leader in advance if you plan to meet the group at the trip destination. Many of our trips are accessible to people with disabilities; for more information please contact the trip leader. **Meetings** are held at the Grant Wood AEA Southern Facility, 200 Holiday Road in Coralville, generally at 7 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month.

**December 10, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Christmas Bird Count Planning Meeting** at the home of Jim and Karole Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, north of Iowa City. Call Bob Dick at 337-4945 for more information.

**December 20, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count.** To participate, contact Bob Dick at 337-4945 by Wednesday, December 16. See page 3 for more information.

**January 10, Sunday 1:00 p.m. Owl Prowl.** We'll spend the afternoon searching for roosting owls, such as Northern Saw-whet, Great Horned, and Barred Owls. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**January 21, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Bernie Knight's owl program on video with additional footage and commentary by Jim Scheib and Karen Disbrow. *Snow date Thursday, January 28 – check our web site for weather cancellation information.*

**January 24, Sunday, 8:00-10:30 a.m. Feeder Watch Social** hosted by Rick and Janet Hollis, 3525 Cumberland Ridge Rd. NE, North Liberty. Come for coffee and rolls and watch the winter birds visiting the feeders. For directions call Rick at 665-3141.

**January 31, Sunday, 1-4 p.m. Second Annual Coralville WinterFest** at the Iowa River Landing district in Coralville. Winter activities including horse-drawn sleigh rides, skiing, ice sculpture demonstrations, food, music, games, and more. The ICBC will have a station setup for eagle viewing and information about winter bird feeding. Anyone interested in helping please call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

**February 6, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Amana Turkey Walk and Feast.** Join us for an early morning hike through the woods to search for Wild Turkeys, Saw-whet Owls, and other winter species, followed by breakfast at the Amanas. Please call Ken Hunt at 354-1079 if you plan to attend.

**February 18, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting.** Iowa Audubon President Doug Harr will update us on current Iowa Audubon activities and conservation projects.

**February 21, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Quad Cities** for gulls and other water birds on the Mississippi River. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**March 13, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Burlington Area** for spring migration up the Mississippi Flyway including ducks, geese, pelicans, and more with local guides Chuck Fuller and John Rutenbeck. This will be an all-day trip with a stop for lunch. **Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot on S. Riverside Dr.** Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**March 23, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. Beginning Birdwatcher Course: Basics of Birding I** at the Conservation Education Center at Kent Park. Advanced registration is requested but is free to club members – call Brad Freidhof at 645-1011 to register. See page 7 for a complete Introduction to Birding course schedule.

**March 25, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** New Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator Billy Reiter-Marolf will give us an update on the BBA project including interesting trends and finds in local areas. Then Mark Brown will present photos from the IOU's recent trip to Monterrey, CA.

**March 28, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Cone Marsh** in Louisa County for Sandhill Cranes, ducks, geese, and other early spring arrivals. **Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot on S. Riverside Dr.** *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.* Rick Hollis, 665-3141.

## Other Dates of Note

**For a list of Iowa Christmas Bird Counts,** visit <http://www.iowabirds.org/birds/CBC.asp>.

**January 8-10, Friday-Sunday. Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days,** QCCA Expo Center in Rock Island, IL. Exhibits, vendors, eagle watching bus tours, wild cat show and more. For more information visit <http://www.qccaexpoctr.com/>.

**January 16-17, Saturday-Sunday. Keokuk Bald Eagle Appreciation Days.** The Keokuk area hosts the largest winter concentration of Bald Eagles on the Mississippi River. Weekend activities include ranger-staffed viewing locations, wildlife displays, seminars, live raptor programs, a wood carvers show, and Native American crafts and educational booths. For more information visit <http://www.keokukiowatourism.org/eagledays.htm>.

**February 12-14, Friday-Sunday. Third Annual Sax-Zim Bog Winter Bird Festival** at Meadowlands, Minnesota. See <http://moumn.org/sax-zim/index.html> for more information.

**March 9, Tuesday, 6 p.m. Prairie Preview XXVII** at Parkview Church in Iowa City. The featured speaker will be Bill Witt, who will present "Enchantment by Prairie".

**Late March, Annual Purple Martin Seminar and Workshop** at the CAM Iowa Clothing Center, 1005 Nutmeg Ave., about 3 miles NE of Kalona. At press time the date has not been announced; for more information call Jim Walters at 319-466-1134 or Evan Gingerich at 319-656-3629, or check our web site for updates.

## From Our President Karen Disbrow

Ah, the winter season is upon us. Time to kick back and look out the window to see activity around the feeders. But wait, what is that I hear...not tiny hooves on the rooftop? No, it's the phone ringing, a rare bird sighted on the Iowa River, you say. Boots, scope, binoculars, and off we go on another adventure. The bird club has many activities planned for the winter. Some of them are our typical winter activities. A new one is the Coralville WinterFest in January. We participated last year and it was great. This year I am working on getting more birds to show up. WinterFest is really geared with kids in mind. There will be lots of games, prizes, music, cool things to observe and of course, the ICBC sets up to scope out the birds. Another great event to get kids interested in birding this winter is our owl prowl.

We have lots of interesting speakers lined up. Note that the March meeting will have two. We will get an update on the BBA project and a report on the Monterrey, CA Iowa Ornithologists' Union birding trip. We are also teaching the Beginning Bird Course at Kent Park again this year. The first three sessions are geared towards the total novice. The fourth session on backyard birding has many ideas for feeders and choices to bring in birds to your yard. The last session is a warm-up on warblers and maybe a few shorebirds as that season of migration kicks into full gear.

As always I am interested in setting up trips to wherever you want to go and to see the birds you want to see. If you have an idea, I'll find a leader. We are contacted every year to provide speakers for youth groups. This is a marvelous opportunity to share your love and knowledge of birds. I did one last year with a book on owls and answering their questions. No technical experience needed, just a love of birds and sharing of this great avocation.

The next couple of weeks will be busy with checking the Christmas Bird Count areas. So fill up those feeders and prepare for just about anything. This is Iowa, where birds and people meet.

Good birding!  
Karen

## Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 20

This year's Iowa City Christmas Bird Count will be held Sunday, December 20, unless extreme weather conditions require moving the count to a later date. Co-compilers are Bob Dick and Chris Edwards. If you wish to participate as a field observer or a feeder watcher, or if you have questions, please call Bob between 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. at 337-4945 or 321-0706 (cell), or email at [bobd555@earthlink.net](mailto:bobd555@earthlink.net), by Wednesday, December 16.

The pre-count planning meeting will be Thursday, December 10, at 7 p.m. at the home of Jim and Karole Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, located off Dubuque St. north of Iowa City. Call Jim at 338-3561 if you need directions. You do not need to attend the planning meeting to participate in the CBC. Your group leader will have information for you on count day.

On count day, we will meet at noon for a mid-day compilation and lunch in Meeting Room C at the North Liberty Community Center, 520 W. Cherry St. in North Liberty. This is the same location as last year. Bring your own lunch.

Dinner and an updated compilation will be at The Brown Bottle Café, 125 Zeller St., North Liberty, at 6:00 p.m.. Our private room is available beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Please note that the count area is a 15-mile diameter circle with the center located at Highway 965 and County Road F-28 (Penn St.)

in North Liberty. This includes all of North Liberty and Coralville, but not all of Iowa City. If you plan to participate as a feeder watcher and are not sure if you are in the count area, please contact Bob. Also, if you know others who may desire to participate as feeder watchers please encourage them and have them call Bob.

Please visit the ICBC web site at [www.icbirds.org](http://www.icbirds.org) for more information.

## Renewal Reminder

It's time to send in your membership dues for 2010. Please note that we have a new Treasurer, Bruce Gardner. Bruce volunteered and was elected at the September meeting following the resignation of long-time Treasurer Bernie Knight. Bruce will also be maintaining our membership list. If you have any questions about your membership status, please contact Bruce at 643-2575 or [woodsidefarms@juno.com](mailto:woodsidefarms@juno.com).

Our annual membership dues remain \$15 per household or \$10 for students. Your mailing label shows the most recent year you have paid for. Please complete the membership renewal form on the inside back cover and send it with your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" to Bruce Gardner, 3055 Wapsi Ave. NE, Iowa City, IA 52240. Thank you.

## Breeding Bird Atlas Update Billy Reiter-Marolf

Birders continue to collect valuable data as the 2nd Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas reaches the end of its second year. Statewide, volunteers have logged 3,300 hours of observation, visited 647 blocks, and recorded almost 180 species. These impressive accomplishments are testament to the amazing dedication and enthusiasm of BBA volunteers. However, with only 20 blocks complete, we still have a long way to go to reach our goals. Next year we should aim to re-visit the 551 blocks with less than 10 hours of

effort and for the first time, visit the 144 blocks with no effort at all. Everyone is invited to participate. In fact, you can start right now by searching for used nests or for species known to nest early.

In Johnson County, 2 of 13 blocks have been completed thus far, with the most species observed in Kent Park (80 species) and Rapid Creek (79 species). Blocks 522 and 533 have yet to be visited. Over the winter months, please remember to enter your data if you haven't already, or mail it to me and I'll do it for you. This data is critical for the conservation and management of Iowa's wonderful birdlife. Finally, thanks to all the loyal volunteers who have dedicated their time this year. Iowa City area birders are off to a great start. Your efforts are inspiring and I can't wait to see what you accomplish next year!

Billy Reiter-Marolf, AmeriCorps  
BBA Volunteer Coordinator  
(515) 432-2823 ext. 117  
Cell: (515) 298-3072  
[bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org](mailto:bbacoordinator@iowabirds.org)  
<http://bba.iowabirds.org/>

## 25 Years Ago in Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

*Editor's Note: Eastern Iowa Birdwatch has been published since January 1981. I'm attempting to assemble a complete collection and am missing the following issues: Volume 1 (1981) Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and Volume 2 (1982) Nos. 1, 2. If you have any of these issues, I would be grateful to receive a copy.*

The field trip schedule in the Winter 1984 Eastern Iowa Birdwatch (Volume 4, Number 4) contained some familiar names and places: a January 19 outing to the Coralville Reservoir led by Rick Hollis, a February 2 trip led by Cal and Bernie Knight to the Mississippi River to view roosting Bald Eagles, and a February 16 trip with leader Carl Bendorf to the Amana

Woods, to be followed by breakfast at the Colony Inn. Bald Eagles are now such a common sight throughout Iowa during the winter that it is easy to forget how rare they were a quarter-century ago.

A going away party for Mike and Carol Newlon was held December 9, 1984 at the home of Cal and Bernie Knight. According to a note by editor Carol Thompson, "Carol and Mike have both been active birders since they moved to Iowa City and have gotten a lot of people interested in birds as well as passed along a lot of their expertise. Mike has been the Christmas Count compiler for many years and is the current president of the Iowa Ornithological Union. They will be missed."

Mary Noble, Bud Gode, and Ann and Bill Barker were among the participants on an October 6, 1984 field trip led by John Cordell to Matsell Bridge in Linn County. Highlights were an Osprey as the trip was assembling at the Iowa Memorial Union, a Red-breasted Nuthatch, five accipiters including two Sharp-shinned Hawks, several warbler species, and a Black-billed Cuckoo.

– *Chris Edwards*

## In Memory of Richard Lynch

Richard "Dick" Lynch, an internationally recognized experimental immunologist and former Chairman of Pathology at the University of Iowa College of Medicine, died at his home on Lake Macbride, Monday, October 12. We knew Dick as a birder who enjoyed sharing his love of nature. Pontoon rides around Lake Macbride were always fun, often full of adventure and surprises. Since his retirement Dick had become an avid photographer and recently was writing of many interesting times of his life. He served in the Navy as a weatherman in the US Navy from 1952 to 1956 where he participated in seven hydrogen bomb tests in the Marshall Islands at Bikini. During

his memorial we learned that some of his essays were accepted for publication. It is my hope that many will be published. Dick had won awards from the IOU for his photography. Check our website for some of his excellent photographs. We will miss his wit and kindness. Gifts may be sent to the Richard G. and Nancy A. Lynch Fellowship at the University of Iowa Foundation or to Iowa City Hospice.

– *Karen Disbrow*

## In Memory of Suzanne Sarlette

Suzanne Sarlette passed away on October 12 at the University of Iowa Hospitals in Iowa City. Sue had retired as a computer programmer/computer specialist for the U.S. Department of Defense, stationed at Rock Island Arsenal. After their retirement, Sue and husband Gerald Pearson traveled the country with their A-Liner camper, visiting state and national parks and monuments, attending various astronomy club "Star Parties", bird watching events, and A-Liner Club conventions. Sue's hobbies included knitting, crocheting, and needlepoint. She was an avid birdwatcher and a voracious reader, reading on average three books per week. She enjoyed working logic puzzles and playing board games, and she liked to listen to a wide variety of music. Sue was a member of many organizations. She came to most ICBC meetings, often with handwork. I remember her as always being busy with her hands and actively participating in the discussions. Sue and Gerry attended many of the night sounds trips and owl prowls, and always had something to add. We will miss her comments and curiosity of the natural world. Donations may be sent to the Autism Society of America.

– *Karen Disbrow*

## **Iowa Audubon Is...**

### **Karen Disbrow**

At our September meeting, Iowa City Bird Club members voted to become an affiliated organization of Iowa Audubon, and appointed President Karen Disbrow as our appointee on the Iowa Audubon Board of Directors. There is no required financial contribution, and this simply means that our club is supportive of Iowa Audubon and has input on its board.

Iowa Audubon is an independent organization, which was created in its present form in 2004 when the Board voted unanimously to drop its affiliation with the National Audubon Society after many years and become an independent Audubon society. Iowa Audubon's mission is to identify, protect and restore Iowa's bird habitats, to educate Iowa's citizens towards a greater level of conservation awareness, and to promote enjoyment and greater pride in Iowa's natural ecosystems, birds, and other wildlife.

The goals of Iowa Audubon are:

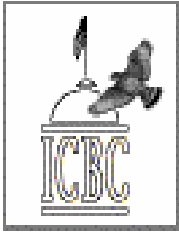
- Science and Bird Conservation - using scientific and historical criteria, activate people to identify, monitor, and improve the management of bird habitat within Iowa.
- Education - helping people of all ages acquire knowledge about the natural world, our place in it, and the need to preserve it.
- Advocacy - expressing the viewpoints of Iowa Audubon on issues related to conservation and the environment.
- Membership Services - increasing membership and member activity, and assisting chapters or other member organizations as required or requested.
- Communication/Outreach - facilitating information transfer with all Iowa Audubon members, the larger Audubon movement nationwide, and other organizations or agencies, the public, and the media.

Fundraising efforts such as the annual Pelican Gala have allowed Iowa Audubon to pursue priorities for bird conservation and education projects of importance to Iowa. Besides the Important Bird Area program, Iowa Audubon has partnered with other organizations on land acquisition projects to protect bird habitat, to support the Pico Bonito Project in Honduras (wintering habitat for neotropical migrants), and publication of the new Makoke Birding Trail guide booklet for central Iowa.

Iowa's Important Bird Areas program, started by Ric Zarwell under the old Audubon Iowa/National Audubon Society structure, has continued under the new organization. The Iowa City Bird Club has supported this program since the start, and many Eastern Iowa locations were designated Important Bird Areas following the collection of data by club members.

In recent years Iowa Audubon has been seeking closer relationships with local Audubon chapters and independent bird clubs and nature clubs within Iowa. The goal is to have better representation from throughout the state in a joint effort to promote birding, bird conservation, and bird education. In 2008 the Board reestablished a cooperative relationship with the National Audubon Society to work on items of mutual concern, but it is the intent of Iowa Audubon to maintain its independence as a separate organization.

For more information about Iowa Audubon, or to become a member, visit their web site at <http://www.iowaaudubon.org/main/default.asp>,



## Introduction to Birding Course March 23 – April 25, 2010 at Kent Park



The Iowa City Bird Club and the Johnson County Conservation Department are offering a 6-week Introduction to Birding Course at the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park. There will be five Tuesday evening sessions along with five weekend field trips to area birding hot spots, plus a special Thursday evening session and weekend field trip for kids ages 7-12.

**Tuesday evening sessions** are \$5 for adults and free for children accompanied by an adult. Iowa City Bird Club members receive free admission (a one-year membership is \$15 per household or \$10 for students). Participants may attend all five sessions or pick one or more to attend. Classes can hold 30, and advanced registration is requested – please call Brad Freidhof at 645-1011 by noon of the Tuesday session. Handouts and refreshments will be provided. Come to class early and bird the loop path near the CEC.

**Weekend field trips** are free. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Bring binoculars to all field trips; if you don't have a pair let us know in advance and loaners can be arranged. Spotting scopes are helpful for viewing shorebirds and waterfowl; if you have one bring it. Club members will have several scopes available on those field trips requiring one. All field trips will depart from the Dodge Street Hy-Vee in Iowa City unless otherwise noted; meet in the SW corner of the parking lot. For more information on field trips, call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

**Tuesday, March 23, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING I** by Rick Hollis. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment that every birdwatcher needs, or might someday need.

**Sunday, March 28, 8 a.m. Field Trip to CONE MARSH.** Located about 25 miles SE of Iowa City, Cone Marsh is an excellent place to view migrating ducks, geese, and other water birds. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. **Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot.**

**Tuesday, March 30, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II** by Rick Hollis. Continuation of first session topics.

**Saturday, April 3, 8 a.m. Field Trip to KENT PARK** near Tiffin. We will explore the trails in Kent Park looking for migrating songbirds and resident woodland birds. **Meet at the CEC in Kent Park.**

**Tuesday, April 6, 7 p.m. WHERE TO BIRD IN JOHNSON COUNTY** by Rick Hollis. Well known, lesser known and secret places to watch birds and study nature in and around Johnson County.

**Saturday, April 10, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HAWKEYE WILDLIFE AREA** near North Liberty. We expect to see ducks, geese, American White Pelicans, and other early spring migrants. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one.

**Tuesday, April 13, 7 p.m. BACKYARD AND FEEDER BIRDS** by James Scheib. This session will cover the common birds found in our area's backyards during the year, and what types of feeders and food to use to attract them.

**Sunday, April 18, 8 a.m. Field Trip to MACBRIDE NATURE-RECREATION AREA.** Visit the Raptor Center, observe birds up close from the bird blind, and hike the nearby trails.

**Tuesday, April 20, 7 p.m. WARBLER IDENTIFICATION & SHOREBIRD REVIEW** by Karen Disbrow. Warblers are coming! Warblers are among our most colorful birds. Compare and contrast similar warblers.

**Thursday, April 22, 7 p.m. BEGINNING BIRDING FOR KIDS** ages 7-12 by Rick Hollis. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

**Saturday, April 24, 8 a.m. - Noon. FIELD TRIP FOR KIDS** ages 7-12. Meet at the CEC in Kent Park. Rick will lead young birders accompanied by an adult around the park. Bring binoculars if you have them; if not, let Rick know on Tuesday night so loaners can be made available.

**Sunday, April 25, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HICKORY HILL PARK.** This park is a great place to view warblers and other migrating songbirds.

## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

**August 23, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** We started at 8:00 a.m. on a sunny but cool morning and ended just before noon with the temperature climbing into the 70s.

We drove out to Swan Lake where we observed several species of swallows and a group of twelve Wood Ducks on the shore nearest the road. Another group of Wood Ducks were spotted across the water at the far shore near the farm buildings. The lake was like glass with perfect reflections of the surrounding vegetation. It was a very beautiful morning with much more to be seen on the lake than at first glance. We paused for several minutes using both scopes and binoculars to spot several birds. As the air warmed up more birds were seen flying over, in particular the swallows.

We moved on to Sand Point. Walking out through the edge woods a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak was spotted, along with Baltimore Oriole, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Dickcissel, Sedge Wren, a fledgling Marsh Wren, and many other birds. Two immature eagles were perched on the sand ahead of us. At the point we spotted immature Horned Larks, cormorants, Blue-winged Teal, and several shorebirds including Spotted Sandpiper and Greater Yellowlegs. At 9:35 a.m. Jason Paulios spotted a Whimbrel. We quickly checked two field guides to confirm the identification. One book said "rare" and one didn't even have a green spot on the state of Iowa. I immediately called Jim Scheib so the bird could be listed on the Iowa Birds listserve.

Other birds were seen at the point including Great Blue Herons, Ring-billed Gulls, Caspian Terns, and three Baird's Sandpipers. We saw someone walking out toward us, and when I peered through my binoculars and it was James Huntington! He had not heard about the Whimbrel and was excited to see it. We subsequently saw more shorebirds including

Short-billed Dowitcher, Pectoral Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, and Lesser Yellowlegs, as well as three Black Terns.

Participants: Karen Disbrow (leader), John Erickson, Bruce Gardner, Ken Hunt, James Huntington, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Mary Noble, Ramona McGurk, Jason Paulios.

Birds (47 species): Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, American Coot, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Black Tern, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Kingbird, Blue Jay, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Dickcissel, Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole, American Goldfinch.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**August 25, Annual Picnic.** We moved the picnic to Lower City Park due to the renovation of the Hickory Hill pavilion, and changed the date to Friday to allow people to attend DNR Director Leopold's forum at Lake Macbride State Park. Fortunately, City Park was not under water as it could have been following 8" of rain during the previous two days. We did have some water near the shelter so we had Canada Geese, a Great Blue Heron, Mallards and a Solitary Sandpiper. It was a lovely evening and people enjoyed seeing each other again and meeting the new people who attended.

Attendees: Tara Cahill with Nicklas (8), Amber (5), and Calista (2 months), Karen Disbrow (hostess), John and Linda Donelson,



Jim and Karole Fuller, Ken Hunt, Lois Hughes, Merle Ihne, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Rosemarie Petzold, Jim and Sharon Scheib.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**September 17, Meeting.** During the business portion of the meeting, it was announced that Bernie Knight was stepping down as Treasurer. Bruce Gardner was nominated and unanimously approved as the new Treasurer for a three-year term. A birder's guide for the Iowa River Valley in Eastern Iowa is being published by the Iowa Valley Research Conservation & Development group. A motion was made and passed to donate \$200 towards the publication costs. Iowa Audubon has offered the ICBC representation on their board. A motion to accept this offer was made and passed, and a second motion to designate Karen Disbrow as our representative on the board was made and passed. Matt Kenne, the IOU spring field reports editor, contacted Karen Disbrow for permission to use the data from our spring warbler walks in his report in *Iowa Bird Life*. Karen gave permission for the data to be used. This is indeed an honor and shows the high regard in which the ICBC is held in the state birding community. The club recorded several of the earliest sightings for warbler species this spring.

The evening's speaker was Dennis Schlicht, co-author of *The Butterflies of Iowa*, whose presentation was titled "Managing for Butterflies". Prairies are the home of many butterfly species. In the last 30 years the majority of the prairies in Iowa, both restored and remnant prairies, have been burned to increase their biodiversity. Unfortunately, it now appears that this burning has been good for plants but harmful to invertebrates such as butterflies. There have been studies done in the last five years that show less diversity than in the late 1960s before burning became such a widely used tool. Dennis mentioned an invertebrate survey of Cayler Prairie in Dickinson County a few miles from Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, the field biological station

This survey showed less invertebrate diversity than some of the adjacent ditches, which is shocking considering how much effort has gone into preserving and managing these prairies to increase biodiversity. Dennis thought the DNR was still using guidelines suggested by Bill Platt, a fire ecologist who taught at Lakeside Labs in the 70s and early 80s. The DNR currently divides Cayler into thirds and burns a portion every year on a three-year rotation. Cayler is being harvested for seed to use in restoring other DNR prairies in the state.

To manage for butterflies one needs to know the life cycles of specific species, because butterflies require specific host plants for different parts of their life cycles. When burning prairies it is important not to burn the entire portion of any particular micro-habitat. A harmful practice that is often used by managers is to go back and re-fire any patches that were missed to make sure nothing is left standing. Invertebrate diversity has suffered greatly because of this practice. It is better to leave patches of habitat standing than to burn everything uniformly.

Prairies that have been saved are less than 0.1% of what was here at one time. When the majority of the landscape was prairie, there were surrounding areas that could restock invertebrates in burned areas. Today when the closest population for a species is 125 miles or even farther away, this no longer happens. To add to the difficulty, all organizations are burning – Iowa DNR, county conservation boards, The Nature Conservancy – with little or no knowledge regarding invertebrates.

All of this has led to the extirpation of five prairie butterfly species in the state of Iowa. There has been thought of reintroducing these species, but this would be futile while burning is still being done as expediently, cheaply and with little regard to diversity of anything but the plant species. This is a legitimate concern and one that we all need to be cognizant of and

make a point of educating everyone who uses burning as a management tool.

NOTE: Karen checked with Doug Harr, Wildlife Diversity Manager for the Iowa DNR, about the protocols for burning. Doug was the biologist stationed at Spirit Lake when Bill Platt was at Lakeside Labs. Doug said there is no overall protocol for burning all prairies and that each prairie is treated individually. Bill Platt did lay out a proposed burning plan for Cayler Prairie in two-acre sections with several 10-foot wide areas for plant research. In addition, Bill designated at least two areas that he recommended be burned only once every ten years. Doug said that Bill's plan was too costly in manpower and time to effectively burn Cayler in alternating two-acre sections in a three-year rotation. Copies of Bill's plan are located at the Spirit Lake DNR headquarters and in the Gazetteer of Lakeside Labs. Karen will forward a copy to Dennis. Karen also learned that Doug Harr has added two butterfly specialists to his staff to identify plant species that need to be burned in sections and to stop the loss of butterfly species from our preserved lands. When Karen studied Botany and Plant Ecology at Eastern Illinois University, invertebrates were discussed in conjunction with prairie burns, however the knowledge needed to ensure that small populations of specific plant species are not burned completely takes an entomologist with detailed knowledge of life cycles. We are lucky that Doug Harr has recognized this, and can only hope that more care in the burning of prairies will make the prairies again alive with flying color.

Attendees: Karen Disbrow, Lon Drake, Chris Edwards, Jim and Karole Fuller, Bruce Gardner, Rick Hollis, Lois Hughes, Ken Hunt, Merle Ihne, Lorraine Kent, Dave Kyllingstad, Ramona McGurk, Alan and Kristin Nagel, Brenda Nations, Ed Rolenc, Jim and Sharon Scheib.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**September 20, River Valley Wetland.** It was a beautiful morning for an outing, with

temperatures in the 60s and early sunshine giving away to overcast skies by noon. We started out at River Valley Wetland, just north of Cedar Bluff in Cedar County. This 100-acre natural area encompasses a variety of habitats including bottomland timber, restored prairie, and a small pond. Although the birds were not especially numerous this morning, we had a pleasant walk. Blue Jays were the most numerous and vocal birds of the day, with Gray Catbirds a close second. We found a few migrants including Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Least Flycatcher, and Swainson's Thrush. The area of the woods with the most bird activity also happened to have the most mosquito activity, so we didn't linger there. At the end of the trail we had a nice view of the Cedar River, where several Killdeer were feeding and preening on the large sandbars.

Shortly after leaving River Valley Wetland, Bruce's voice came over the radio and alerted us to a large bird flying lower over the field to the west. It turned out to be a handsome young Northern Harrier, giving us nice views as it sailed past.

Next we made a short stop at Jim and Karole Fuller's property east of Cedar Bluff. We walked in from the road to the prairie clearing where we spent some time enjoying the fall wildflowers, including gentians and lady's tresses. As we lingered there a pair of Barred Owls called, a cuckoo flew across the clearing and briefly alighted in a distant tree, and then a kettle of pelicans soared overhead. On the way out we saw several woodpeckers including two juvenile Red-headed Woodpeckers.

On our way back to Iowa City, Bruce led us to the West Branch sewage ponds, where the surprise bird of the day was an early Greater White-fronted Goose.

Participants: Chris Edwards (leader), Judy Ellyson, Bruce Gardner, Ken Hunt, Mary Noble, Don Swartzendruber.

Birds (46 species): Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Mallard, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, cuckoo sp., Barred Owl, Chimney Swift, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Edwards*

**September 26, Annual Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve.** It was a pleasant morning with temperatures in the 60s, partly cloudy skies, and very light SE winds. However the weather was not very conducive for a large hawk flight. As usual small kettles of Turkey Vultures were the first birds in the air, and from 10:00 to noon occasional raptors passed by alone or in small groups. Many of them were quite distant. Compared to a typical year, more *accipiters* and Bald Eagles were seen and fewer Broad-winged Hawks were seen. Flocks of American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants were sighted in the distance, and numerous passerines were seen in the surrounding trees or flew past overhead.

Around noon the sky became heavily overcast and a few sprinkles fell. For most of the next two hours, other than a close Osprey fly-by, patrolling Ring-billed Gulls were about the only birds seen. Just before 2:00, the skies started to clear and a few Turkey Vultures and Bald Eagles took to the air as we called it quits.

Our timing was just slightly off, as the following day was clear and several eastern Iowa observers reported seeing large numbers of hawks moving through the area. Oh well, maybe next year!

Participants: Chris and Ben Caster, Karen Disbrow, Chris and Anne Edwards, Julie Englander, John Erickson, Therese Guedon, Ken Hunt, Mary Noble, Terry and Anne Perkins, Linda Rudolph, Bill Scheible, Blossom Shaw, Marybeth Slonneger, and about fifteen other visitors.

Raptors (7 species, 81 individuals): Turkey Vulture 40, Osprey 2, Bald Eagle 10, Sharp-shinned Hawk 2, Cooper's Hawk 6, *accipiter* sp. 4, Broad-winged Hawk 24, Red-tailed Hawk 2, *buteo* sp. 1.

Other Birds (28 species): American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Ring-billed Gull, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Edwards*

**October 10, Cedar County.** Four hardy souls embarked on this cold October morning to explore southern Cedar County. Cold means 28 degrees above zero which may seem warm by January. We started at the wastewater holding ponds for the city of West Branch. These are located east of the Proctor and Gamble warehouses south of Interstate 80. There are often several types of ducks and geese plus some shorebirds on these ponds. The view from the road makes observations both easy and warm (if you don't get out of your car).

We then proceeded east to the Hickory Grove Cemetery across from the Scattergood school. This cemetery dates back to the mid-1800s and has a great trail that leads east for a half mile along I-80. The only problem is that the noise from the interstate prevents hearing many non-vehicle sounds.

The next stop was Rochester Cemetery, where we encountered our first snowflakes but also some good birds. Since the snowfall was getting heavier we drove to the new Kum and Go on I-80 for hot beverages and snacks.

Our last major stop was at Cedar Valley Park where our mile-long hike brought more good birds. On our way back to West Branch we explored Franklin Ave. to the north of 250th street which naturally has another cemetery located at the intersection. We were treated to a large flock of bluebirds and several Song Sparrows trying to escape the snow. Maybe next year we should do this cemetery tour on Halloween.

Participants: Judy Ellyson, Bruce Gardner (leader), Ken Hunt, Don Swartzendruber.

Birds (29 species): Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, American Crow, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Eastern Meadowlark, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– Bruce Gardner

**October 15, Meeting.** At the October 2009 meeting Linda and Robert Scarth, photographers and writers from Cedar Rapids, presented and discussed images from their book *Deep Nature: Photographs from Iowa*,

published by the University of Iowa Press, 2009. A six minute slide show with music by Paul Imholte was followed by readings from their book essay and John Pearson's essay on his response to what he sees in the preserves and 'wild' places in Iowa. They talked about how the book came to be, their approaches to photography and the importance of the small in the larger environment. Sometimes large size is equated with significance and they specialize in presenting the small and significant in nature through their photography.

A supplement to the book may be found on their site [www.scarthphoto.com/bookimages.htm](http://www.scarthphoto.com/bookimages.htm). A page of thumbnails of the images in the book has links to information about each subject. There is also a linked PDF file of this information which may be downloaded, printed and cropped to fit in the back of the book. Examples of the breadth of their photography also may be found in their web galleries

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood, Karen Disbrow, Chris and Anne Edwards, Roger and Linda Fisher, Bruce Gardner, Ken Hunt, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Lorraine Kent, Pat Kieffer, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Viana Rockel, Linda Rudolph, Jim and Sharon Scheib.

– Karen Disbrow

**October 25, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area.** We began our birding at the picnic shelter on the east side of Pleasant Creek Lake north of Palo. It was a perfect fall day with little wind and there weren't many water birds on the lake. It wasn't long after arriving that we spotted what would be our best bird of the day, a Western Grebe. It was well west in the middle of the lake. We decided to drive around on the south side to get a better look. There we also found some Pied-billed Grebes, a Great Blue Heron, and a lone Forster's Tern. An American Pipit was a flyover. We then headed over to the north side. There weren't any new water birds and the duck hunters in the blind across the water must have been terribly bored. They packed it in pretty early. The first birds found

were about thirty Eastern Bluebirds migrating overhead. They called to one another continually as they passed. It was really nice to find a pair of Palm Warblers, which made themselves conspicuous on the chain-link fence. The bushes nearby also held a beautiful Harris's Sparrow that also remained very visible. We added a number of sparrow species in that area including Swamp and Lincoln's. Another scope of the lake from the east end before leaving produced five Horned Grebes, a dozen Ruddy Ducks and a Lesser Scaup—didn't see those sneak in. And a Barred Owl hooted from the nearby woodlot.

Our next stop was the Lewis Bottoms. This is a new wetland presumably created by the flooding that devastated the nearby town of Palo last year. Lewis Bottoms Rd. running south from Pleasant Creek cuts right through it, so access is very convenient. Bill thought he had seen three Brewer's Blackbirds there, but these never could be re-found for examination. We did find more waterfowl in the form of shovelers, Green-winged Teal, and Ring-necked Ducks. A dowitcher and both yellowlegs were a nice surprise. Also in the area were more Swamp and Lincoln's Sparrows.

After a traditional stop at the Palo Mini Mart—gotta keep up the ecotourism contribution—we headed down to Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids. There wasn't too much on the lake that day, but we did add Mallard, Canada Goose, and a pelican to our list. All in all, it was a very nice outing. Thanks to Linda for driving.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Ken Hunt, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Ramona McGurk, Linda Rudolph, Bill Scheible.

Birds (45 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Western Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser

Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Ring-billed Gull, Forster's Tern, Rock Pigeon, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit, Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– Chris Caster

### **November 1, Redbird Farm Wildlife Area.**

The weather was calm, temperature 40 degrees, with a pink, cloud-studded sunrise. We met at Fin & Feather and drove to Redbird Farm, stopping to observe some Canada Geese floating on water in a field on the south side of Black Diamond Road. We passed an American Kestrel on a wire and a Red-tailed Hawk on a post. Flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds trailed overhead.

The parking lots at Redbird Farm were nearly full on the opening day of pheasant season. A few hunters in orange patrolled the wetland on the south side of the road. We pursued our plan to stay alongside the cornfield (planted by the DNR for attracting wildlife), on the north side of the road, in good view of any possible hunters. Several of us wore orange.

The fence line on the west side of the cornfield, usually teeming with sparrows, was quiet after so much hunter traffic, but along the north edge of the field a Fox Sparrow soon jumped into sight. It was the first of a hundred Fox Sparrows we saw—by far the most abundant species present.

We made our way along a row of sorghum in the field—sighting a Great Blue Heron coming off the creek—to the junction of Old Woman's Creek with the North Fork of Old Man's Creek, and then, along a deer trail, by the main creek to the road. In addition to dozens of Fox Sparrows,

we sighted a Song Sparrow, an American Tree Sparrow, a Downy Woodpecker, a Red-tailed Hawk, an American Goldfinch, a few American Robins, some House Sparrows and a flock of 12 or more Cedar Waxwings. We heard a Red-bellied Woodpecker.

Back on the road, we walked east across the bridge, then turned left on Hazelwood Avenue, sighting many sparrows in the brush along the east side of the road: many Fox Sparrows, one American Tree Sparrow, more House Sparrows, a few White-throated Sparrows and an immature White-crowned Sparrow. None of the sparrows was making much noise, and we especially noted the absence of the usual song of the White-throated Sparrow.

We were pleased to see such an abundance of Fox Sparrows, the target bird for the morning, and a specialty of Redbird Farm in the fall. The group was full of good spotters who made sure we didn't accidentally see any Kookaburras or Australian Magpies.

Participants: John Broz, Linda Donelson (leader), Therese Guedon, Peter Hansen, Ken Hunt, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Pat Kieffer, Ramona McGurk, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Marybeth Slonneger.

Birds (22 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, House Sparrow.

—Linda Donelson

**November 19, Meeting.** Barbara Boyle was ill, so Judy Felder graciously stepped in at the last moment with an update on Indiangrass Hills in Iowa County. This is an area that the ICBC has been birding for at least 10 years.

The original 480 acres of Indiangrass Hills were purchased in 1997 by Sandy Rhodes, Judy Felder, and Mary Brown, who were interested in having a property with prairie that they could work on and pass on to future generations. All three had spent years working on other prairies owned by various entities where the future land use was sometimes in question. In 2005 the group purchased an additional 160 acres of adjoining land. The entire 640 acres was then donated to the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), a non-profit land trust, with reserve life estates for Sandy, Mary, and Judy. INHF purchased an adjoining 112 acres in 2009 which will be managed separately. There are other adjoining properties that are also being managed as remnant prairies. Remnant prairies differ from restored prairies in that they have never been plowed, and they serve as seed banks for adjoining land. Indiangrass Hills had been grazed in some areas, and other parts had been allowed to grow up in trees, bushes and vines. Some areas were farmed and some areas were planted for hay.

This is a very large area, so the three had to learn to use larger equipment than hand tools. Sandy, in particular, had used only hand tools when he worked on Williams Prairie to cut back the woody species in the 1980s. Over the years they have cleared and burned large areas, and waiting in the soil were the seeds of prairie species just waiting for the right opportunity to germinate and grow. Remnant prairies are a joy to behold, as each season brings more prairie plants back. They have done very little actual planting of seed, and when they do plant they are using seed from their own plants or nearby local areas. They have kept meticulous records of the areas cleared, burned, and planted.

As everyone knows this has been an extremely wet fall. Harvest has been delayed, as well as fall prairie burns. There are very few days when it is dry enough, wind conditions are right, and the adjacent corn or bean fields have been harvested. Oh yes, and having enough

volunteers to do a burn. Judy likes to have a minimum of 11 people. If this is something you would like to try, I highly recommend you contact Judy. Not only are their burns educational, they are run in a very safe manner. Judy had pictures of the last burn done a week before. Since the vegetation had so much moisture, the resulting burn had dense white smoke and was a slow burn. With any burn you need to notify the authorities, maybe more than once. Indiangrass Hills lies on the border of two volunteer fire departments and within a few miles of I-80, and lots of smoke being visible for many hours brought many calls to 911.

Of the 68 acres burned there was at least one-third that is brome with some lesser amount of regenerating remnant. There was CRP, which is required to be burned with eastern gamma grass CRP filter strips along a ditch. There was an entire slope that is prairie remnant, another smaller prairie remnant, one large hillside that is prairie remnant and inter-seeded remnant, a small pasture paddock with degraded a prairie remnant that has been seeded, an abandoned road with ROW that has prairie remnant, and a fescue/brome pasture. The goal of the burn was

to set back woody invasives and domestic grass, and to invigorate prairie species and provide a good seed bed for a dormant season seeding in a wetland.

There were questions about invertebrates and burning such a large area. An inventory was done recently that showed that the Regal Fritillary, a rare prairie butterfly species, was found. However, while a vegetation inventory was done at the time of purchase, an invertebrate inventory was not done at that time.

This was a very interesting talk with gorgeous photography, much of which was by Barbara Boyle.

Attendees: Barry Buschelman, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Linda and Roger Fisher, Jim and Karole Fuller, Bruce Gardner, Peter Hansen, Lois Hughes, Ken Hunt, Merle Ihne, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Lorraine Kent, Jane Knoedel, Dave Kyllingstad, Nancy Lynch, Ramona McGurk, Viana Rockel, Jim Scheib, Marcia Shaffer.

– *Karen Disbrow*

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## Iowa City Bird Club

**For general bird club information, or to lead or suggest a field trip,** contact our president and field trip coordinator, Karen Disbrow at (319) 339-1017 or [k\\_disbrow@yahoo.com](mailto:k_disbrow@yahoo.com).

**Annual membership dues** are \$15 per household or \$10 for students, payable by January 1st for the coming year. Check your mailing label for the year you have paid through. Make checks payable to Eastern Iowa Birdwatch and mail to Bruce Gardner, 3055 Wapsi Ave. NE, Iowa City, IA 52240. You may contact Bruce at (319) 643-2575 or [woodsidefarms@juno.com](mailto:woodsidefarms@juno.com).

**Our club web site** is located at [www.icbirds.org](http://www.icbirds.org) and is maintained by Jim Scheib. You may contact Jim at (319) 337-5206 or [jim@tenlongview.net](mailto:jim@tenlongview.net).

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### ***Eastern Iowa Birdwatch***

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