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# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

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Volume 30 Number 3

December 2010

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

**December 19, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count.** To participate, contact Bob Dick at 337-4945 by Wednesday, December 15. See page 4 for more information.

**January 9, Sunday, 8:00–10:00 a.m. Bird Feeder Watch Social** hosted by Jim and Sharon Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll NE, north of Iowa City. Come for coffee and rolls and watch the winter birds visiting the feeders. See our web site for directions.

**January 20, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting at the Coralville Library.** We will show a film about Madera Canyon, Arizona, a world-renowned birding hotspot. *Snow date January 27 – in case of bad weather, check our web site for rescheduling information.*

**January 23, 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 30, Sunday, 1-4 p.m. Coralville WinterFest at Iowa River Landing.** Activities include sleigh rides, skiing, ice sculptures, food, music, games, and more. ICBC will have a display and viewing area setup at the Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. Anyone interested in helping please call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

**February 5, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Amana Turkey Walk and Feast.** Join us for a morning hike through the woods to search for Wild Turkeys, Saw-whet Owls, and other winter species, followed by breakfast at the Amanas. Please contact Rick Hollis at 665-3141 or [xiboia@earthlink.net](mailto:xiboia@earthlink.net) if you plan to attend.

**February 13, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Quad Cities** for gulls and other water birds on the Mississippi River. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

Continued on next page →

## Schedule (continued)

**February 17, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Birding Panama with Doug Harr, Iowa Audubon President. *Check our web site for the meeting location.*

**March 12, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Burlington Area** for 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 Drive.* Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**March 19, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Clinton Area** including Eagle Point Park and L&D 13 for waterfowl and other early migrants. This is a joint field trip with Clinton's Riverview Birding Group. This will be an all-day trip so bring a sack lunch or snack. Chris Edwards, 430-4732.

**March 24, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Mike Coffey, USFWS, will speak about his experiences assisting with bird recovery in the Gulf of Mexico following the BP oil spill. **Billy Reiter-Marolf, Iowa BBA Coordinator,** will provide an update on the BBA. *Check our web site for the meeting location.*

**March 29, 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 course schedule.

**April 3, 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 Drive. BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.* Rick Hollis, 665-3141.

## Other Dates of Note

**December 18 – January 5, National Audubon Christmas Bird Count Period.** Nearly fifty CBCs are held in Iowa every year, many of them here in Eastern Iowa. If you would like to participate in any of these, visit [www.iowabirds.org/birds/CBC.asp](http://www.iowabirds.org/birds/CBC.asp) for dates and contact information.

**January 7-9, Friday-Sunday. Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days.** Eagle watching events are also being held this winter in Clinton, Dubuque, Keokuk, LeClaire, and Muscatine. For a partial list of events, visit [www.mvr.usace.army.mil/missriver/Eagle%20Watching/Eagle%20Main.htm](http://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/missriver/Eagle%20Watching/Eagle%20Main.htm).

**February 18-20, Friday-Sunday. Sax Zim Bog Festival of Birds** in northern Minnesota. Reservations are limited to 150 people and are due January 31. For more information visit <http://moumn.org/sax-zim/>.

**February 18-21, Great Backyard Bird Count.** See page 4 for more information.

**March 8, Tuesday, 6 p.m. Prairie Preview XXVIII** at Parkview Church in Iowa City.

**Late March, Annual Purple Martin Seminar and Workshop** at the CAM Iowa Clothing Center, 1005 Nutmeg Ave., about 3 miles NE of Kalona. The date has not yet been set; for more information call Jim Walters at 466-1134 or Evan Gingerich at 656-3629, or check our website.

## From Our President Karen Disbrow

The holiday season is upon us. First I wanted to let you all know that the University of Iowa Museum of Natural History is seeking donations for conserving the Laysan Island Cyclorama. Specimens for this display were collected in 1911, and the display opened in 1914. The Laysan Island Cyclorama is a unique, valuable resource for research and historical reasons, and has been a special place for generations of Iowa school children. If you are in the habit of giving funds at this time of year, I ask that you consider giving specifically to the Laysan Island Cyclorama Project through the University of Iowa Foundation. I am looking into the possibility of the ICBC holding a fundraiser next year for this project. Contact me if you would like to help set up the fundraiser.

When I went to pick up the key for the October meeting at Grant Wood AEA, I discovered that the rooms were being used that evening for AEA training. I spent the next three hours frantically searching for another location to hold that evening's meeting. Michael Lensing graciously allowed us to use the Oak Hill Lensing Funeral Home next door to Grant Wood AEA for our meeting. If you know or see Michael be sure to thank him again. Grant Wood AEA has changed their room reservation policy, and we can now reserve the room only three months in advance. This presents a problem for our January-March meetings. At this time I have not yet found a location for our February and March meetings – please check the web site as those dates draw closer for the locations of the meetings.

We are teaching the Introduction to Birding Course again at Kent Park, starting on the last Tuesday in March. Attendance is free for all bird club members, so come and brush up on your skills. And if you know of anyone who might want to learn birding, please let them know about the course.

We have some great meeting programs for 2011: in January, a film on the natural wonders of Madera Canyon near Green Valley, AZ. Some of you may remember Bud Gode, who retired to that area in the late 1990s and spent several years working and researching in Madera Canyon. If you should travel there (which I highly recommend), look for the bench dedicated to Bud's memory. In February, Doug Harr is giving a program on birding Panama. In March, Mike Coffey, who worked on the BP oil spill recovery in the Gulf of Mexico for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, will speak about his experiences there.

We also have some great birding outings planned, starting with the Christmas Bird Count December 19; the bird feeder watch social at the Scheibs; and trips to the Mississippi River. Also, the annual Great Backyard Bird Count is being held February 18-21. We would like to gather as much local data as possible for this year's count – check our web site for a reporting form and more information.

I am sure the winter season will have many birding opportunities for rare birds that find their way to Iowa. After all, Iowa is where birds and birders meet.

Good Birding to All,  
Karen

## Renewal Reminder

It's time to send in your membership dues for 2011. 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. If you have any questions about your membership status, please contact Bruce at 643-2575 or [woodsidefarms@juno.com](mailto:woodsidefarms@juno.com).

## Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 19

This year's Iowa City Christmas Bird Count will be held Sunday, December 19, 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 Wed. December 15.

The pre-count planning meeting will be Monday, December 6, 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.

An optional dinner and 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.

## Great Backyard Bird Count February 18-21

This year's Great Backyard Bird Count will be held February 18-21. It is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon, and Bird Studies Canada. According to the GBBC web site, "The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds."

Locally, the Iowa City area has been under-represented during past counts, and we would like to encourage more participation this year. Taking part is easy: count birds for at least 15 minutes, at as many places and on as many days during the four-day period as you like – just keep a separate list of counts for each day and location. You can count birds anywhere: in your yard, at a local park or wildlife refuge, or anywhere else. Then enter your results on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site, at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/). For a local checklist and reporting form, visit the ICBC web site.



## Membership Spotlight on: **Jim Fuller**

**What is your occupation?** Retired dentist and University of Iowa dental professor.

**Tell us about your family.** Wife of 50 years, Karole; daughters Anne Means of Madison, WI, Amy Stockman of Oxford, IA, and Laura Fuller of Helena, MT; five grandchildren.

**Where did you grow up?** Burlington, Iowa.

**When and how did your interest in birds develop?** My early interest came from my mother, Jane Fuller. I really started somewhat seriously in 1972.

**Did you have any birding mentors?** Tom Kent, Mike Newlon, and Cal and Bernie Knight.

**When did you join the Iowa City Bird Club?** I was a sort of founding member, attending the first planning meeting in 1972.

**Have you been involved with the Iowa Ornithologists' Union?** I have served as IOU Vice President (twice), Board member (twice), Records Committee member, and managed the Iowa Birdline from 1988 to 2001.

**What is your favorite backyard bird?** Tufted Titmouse.

**What particular aspects of birding interest you the most?** Chasing rarities, both in-state and throughout the ABA area, and participating in Big Days and Big Years.

**What is your favorite field guide?** National Geographic and Sibley.

**Do you keep a life list?** Yes, it is presently 765, with 387 in Iowa and 320 in Johnson County.

**What are the most recent birds you added to your life list and Iowa list?** In 2010, Roadside Hawk (in Texas) and Orange-billed Nightingale-Thrush (in South Dakota). In Iowa, Anna's Hummingbird (in Des Moines) and Say's Phoebe (near Spirit Lake).

**What interesting birds have you seen in your yard?** Swallow-tailed Kite, Sandhill Crane, both crossbills, Evening Grosbeak, all three swan species, Long-tailed Duck, and probably a number of others I can't think of. My yard list is at 208, the highest total in Iowa.

**Where is your favorite place in Iowa to bird?** Fremont County, Shimek State Forest and Lacey-Keosauqua State Park in SE Iowa, and Red Rock Reservoir.

**Tell us about some of your most exciting Iowa birding moments.** There have been many. Seeing all three loons (Common, Red-throated, and Pacific) in one telescope view from the marina at Red Rock Reservoir; seeing all three ibis species (White-faced, Glossy, and White) in Iowa in 1993; reaching 311 species in an Iowa Big Year, and seeing 300 or more four years in a row; finding two first state record

birds, both arctic gulls – Slaty-backed Gull at the Quad Cities on Valentine’s Day 1989, and Ross’s Gull below the Red Rock Dam on Halloween 1993.

**What is your Iowa “nemesis” bird?** It was Say’s Phoebe until last summer, and now it is Black Vulture.

**Tell us about a favorite birding experience or place outside of Iowa.** Attu, Gambell, and Pribilofs, Alaska. I have been to Attu three times for a total of eight weeks.

**Do you have any hobbies or interests besides birding?** Prairies, smallmouth bass fishing wading streams in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, hiking, Iowa Hawkeye sports, traveling.

**Do you have any favorite movies or TV shows?** My favorite all-time movie is *Dr. Zhivago*. My favorite all-time TV show is *Mission: Impossible*. My favorite currently and for many years has been *Jeopardy*.

**Have you read any good books lately?** I am currently studying *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer.

**What is your favorite restaurant?** My favorite seafood restaurants are Red Lobster, Dixie Crossroads in Titusville, FL, and the Fish Market in San Diego. Locally, the Amanas.

## 25 Years Ago in *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch*

At ten pages, the Winter 1985 issue of *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch*, edited by Carol Thompson, was the longest issue of the publication to date.

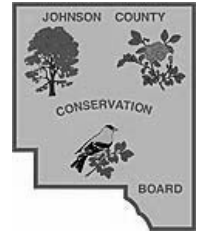
Rick Hollis reported on the first annual Iowa City Hawk Watch, conducted on September 22, 1985 by himself and Bud Gode. Despite sporadic light rain throughout the morning, the count was considered a success and tallied 209 Broad-winged Hawks, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, 6 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 1 Cooper’s Hawk. The annual hawk watch continued at this location for another three years with moderate success, before being relocated to the west side of Mehaffey Bridge for two years, and finally in 1991 to the present site at Stainbrook Preserve on the east side of Mehaffey Bridge.

An interesting article entitled “Iowa City Christmas Bird Count for Non-Birders” provided a 10-year summary of the Iowa City

CBC for the years 1975-1984. The author was not credited. The count averaged 31 participants during that time, which is not much below the average of 34 participants we have had in the last ten years. This is somewhat surprising considering that in the past 25 years the popularity of birdwatching and the size of our membership have far outpaced that modest 10% increase. Whether due to changes in bird distribution, or increased observer skill and knowledge, our average species total has increased from 57 to 64 in the past 25 years. Back then, fewer Canada Geese, Wild Turkeys, Bald Eagles, Cooper’s Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, American Kestrels, Eastern Bluebirds, and House Finches (none) were found. In contrast, more Northern Bobwhites, Eastern Screech-Owls, Long-eared Owls, Short-eared Owls, Red-headed Woodpeckers, American Tree Sparrows, Evening Grosbeaks, and House Sparrows were seen. [I have an Excel spreadsheet showing the species results from all 59 years of the Iowa City CBC, which I can provide to anyone who is interested. – *Chris Edwards*]



## Introduction to Birding Course March 26 – April 26, 2011 at Kent Park



The Iowa City Bird Club and the Johnson County Conservation Department are offering a 5-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 class and 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 29, 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 April 3, 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, April 5, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II** by Rick Hollis. Continuation of first session topics.

**Saturday, April 9, 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 12, 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 16, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HAWKEYE WILDLIFE AREA** near North Liberty. We expect to see ducks, geese, American White Pelicans, and other spring migrants. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one.

**Tuesday, April 19, 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.

**Wednesday, April 20, 7 p.m. Beginning Birding for Kids** ages 7-12 by Rick Hollis. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

**Saturday, April 23, 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 Wednesday night so a loaner can be made available.

**Sunday, April 24, 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 26, 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.

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

## Book Reviews

### Rick Hollis

**The Private Lives of Birds: A Scientist Reveals the Intricacies of Avian Social Life.** Bridget Stutchbury. Illustrated by Julie Zickefoose. Walker and Company, 2010. 272 pages. Hardcover, \$25.00.

What a neat book. The author writes well and puts in bits and pieces of new discoveries, not as isolated facts, but in the context of the birds' life styles. The subtitle might just as well have been *Infidelity and Migration*. Most of us, by now, know that it is rare for a bird species to have broods that are the result of a single male parent, and that broods of many species contain chicks that are not the child of their social father. Other species have broods that are mostly the result of input from a single male. Why do some species do it one way, and others 'mess around'? What are the newest findings relating to migration of individual birds? Most early studies were done on species large enough to carry bulky (for a bird) radio transmitters. Studies are now being done on passerines. These aspects of bird lives and many more are explained clearly. All bird watchers regardless of their interest level will learn fascinating things about avian life styles from this book. At one point in her studies, the author appears to have spent time at Lakeside Laboratories in NW Iowa, and in part of one chapter she discusses her Bank Swallow studies from that time. This book was previously published in Canada as *The Bird Detective*. Southbury previously wrote 2007's *Silence of the Songbirds*, a book that I am now going to have to read. Both that book and this one can be found at the Iowa City Public Library.

**A Guide to the Nests, Eggs, and Nestlings of North America (Second Edition).** Paul J. Baicich and J. O. Harrison. Princeton University Press, 2005. 416 pages. Includes line drawings, colored plates, index, and bibliography. Paperback, \$29.95.

This is THE book for learning about North American bird nests. It is far superior to the book in the Peterson Field Guide Series, *Birds' Nests*, which is somewhat confusingly authored by a different Harrison (Hal H. Harrison). The Peterson guide has photos looking mostly down into the nest, and the eggs themselves appear dim and small. This guide features nice line drawings, with a side view. The colored plates of eggs are lovely. There are also 16 color plates of nestlings, often including gape patterns. The text includes descriptions of nest sites, nests, breeding season, eggs, incubation period, nestling and nestling period. When I find a nest or egg fragment, this the first and typically only place I look.

## Iowa Audubon Corner

### Karen Disbrow

The Iowa Audubon board met on November 13, 2010. The 2011 Pelican Gala and Festival is being held in the Iowa City area in September; further details on logistics and locations will be reviewed at the March 2011 meeting. The design of the viewing platform for Otter Creek Marsh is completed and construction is expected to be completed in early 2012, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of Sandhill Cranes nesting at Otter Creek Marsh after a 100-year absence. A new map of the IBA areas has been completed and should be available for viewing once the website is updated. The Technical Committee will be meeting to discuss updates for the website. Grant application forms, directions and monies were approved and will be available for viewing on the website. Money raised in Iowa by the Aveda Company campaign will be used for Purple Martin and Chimney Swift tower construction in Tama and Benton counties. Displays will be purchased and put together for each club/chapter to use at local events to publicize the work of Iowa Audubon and encourage new members to join. The next meeting will be March 2011.



## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

**July 18, Backyard Habitat Walk at Blossom Shaw's.** Half a dozen club members enjoyed a leisurely Sunday afternoon visit to Jay and Blossom Shaw's yard on Windsor Drive in Iowa City. The couple purchased the home in 1979, and Blossom set out to improve the "muddy hill" of a backyard. Today it is a beautiful sanctuary of art and nature.

In the early 1980s Blossom struggled to grow grass underneath the large silver maple and other trees in the backyard. When Jay designed and built a terrace curving out from the house, it gave her an opportunity to plant a shade garden filled with native woodland wildflowers and hostas. She expanded on this idea to develop a mini woodland, and added small native trees such as pagoda dogwood, American hornbeam, and serviceberry which provided food and shelter for birds and other wildlife. She added many rocks to provide natural-looking landscaping, and several dozen woodland flower species. A large wood-chip island ties the woodland to the other shade gardens.

In recent years Blossom has created two prairie gardens in the sunnier spots of the backyard, using native prairie plants from Ion Exchange in northeastern Iowa. The front yard also features a butterfly-hummingbird garden. Blossom has worked hard to make the yard a welcoming habitat for birds, offering feeders, water, and nest boxes, and she has identified 54 species of birds along with various mammals and other wildlife.

In addition to natural beauty, several sculptures add aesthetic appeal. The sculptures were created by and honor the memory of the Shaws' son, Eric. These include stainless steel wing-like figures entitled Kite Plants, and another piece called Angel which stands in front of a large hemlock.

Blossom's yard was recently featured in the Summer 2010 issue of *Woodlands and Prairies Magazine*. This 32-page full-color professional magazine with a focus on Midwestern conservation is published quarterly in Northeast Iowa, and is self-described as "About caring for your piece of this Good Earth." For subscription information, visit their web site at [www.mrswoodsmagazine.com](http://www.mrswoodsmagazine.com) or email [mrswoods@mrswoodsmagazine.com](mailto:mrswoods@mrswoodsmagazine.com), or call 563-539-4144. The summer issue also featured articles on two recent tall grass prairie management books; an interview and photo gallery from one of the books' authors; a profile of an Ohio prairie conservationist; a feature on larch and tamarack trees; battling invasive Japanese knotweed; and Naturalist's Notebook with photos and notes by Carl Kurtz.

Participants: Karen Disbrow, Jonni Ellsworth, Therese Guedon, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble, Blossom and Jay Shaw (hosts), Marybeth Slonneger.

– *Chris Edwards*

**July 25, Iowa City Butterfly Count.** Our 12th annual Iowa City Butterfly Count was held on Sunday, July 25, postponed from the day before due to wet weather. Our count is part of the North American Butterfly Association's 4th of July Count program. We had a great day, with nice weather, many butterflies, and an enthusiastic group of 12 participants including veterans and first-timers.

We began our day at 9 a.m. at the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park. After a field guide review of some of the most common butterflies we expected to encounter, we walked the nearby trails. The prairie was in its full glory and there were many butterflies about, including two Gray Commas and two Northern Pearly-eyes. We then drove to the Valley View Prairie and went on a long hike past the retention ponds and through the prairie. Near the ponds we found several Bronze Coppers, and there were many Little Yellows and Eastern Tailed-Blues "puddling" on the mud. A

Common Checkered-Skipper was an unusual find. At the end of our hike, a fly-by Giant Swallowtail gave us 33 species, and it was time for lunch.

Some of our group called it a day, but Ken, Tom, and I continued on to Macbride Nature-Recreation Area for a picnic lunch and then more counting, where our finds included two Gray Hairstreaks. We hiked through the prairie at Lake Macbride State Park, and then finished the afternoon at Solon Recreation and Nature Area, where we found several Common Sootyings and three Variegated Fritillaries, a new species for the count. On my drive home I made a brief stop at Turkey Creek Preserve and drove past a large alfalfa field where I estimated there were 600 Clouded Sulphurs and 150 Orange Sulphurs.

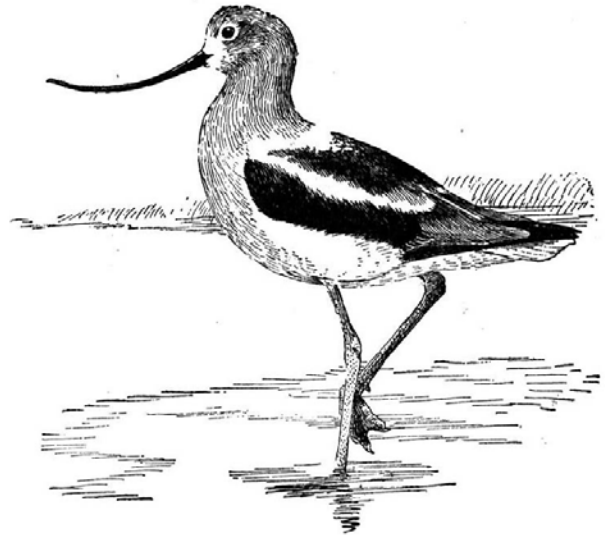
Overall we saw 37 species and 1925 individuals in 9.5 hours of counting (12-year average, 33 species and 894 individuals). It was a good day for southern immigrant butterflies such as Little Yellow, Gray Hairstreak, American Snout, Common Buckeye, and Fiery Skipper, and quite a few resident species were also seen in good numbers. Fourteen species, listed in italics below, were seen in record numbers.

Participants: David Curry, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards (leader), Ken Hunt, Natasha Ivanova, Tom Jantscher, Ramona McGurk, Lucas Miller, Marcus Miller, Brenda Nations, Mary Noble, Lisa Spellman.

Butterflies (37 species, 1925 individuals): Black Swallowtail 13, Giant Swallowtail 1, *Eastern Tiger Swallowtail* 29, Cabbage White 48, Clouded Sulphur 969, Orange Sulphur 232, *Little Yellow* 119, Bronze Copper 3, *Gray Hairstreak* 3, Eastern Tailed-Blue 63, Summer Azure 23, *American Snout* 12, *Variegated Fritillary* 3 (new count species), Great Spangled Fritillary 32, Meadow Fritillary 12, *Pearl Crescent* 39, Question Mark 8, *Eastern Comma* 7, *Gray Comma* 3, *American Lady* 6, Painted Lady 6, Red Admiral 44, *Common Buckeye* 38,

Red-spotted Purple 8, Viceroy 12, *Hackberry Emperor* 10, Northern Pearly-eye 2, Common Wood-Nymph 10, Monarch 76, Silver-spotted Skipper 12, Common Checkered-Skipper 1, Common Sootywing 5, *Least Skipper* 51, *Fiery Skipper* 7, Peck's Skipper 3, *Tawny-edged Skipper* 12, Dun Skipper 4.

– Chris Edwards



**August 22, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** The morning was beautiful – clear, sunny, and 72° to start the trip. We took James Avenue to Swan Lake Road and then headed west. At Swan Lake, only Pied-billed Grebes were found on the water, though an Osprey was seen fishing. Tree Swallows were not seen flying over the lake, but were instead seen on wires near cornfields, where apparently the insects were most numerous.

Along Babcock Access road, there was a flock of Killdeer but no other migrating shorebirds. Eurasian Tree Sparrows were found in the bushes there, as was a Broad-winged Hawk. Round Pond had a few egrets, but the highlight of the trip was about a mile further west at the next parking area. Many Great Egrets were seen there, and at about 10 a.m. American White Pelicans started to fly over us as low as 15-20 feet above our heads. What an awesome sight it was!

Participants: Karen Disbrow (leader) and approximately 8 other people.

Birds (35 species): Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Broad-winged Hawk, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Indigo Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**September 11, Hickory Hill Park.** First, an apology to those I stranded at Hy-Vee for this bird walk! I slept through a solid hour of alarm and got to the parking lot 15 minutes late. Really sorry folks! I did find a few patient folks waiting at the Conklin Ave. entrance to Hickory Hill Park so we were able to salvage the morning... hopefully the earlier crew had the same fortune! We found a couple of small warbler flocks and picked up a few odds and ends as we went along. It turned out to be a good morning! Best warblers were a Bay-breasted Warbler and a Blue-winged Warbler. In my rush I also forgot to write everyone's names down.

(Carol Winter reports that the earlier group, which also included Matt and Leslie McAndrew and Patricio Otero, enjoyed a nice morning in the park, but saw far more runners, walkers, dogs, chipmunks, squirrels, and insects than birds. They noted many Gray Catbirds, Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, American Robins, and a Northern Cardinal. Matt identified various kinds of trees for the group.)

Birds (30 species): Cooper's Hawk, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Least Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Blue-winged Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Wilson's Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch.

– *Jason Paulios*

**September 16, Meeting.** Jim Durbin of Cedar Rapids Audubon kicked off our fall season with a talk about backyard landscaping for birds. When Jim and Joyce moved to their Marion home in 1976, the backyard consisted of a large maple tree amid a sea of grass. Over the years they have transformed their yard into a suburban oasis for birds and other wildlife. The maple and a tiny patch of grass are still there, but they are surrounded by large evergreens, native shrubs and wildflowers, water features, bird feeders, and sitting areas.

Jim stressed that three components are necessary to attract birds: food, water, and shelter. Jim has a variety of bird feeders, many of which he built himself using inexpensive materials. Rather than buying seed mixes, which often contain a large proportion of undesirable seeds, he prefers to buy bulk seeds and mix them himself. He employs a variety of strategies, such as self-closing feeders and stove-pipe pole guards, to battle the squirrels and raccoons in his neighborhood, but admitted there is no sure-fire solution.

Jim uses a variety of native shrubs and understory trees which provide excellent cover for birds as well as a food source in the form of berries. He especially likes highbush cranberry, gray dogwood, and wahoo. The dogwoods provide abundant berries in late summer and

early fall for catbirds, thrushes, vireos, and other birds, whereas the cranberries ripen slowly and provide a food source for Cedar Waxwings and other birds in late winter. Elderberries and pokeberries are also excellent food plants. Jim said native plants also attract many insects, which in turn are a food source for many birds including warblers and orioles. Birders should avoid nursery plants advertised as insect-resistant or insect-repellant. He pointed out that fruit trees attract many birds and butterflies if some of the fruit is left to rot on the ground. Jim has also planted many native woodland wildflowers. Some of these could be considered "weeds", such as stinging nettle, which is a host plant for several butterfly species. To attract butterflies, not only do you need nectar plants, but also host plants for their caterpillars to feed on.

Jim said that water is a key to attracting many birds throughout the year. To that end, in addition to bird baths, he has installed three small ponds, a small stream linking the ponds, and a waterfall in his backyard. He uses a pump to keep the water circulating in the stream and waterfall year-round. Both birds and humans are attracted to the sound of moving water. Water also attracts other interesting wildlife such as frogs, toads, and dragonflies.

Jim uses his backyard as a nature photography studio. He purchased a turkey hunting blind for use as a photography blind, and has spent hours capturing beautiful photographs of warblers and other birds. Hundreds of his spectacular photographs, including photos of his backyard, are on display on his two web sites: [www.birdsofiowa.com](http://www.birdsofiowa.com) and [www.insectsofiowa.com](http://www.insectsofiowa.com)

Thanks Jim for a terrific presentation, and for being an inspiration to backyard birders everywhere.

During the business portion of the meeting, Treasurer Bruce Gardner gave a brief report. Following payment for the September

newsletter, our cash balance is \$1,309, and during the past twelve months revenues were \$1,710 and expenses were \$1,530.

Karen reported that 51 people attended Iowa Audubon's Pelican Gala in Ames. She said Iowa Audubon plans to hold the September 2011 Pelican Festival and Gala near Iowa City, with help from Iowa City Bird Club members. Karen said she is also looking into holding a Turkey Vulture event next June, with help from a Loras College professor who has studied vultures for thirty years.

Attendees: Barry Buschelman, Nancy Carl, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Jim and Karole Fuller, Bruce Gardner, Peter Hansen, Rick Hollis, Lois Hughes, Ken Hunt, Merle Ihne, Dave Kyllingstad, Nancy Lynch, Gail McLure, Sally Moore, Mary Noble, Gerry Peterson, Linda Rudolph.

– Chris Edwards

**September 18, Annual Hawk Watch.**  
Cancelled due to bad weather.



**October 9, Keokuk County.** It was a beautiful day for a fall outing, with sunny skies and unseasonably warm weather. Many of the trees were turning orange and gold, and farmers were in the fields harvesting corn and soybeans. Our destination was Keokuk County, which is nearby but is not often visited by birders. We drove west on I-80 to Williamsburg, and then

south through a succession of small towns including North and South English. The most notable roadside birds were four Eurasian Collared-Doves in Parnell.

Our first stop was at Belva-Deer Recreation Area, a 1,669-acre mixed use area several miles NE of Sigourney. The park is home to a man-made lake, popular with anglers, which is surrounded by miles of trails through grassland, brush, and timber. Access to the eastern portion of the area was closed due to road construction, so our activities were confined to the western portion. We parked near the campground and walked the trails to the west through grassland and timber. Due to differences in hiking ability, we split into two small groups. Several migrant species were quite numerous. A large, loose flock of Tree Swallows streamed overhead. Yellow-rumped Warblers were feeding on the abundant dogwood berries, while several flocks of noisy Blue Jays flew past in ragged lines. White-throated Sparrows were heard and seen in the understory, and a flock of Cedar Waxwings fed higher in the trees. Northern Flickers were active and vocal. A flock of 50 Turkey Vultures gradually took to the air from their roost and passed over us on their way south. Other highlights included a migrating Osprey, a late House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbirds, and an Orange-crowned Warbler.

After taking a brief driving tour of the south side of the lake, we drove to the upper NW reaches of the lake, where we saw a Palm Warbler, Eastern Meadowlarks, and a Ring-necked Pheasant.

Next we headed to the Fuller Green Valley Addition of the English River Wildlife Area. This area straddles the borders of Keokuk, Iowa, and Washington counties. The water in the marsh was as high as we had ever seen it, but it contained only a few Pied-billed Grebes. We noted four Bald Eagles overhead, and a Belted Kingfisher fishing the marsh. We walked the grassy area east of the parking lot, which lies on

the Keokuk/Iowa county line, and almost immediately kicked up numerous sparrows. One of the first was a LeConte's Sparrow, which offered a brief look before diving for cover. Several minutes later we flushed several more *ammodramus* sparrows. Everyone in the group had great views of LeConte's Sparrows, and a Nelson's Sparrow was briefly seen by part of the group. Before leaving we located another Orange-crowned Warbler, two Common Yellowthroats, and a Savannah Sparrow. Interestingly, we had seen LeConte's Sparrows in both Keokuk Co. and Iowa Co., and it was a new species for both county checklists, as maintained on the Iowa Ornithologists' Union web site at [www.iowabirds.org](http://www.iowabirds.org).

On the way home part of our group stopped at Redbird Farms Wildlife Area in SW Johnson County. By then it was after noon and quite warm, and the birds were less active. We added several Fox Sparrows and a late Indigo Bunting to our trip list, and then called it a day.

Participants: Jess Alexander, Mark Brown, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards (co-leader), Ken Hunt, Mary Noble, Bill Scheible (co-leader).

Birds: (53 species): Canada Goose, Ring-necked Pheasant, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, *accipiter* sp., Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco,

Northern Cardinal, Indigo Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Edwards*

**October 17, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** It was a great day to be out and we had a pretty good crowd for this one. A Red-tailed Hawk caused a few vehicles to stop along F-28 on our way out to Hawkeye. Our second bird was a kestrel at the farmstead on the west side of Greencastle Ave. We then carefully approached the Gun Club Ponds, but nothing was happening there. So we drove further down Greencastle and stopped at the parking lot just south of Half Moon Lake. Now a smart leader would have worked from east to west, keeping the morning sun at our backs, but I chose to lead the group straight into the rising sun. Fortunately most of the birds were in the wet areas to our north. After crossing a tiny creek with some well-placed stepping-stones we were able to point our scope to the north. It was a long ways, but I was certain we were looking at Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls. I was not so certain which yellowlegs we had however. There weren't many birds, but the Great Blue Herons and pelicans seemed to satisfy the crowd for a bit.

After a short walk into the sun we came upon some shrubs with sparrows. We managed to circle around them and got nice looks at Song, White-crowned, Swamp, and Field Sparrows. On the way back to the vehicles with the sun at our backs we came across a Yellow-rumped Warbler and a very cooperative group of Eastern Bluebirds. The male was really gorgeous and tame to the point of daring us to pass. Back at Greencastle Ave. we added a coot and a Pied-billed Grebe to our list, the two lone birds on Half Moon Lake.

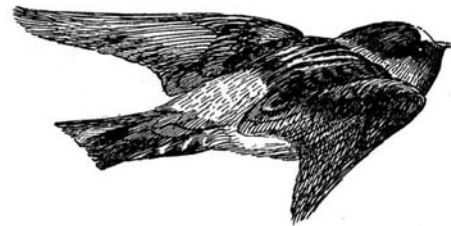
Our next stop was the newly renovated Babcock Access. The bushes around the campground there are usually very productive, but not today. Fortunately there were flocks of cormorants flying around and a group of Northern Shovelers to justify the stop. The final stop was

the Sand Point parking lot. This area was also pretty quiet, but we did find a female Purple Finch and White-throated Sparrows at the Swan Lake Woods. And we got to hear Linda Donelson tell of her harrowing adventures in Antarctica. Karen Disbrow, I hope you're reading this.

Participants: Jess Alexander, Chris Caster (leader), Jerry Denning, Bob and Dara Dick, Linda Donelson, Peter Hansen, Ken Hunt, Doina and Lauren Johnson, Pat Kieffer, Jack Widness.

Birds (37 species): Canada Goose, Northern Shoveler, Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, *accipiter* sp., Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Killdeer, yellowlegs sp., Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Caster*



**October 21, Meeting.** Due to a meeting conflict at Grant Wood AEA, we met at the Lensing Funeral Home next door. Karen announced that Grant Wood AEA had changed their room reservation policy and that meetings could no longer be made more than three months in advance. Because of this she is looking for an alternate meeting location for our January, February, and March meetings. Rick Hollis announced his intention to resume the

Wednesday morning bird walks in the spring, and that leaders are needed to fill in when he is unavailable.

Jim and Sharon Scheib gave a slide show recounting their birding trip to the Durango Highway and San Blas, Mexico, March 3-12, 2010. The trip was guided by David MacKay and Armando Mejia of Solipaso Excursions ([www.solipaso.com](http://www.solipaso.com)). The presentation included photographs of 92 bird species, many of which are endemic to that area.

### ***Mazatlan, Copala, and the Durango Highway***

Until the completion of Mexican Highway 16 in 1985, the Durango Highway was the only paved route over the Sierra Madres in the 1200-mile expanse between the U.S. border and Guadalajara! Considered an engineering marvel at its completion, it climbs from sea level to nearly 8,000 feet in about 60 miles, and continues to be one of the most impressive and scenic drives in Mexico. To this day, it serves as one of the most important transportation links between the coastal ports of Mazatlan and Puerto Vallarta, with the cities of Mexico's central plateau region. It is referred to as the "Durango Highway", named after the capital city in the state of the same name, which is the highway's eastern terminus. This tour concentrated on birding in the western slope of the Sierra, in the state of Sinaloa, and the group never actually set foot in the state of Durango. The extreme elevation changes found along the highway, coupled with significant rainfall amounts and rugged topography, offer an abundance of unique habitats with an incredible variety of bird life. The trip offered the potential to see upwards of 34 Mexican endemics.

The Scheibs flew into Mazatlan, stayed one night at the Holiday Inn on the beach to organize, and then headed with the group into the Sierra Madre Mountains, up the Durango Highway to the small mining village of Copala. They traveled up the Durango Highway on two days to the Chara Pinta Tufted Jay Preserve near La Palmito, and on the third day birded Panuco

Road before heading south to San Blas.

Some good birds in the area included Ruddy Ground-Dove, Black-throated Magpie Jay, Northern-beardless Tyrannulet, Thick-billed Kingbird, Varied Bunting, Rufous-bellied Chachalaca, Crested Caracara, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Broad-billed Hummingbird, Orange-fronted Parakeet, Zone-tailed Hawk, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Golden-Cheeked Woodpecker, Mountain Trogon, Painted Redstart, Slate-throated Redstart, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Russet Nightingale-thrush, Green-striped Brushfinch, Rufous-capped Brushfinch, Tufted Flycatcher, Yellow-eyed Junco, (Brown-throated) House Wren, White-eared Hummingbird, Red Warbler, Red Crossbill, Greater Pewee, Black-headed Siskin, Rusty-crowned Ground-sparrow, Bullock's Oriole, Black-vented Oriole, Streak-backed Oriole, Berylline Hummingbird, Hammond's Flycatcher, Tufted Jay, Yellow Grosbeak, Bright-rumped Attila, Gray-silky Flycatcher, Colima (Least) Pygmy Owl, Military Macaw, Cinnamon Hummingbird, Citroline Trogon, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Rufous-backed Robin (Grayson's Thrush), and Russet-crowned Motmot.

### ***San Blas***

Long recognized for its plethora of species, diversity and sheer numbers of birds, the area surrounding San Blas, in the Mexican state of Nayarit, is well known and a popular destination for birders. The area offers the opportunity to see more than 30 Mexican endemics, interesting tropical birds at their northern limit, as well as a large number of neotropical migrants at their wintering grounds. Much of San Blas' enduring charm is due to the fact that it has never been developed for large-scale tourism, and lacks the big Mexican beach resort feel that is prevalent in many coastal towns.

For five nights the group stayed at the Hotel Garza Canelo in San Blas. This allowed four and a half days of birding in the area including an evening boat trip through the mangroves up

the estuary of the San Christobal to La Tovar to see the Northern Potoo after dark. Daytime trips included La Bajada and the coffee plantation, the sewage ponds and Booby Rock, Cerro de San Juan and Rancho La Noria, and the old fort and cathedral on the bluff above San Blas.

The final morning featured a trip to Chacalill Road to find the Elegant Quail, and then boat trips on the Rio San Cristobal in both late morning and late afternoon.

Some of the featured species were Wood Stork, Neotropic Cormorant, Gull-billed Tern, Mottled Owl, Lesser Night-hawk, Dusky-capped Flycatcher, Calliope Hummingbird, Bumblebee Hummingbird, Spotted Wren, Gray-breasted Martin, Tropical Kingbird, White-collared Seedeater, Vermillion Flycatcher, Elegant Quail, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Grayish Saltator, Magnificent Frigatebird, Black-necked Stilt, Gray Hawk, Anhinga, Crane Hawk, Snail Kite, Common Black Hawk, Social Flycatcher, Green Kingfisher, Limpkin, Purple Gallinule, Boat-billed Heron, Bare-throated Tiger Heron, and Northern Potoo.

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, John and Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Vic and Nola Edwards, Jonni Ellsworth, John Erickson, Jim Fuller, Bruce Gardner, Bill Griffiee, Rick Hollis, Lois Hughes, Ken Hunt, Pat Kieffer, Dave Kyllingstad, Kristen Lawton, Toni Ohrt, Gerry Peterson, Viana Rockel, Ed and Mary Rolenc, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Richard Tetrault.

– *Jim Scheib*

**November 14, Cedar Lake and Lake Macbride Nature-Recreation Area.** This outing was designated as the “Mystery Field Trip” where we would all decide last minute where to go birding based on recent sightings. Since I was too busy to do any scouting myself before the trip, the group followed up on the only local posting from the previous day and it was a good one. Diana Pesek had found a pair

of White-winged Scoters at Cedar Lake. We headed straight to Cedar Rapids and covered the lake pretty thoroughly, seeing some decent birds such as Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Double-crested Cormorant, Lesser Scaup, and Hooded Merganser, but the scoters had apparently moved on.

We then decided to return to Iowa City by driving through Lake Macbride. Our first stop at Mehaffey Bridge was a complete bust, with absolutely nothing on the water on either side of the road. However, our next stop at the Raptor Center was quite productive. In the bird blind and surrounding areas, we enjoyed Red-headed Woodpecker, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and a surprisingly large group of about 50 American White Pelicans flying overhead. Our next stop was further north at the south arm of Lake Macbride. There wasn't a whole lot there, but we did see a Belted Kingfisher and a group of about 30 Bonaparte's Gulls. We finally did locate some waterfowl on the north arm of the lake, getting scope views of a Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Ruddy Ducks, and three Horned Grebes.

Participants: Mark Brown (leader), Jerry Denning, Ken Hunt.

Birds (38 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Wild Turkey, Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Mark Brown*



## ♪ Bird Notes ♪

### Rick Hollis

#### *Bowerbirds and Perspective*

At the May meeting Linda Donelson touched on the topic of bowerbirds, a type of bird which has fascinated me since I first read of them. Bowerbirds are Oscine Passeriformes and are distantly related to crows. They are found SE of Wallace's Line in Australia and New Guinea.

Male bowerbirds court females by building intricate bowers in which to display. Males can spend 80% of their time working on their bowers. Bowders, which vary from species to species, often consist of grasses woven together and decorated with rocks, sticks, berries, bottle caps, etc. The Satin Bowerbird decorates its bower with bright blue objects or paints it with blue berries. Great Bowerbirds are 12-14" long and their bower is lined with tightly packed sticks and stretches some twenty inches before ending in a court. The female stands at the beginning of the bower and looks down this avenue paved with sticks, to a court where the male squawks, hops around and waves something colored. I am sure this is very satisfying to female bowerbirds.

As if this were not sufficiently fascinating, the floor of the court is 'paved' with rocks, but they are not just tossed out randomly. They are carefully arranged so from the female's perspective the smallest rocks are to the front and the largest are to the back. This makes the paving stones in the front of the court look smaller than they are, and objects to the rear of the court, including the male bowerbird, look larger than they really are. This forced perspective is an artistic 'trick' which humans have used as far back as the ancient Greeks when they built the Parthenon. Designers of modern casinos and amusement parks also use the same technique.

The question "What is art?" is always difficult to answer. One author of this study on

bowerbirds stated, "Visual art can be defined as the creation of an external visual pattern by one individual in order to influence the behavior of others, and an artistic sense is the ability to create art. Influencing behavior can range from attraction to and voluntary viewing of the art by others to viewers mating with the artist; this is what bowerbirds do. Our definition equates art with conventional signals that are not part of the artist's body. In this sense, bowerbirds are artists and their viewers judge the art, implying an aesthetic sense in birds."

There are some descriptions of this research online. The actual paper is not easily available, but I have a copy should anyone want it.

JA Endler, LC Endler, and NR Doerr. 2010. Great Bowerbirds Create Theaters with Forced Perspective When Seen by Their Audience. *Current Biology* 20, 1679–1684.

#### *House Finch Social Behavior in Relation to Ornamentation*

Conclusion: Male House Finches will use social means to improve their relative attractiveness.

This study was done at a single location in southern Arizona. Whether it applies here in Iowa is unknown. House Finches are highly social birds, and during the non-breeding season typically associate in mixed-sex flocks for feeding and roosting. At this site these flocks number 20-50 individual birds. In my neighborhood, these flocks are much smaller. As the breeding season starts, the mixed flocks get smaller as the mated pairs isolate themselves from the flock. The authors carefully ranked the males in the population according to both ornament area and hue. That males with the brightest red and the most areas covered with red (henceforth, brightest) are most attractive to females has long been known. The authors found that during the non-breeding season, some males moved to other groups. The brightest males stayed put and had few encounters with individuals of other flocks.

Controlling for age, the authors found that the dullest males had more social encounters with other flocks. The brightest males had breeding success or were very likely to in the future. The dullest males were doing something to find a different social environment where they would be relatively more attractive.

Kevin P. Oh and Alexander V. Badyaev. 2010. Structure of Social Networks in a Passerine Bird: Consequences for Sexual Selection and the Evolution of Mating Strategies. *American Naturalist*. The article can be downloaded at [www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/an/2010/176/3](http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/toc/an/2010/176/3).

### ***Magic Places***

Twenty-some years ago I wrote about a Magic Tree that I discovered while working on the first Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas. At last month's IOU meeting our field trip stumbled across a Magic Wood Pile at Neal Smith NWR. The field trip was led by Karen Viste-Sparkman and Stuart Sparkman. To look at the wood pile, it was nothing spectacular: a weedy pile of brush, logs, and stumps on the edge of a very young, recently planted prairie. On one side was a farm lane and a field of harvested corn. On the other side was a magnificent weed patch. A half-mile away, outside the refuge, was a game farm where guns were popping all morning. We stopped at the wood pile as we walked past, and someone pished. A bird popped up and someone called out "Nelson's Sparrow". As it turned out, one of the sparrows we never did see at this pile was Nelson's Sparrow. But we did see, in no particular order, White-throated, White-crowned, Harris's, Fox, Song, Savannah, LeConte's, Swamp, American Tree, and Lincoln's sparrows. And we did not just see the birds—they came close and stayed out it the open. The LeConte's did everything but hop up and down and wave at us.

The moral if this birding tale is to be patient, be very patient. If something is around, give it time to get used to you. We were not a small group. There may have been 10-15 of us, perhaps as many as 20 on the second day.

People were clicking away with cameras, pointing and talking, and raising and lowering binoculars. We could have very easily walked right past this spot, gone on, and missed the show. Once the birds were used to us we were rewarded. Sometimes this happens with patience, sometimes not. But you do not know until you try.

This spot did have a couple of things going for it: great shelter in the wood pile, where I am sure the birds felt safe, and a great weed patch to keep them well fed. We saw it on the Saturday morning field trip. I returned Saturday afternoon and it was absolutely empty, as was the weed patch. But Sunday morning the show was on again. I have been puzzling over where the birds were during the afternoon. Were they full and so deeply tucked into the shelter of the Magic Wood Pile that they felt no reason to show themselves? I sure do not know.

### ***Birding Tools: The Audubon Bird Call***

My mother had an Audubon Bird Call when I was a kid. It consists of a 1" x 5/8" red wooden cylinder with a metal jobbie in the middle. The end of the metal consists of a circular place to hold it. It is used by holding the wood firm in one hand and the turning the metal piece while pushing into the cylinder. Friction, enhanced with powdered rosin, produces squeaky noises.

I have only seen this in use in the field twice, once on an IOU meeting a couple of years ago, and most recently by myself. It works for sparrows and finches. One of the last nice days this fall, I was walking through some scrub and prairie and noticed some juncos flitting around as well as something that looked yellowish or greenish. I pished a bit and nothing showed up, so I pulled out the squeaker and made some little soft squeaky noises. At this point a number of Dark-eyed Juncos popped up, as well as White-throated Sparrows and some Black-capped Chickadees. A House Finch came buzzing past and then a Ruby-crowned Kinglet appeared. I was impressed.

Considering my mom's came from the early fifties, I was amazed to find this is still listed in Amazon for \$5-13, under Audubon Bird Call, Pet Media Birchwood-and-Metal Original Audubon Bird Call, Roger Eddy Audubon Bird Call (these first thee look identical), and a different version, lacking the red paint and with a different handle, called the Bird Call.

Bats: White-nose Syndrome, associated with a fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, is doing just that. This syndrome was first discovered in New York State in 2006, and is likely going to cause regional extinction in the Little Brown Bat, one of the most common, widespread species in North America.

**Notes on Other Species**

Herps: As scientists across the globe have been searching for the causes of major amphibian declines, experiments are now being done to see if anti-fungals can help save frogs. First tadpoles were removed from ponds and tested to be sure they were free of the fungus. Then the ponds were treated with anti-fungals. Later, the tadpoles were returned to the ponds and they stayed healthy.

Asian Avian Influenza (H5N1): Although this is mainly a disease of domestic animals, many of us took a shot for it along with our regular influenza vaccine. We should be aware of its potential to spread from domestic fowl to wild fowl. It has been shown that the causative virus can persist on feathers for at least a year.



**IOWA CITY BIRD CLUB MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM**

Please send this form with your annual membership dues to Bruce Gardner, 3055 Wapsi Ave. NE, Iowa City, IA, 52240. Annual dues are \$15 per household or \$10 for students. Members receive a 10% discount on bird seed at Birds Eye View, 410 First Ave. in Coralville's Riverview Square.

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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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