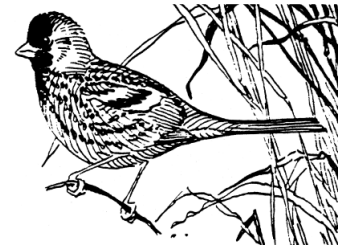


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# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

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Volume 37 Number 1

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## Schedule

**Field Trips** are free and open to the public. Meeting place varies and is noted in the schedule. Carpooling is encouraged and figured out at the designated meeting place and time. Some trips are accessible to people with disabilities. For more information or questions, contact [info@icbirds.org](mailto:info@icbirds.org).

**Meetings** are held at the Robert A. Lee Recreation Center, Room A, 220 S. Gilbert St., Iowa City, generally at 7 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month.

**April 15, Saturday, 6:45 a.m. OTTER CREEK MARSH** near Tama. This is a joint field trip with Big Bluestem Audubon led by Eric Ollie. Targets are marsh birds including rails, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Sandhill Cranes, sparrows, shorebirds, and lingering waterfowl. Return time about 1 p.m. Trip involves hiking – plan for walking through shallow wet areas. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. Meet assistant leader Cheryl Miller (651-653-8133) at Kohl’s parking lot, 2795 Commerce Dr. in Coralville, at 6:45 a.m. or meet at 8:00 a.m. at the marsh observation deck on Hwy. E66.

**April 19, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**April 20, Thursday, 7 p.m. MEETING** at Kent Park Conservation Education Center. *Please note the change of venue!* Linda and Robert Scarth will present “Chimney Swifts at the Althea Sherman Tower.” Welcome to new members from the *Introduction to Birding* course!

**April 22, Saturday, 8 a.m. TERRY TRUEBLOOD RECREATION AREA and WATERWORKS PRAIRIE PARK.** Visit these two Iowa City parks with great trails for woodland, prairie, and wetland species. This is a half-day *Introduction to Birding* course trip but all are welcome. Meet at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St., Iowa City.

**April 27-May 25, Weekdays, 6:30 a.m. HICKORY HILL PARK WARBLER WALKS.** Co-sponsored by Bur Oak Land Trust with leaders Mark Madsen, Jason Paulios, Dan Rose, and Chris Edwards. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Conklin Lane. Daily sightings will be posted on our web site.

**April 30, Sunday, 8 a.m. HICKORY HILL PARK.** This is a local hotspot for viewing warblers and others songbirds. Half-day trip for *Introduction to Birding* course but all are welcome. Hike on park trails, sometimes muddy – hiking boots and insect repellent advised. Meet at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St.

**May 3, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**May 13, Saturday. SPRING MIGRATION COUNT.** Bird in teams to count as many birds as possible in Johnson County. Species and individual birds are tallied – last year 163 species were recorded. Teams gather for a noon lunch at the North Liberty Recreation Center. Afternoon work is encouraged, but optional. To participate on a team, email [info@icbirds.org](mailto:info@icbirds.org) in advance of count day, or call Chris Caster at 319-936-0120.

**May 17, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

Continued on next page →

**May 18, Thursday, 7 p.m. MEETING** at Iowa City Robert A. Lee Recreation Center, Room A. Dick Sayles will present "Birding Panama," a report of his October 2016 trip there.

**May 20, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. WILDCAT DEN STATE PARK** near Muscatine. Target birds are warblers, flycatchers, and other late migrants. Extensive walking on wooded trails. If time allows we'll stop at Wiese Slough on the way back, and we'll return to Iowa City by early afternoon. Pack water, snacks, and insect repellent. Meet leader Chris Edwards at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St., Iowa City.

**June 3, Saturday 8 a.m. TERRY TRUEBLOOD RECREATION AREA and SYCAMORE BOTTOMS** and other natural areas near Iowa City. Locations will depend on recent bird sightings. Target birds are Dickcissel, Eastern Kingbird, Orchard Oriole, nesting Wood Ducks, Western Meadowlark, and swallows. This is a half-day trip co-led by KT and Andy Long (319-541-5655). Meet at the NE corner of Trueblood near boat ramp (4213 Sand Rd. SE). Moderate amount of walking on hard surface and grass paths. Hiking boots and insect repellent advised. Bring a spotting scope if possible.

**June 7, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**June 17, Saturday, 8 a.m. - Noon. TURKEY VULTURE FESTIVAL** at the Coralville Dam East Overlook. Featuring Joan Schnabel and Gonzo the Turkey Vulture. Jointly hosted by ICBC and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, featuring exhibits, games, and family fun. Volunteers needed! Please contact Karen Disbrow, 319-430-0315 or [info@icbirds.org](mailto:info@icbirds.org).

**June 21, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**June 24, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. INDIANGRASS HILLS** in Iowa County for breeding grassland birds. Expect to see Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Sedge Wren, and Bobolink. Return time is early afternoon. Extensive walking on mowed grass paths through this 600-acre restored prairie. Meet leader Mark Brown at Kohl's parking lot, 2795 Commerce Dr., Coralville.

**July 5, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**July 15, Saturday. BUTTERFLY COUNT** sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association. We'll visit Kent Park, Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area, Lake Macbride, and other areas. To participate, contact Chris Edwards at 319-430-4732.

**July 19, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**August 2, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**August 16, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

**August 20, Sunday, 7:30-11:30 a.m. HAWKEYE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA** for shorebirds and other early fall migrants. Meet leader Chris Caster at the HWA parking lot on Swan Lake Road, across from Swan Lake. We will carpool our way around HWA, with moderate hiking at some viewing areas. Dress for the weather and wet and muddy trails. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

**August 20, Sunday, Noon. CLUB POTLUCK PICNIC** at Kent Park's Red Haw Shelter. We're reviving an old tradition at a new location! Come after birding HWA, or just come for the picnic and social fun. Bring a dish to share and your own drink and table service. The shelter is handicapped-accessible and has nearby restrooms. For questions, contact Linda Quinn 319-330-3328.

**September 6, Wednesday, 8 a.m. KENT PARK BIRD WALK** with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Kent Park CEC.

## Other Dates of Note

**May 5-7, Friday-Sunday. IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION SPRING MEETING and LUCAS COUNTY BIRDING FESTIVAL** in Chariton. There will be Saturday and Sunday morning field trips to local hotspots, plus a Saturday evening outing for owls and nightjars, as well as Saturday afternoon and evening bird programs. For more information visit [www.iowabirds.org](http://www.iowabirds.org).

**May 13, Saturday, 9:00 a.m.-Noon. BIRD BANDING EVENT** at the Kent Park Conservation Education Center. Join federally-certified bird banders and conservation staff to see songbirds up close and learn about the benefits of bird banding. Participants can come and go as their schedules allow; bring a lawn chair if you plan to stay for awhile. For more information call 319-645-1011 or email [salgreen@co.johnson.ia.us](mailto:salgreen@co.johnson.ia.us). The program may be canceled in bad weather.

### From the President's Desk Karen Disbrow

As always I am excited by the sounds of spring. February gave us several warm days that jump-started the season, and spring migration is now in full swing. We have many events scheduled this spring to help you enjoy the season.

The Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring Meeting, being held in conjunction with the first Lucas County Birding Festival, promises to be one of the highlights of the year. So set aside the first weekend in May and come get that Chuck-will's-widow for your life list! (I will be there anxiously hoping to get this bird). The evening field trip should provide many interesting birds and a great time. For more information about the IOU or this festival go the [www.iowabirds.org](http://www.iowabirds.org) or Google the Lucas County Birding Festival. Rick Hollis, Jim Fuller, Jim Scheib, and myself have all regularly attended spring IOU meetings and would be delighted to talk to anyone about the event.

The birding course has 7+ people attending, so you may see some new faces on this spring's field trips. Thanks to Johnson County Conservation for again hosting the course at the Conservation Education Center.

Good Birding!

### Help Wanted: President & Vice President

Divide and conquer the work! This team is in charge of club meetings, 6-8 annually. Duties include: plan and facilitate meetings and secure a speaker/presentation for each meeting. Also represent ICBC to the public, in carrying out our mission: To promote the enjoyment, study, and conservation of birds in their natural habitats. Additionally, sit on the ICBC board along with other club officers, in a 3-year term. Starting date: fall 2017. Send inquiries to [info@icbirds.org](mailto:info@icbirds.org) or call Chris Edwards 319-430-4732.

### Membership Renewal Reminder

If you haven't renewed yet for 2017, please do so now. Our annual membership dues per household are \$15 for a paper subscription, \$10 for an email subscription, and \$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).

## **2016 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count**

### **Chris Edwards and Diana Pesek**

The 66th annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, January 1, 2017. The count area is a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Hwy. 965 and Penn Street in North Liberty. The total of 59 species was below the ten-year average of 65, and well below the all-time high count of 81 species set in 2012. The count was originally scheduled for December 18, but was postponed due to bitter cold and dangerous wind chills. Weather conditions on count day were favorable, with temperatures of 17-37° F and moderate S winds. Skies were clear throughout the day. Area rivers and streams were partly open, the Coralville Reservoir and other bodies of water were frozen, and there was no snow cover.

### ***Highlights***

Only one rare species was found this year, an adult Red-shouldered Hawk seen along Sugar Bottom Road. Several other uncommon species (not seen in most years) were found: Ring-necked Duck, Hermit Thrush, Common Grackle, and Brown-headed Cowbird.

Species seen in numbers significantly *above* the ten-year average were Canada Goose, Eurasian Collared-Dove (all-time high), Herring Gull (ten-year high), Sharp-shinned Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Eastern Screech-Owl (ten-year high), Great Horned Owl (ten-year high), Barred Owl (ten-year high), American Kestrel (ten-year high), Eastern Bluebird (all-time high), and European Starling (ten-year high).

Species seen in numbers significantly *below* the ten-year average were Mallard, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey (ten-year low), Northern Flicker, American Crow (ten-year low), American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch (ten-year low), American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Northern Cardinal.

Common species (seen in most years) missed entirely were Horned Lark (third miss in 20 years, and third in a row), Pine Siskin, Fox Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird. Species seen during the count week but not on the count were Greater White-fronted Goose, Redhead, Greater Scaup, and Long-tailed Duck. The latter would have been a first count record.

### ***Some Interesting Trends***

The Red-shouldered Hawk found on this year's count was only the second in the last 50 years. In the early years of the Iowa City count, from 1951-1966, the species was seen nearly annually, with a high count of six. But starting in 1967, none were seen until 2012 and 2016. This decline was noted on other CBCs throughout Iowa in the 1960s, and corresponded to a rapid decline in the species' population in Iowa and nationwide. This decline was due primarily to habitat loss and forest fragmentation, and pesticides may also have been a factor. The species is an interior forest specialist that requires large stands of mature bottomland forest for nesting. It is currently listed as Endangered in Iowa.

Our three common resident owl species – Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, and Eastern Screech-Owl – were all found in above-average numbers this year, and the combined 19 individuals were the highest since 1994. Our owling effort this year, at 3.4 party-hours, was about average for the last ten years, so perhaps these owl populations are increasing. We found no individuals of two wintering owl species – Long-eared Owl and Short-eared Owl – for the fourth straight year. From 1951-1983, these owls were found in most years (29/33 years for Long-eared, 26/33 for Short-eared). Since 1984 they have been found only occasionally (8/23 years for Long-eared, 9/23 for Short-eared). Habitat loss is likely responsible for long-term declines in these species. Much of the grassland in our area, favored by Short-

eared Owls for roosting and foraging, has been converted to row crops or housing subdivisions, and the dense conifer groves preferred by Long-eared Owls have become less common in our landscape.

The three most populous species on this year's count include one reintroduced species – Canada Goose – and two introduced species – European Starling and House Sparrow. It is hard to fathom now, but from 1951 to 1974, no Canada Geese were found on our count. The species was once common in Iowa, but nesting populations were extirpated by about 1900 due to hunting and habitat loss. Following a reintroduction effort by the Iowa Conservation Commission starting in 1964, the nesting population in Iowa was reestablished. From 1975 to 1994, about 100 per year were seen on our count. Now we are seeing an average of 2,500 per year.

### ***Count Effort***

This year there were 27 field observers, including 4 first-time participants, in 10 parties: Kyle Belcher, Mark Brown, Chris Caster, Jerry Denning, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim Fuller, Peter Hansen, Kate Kostenbader, Andy and KT Long, Ken Lowder, Jamie McCoy, Ramona McGurk, Cheryl Miller, Mary Noble, Diana Pesek, Linda Quinn, Mark and Deb Rolfes, Linda Rudolph, Norbert Sarsfield, Jim Scheib, Bill Scheible, Joan Schnabel, Jane Slaymaker, and Sharon Somers. There were 8 feeder watchers in 7 locations, continuing a downward trend in recent years. Feeder watchers were Lauren Belcher, Anne Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim Fuller, Rick Hollis, Jim Scheib, and Doug and Thane Somers.

This year's count was organized by Diana Pesek, and the results were compiled by Chris Edwards. On the day of the count we met for lunch at Gus' Food and Spirits in Coralville, at which time we had 53 species. We did not meet for an evening compilation this year. We collected \$89 in donations for the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count program. Thanks to everyone who donated.

Nationally, this year marked the 117th consecutive Christmas Bird Count. More than 70,000 observers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and many Pacific Islands participate in this annual bird census. The results of all counts from 1900 to the present are available online at [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc), through a cooperative project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

### **SPECIES LIST**

Cackling Goose	5	Great Horned Owl	10	American Robin	9
Canada Goose	4,498	Barred Owl	6	European Starling	3,324
Mallard	163	Belted Kingfisher	3	Cedar Waxwing	80
Ring-necked Duck	1	Red-headed Woodpecker	5	House Sparrow	441
Common Goldeneye	1	Red-bellied Woodpecker	64	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	24
Ring-necked Pheasant	1	Downy Woodpecker	74	House Finch	66
Wild Turkey	5	Hairy Woodpecker	18	Purple Finch	10
Rock Pigeon	305	Northern Flicker	8	American Goldfinch	66
Eurasian Collared-Dove	33	Pileated Woodpecker	2	Yellow-rumped Warbler	1
Mourning Dove	142	American Kestrel	31	American Tree Sparrow	159
Ring-billed Gull	80	Northern Shrike	1	Song Sparrow	7
Herring Gull	10	Blue Jay	80	Swamp Sparrow	1
Bald Eagle	75	American Crow	241	White-throated Sparrow	34
Northern Harrier	4	Black-capped Chickadee	173	White-crowned Sparrow	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	Tufted Titmouse	30	Dark-eyed Junco	264
Cooper's Hawk	3	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2	Northern Cardinal	190
<i>Accipiter</i> sp.	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	73	Common Grackle	5
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Brown Creeper	6	Brown-headed Cowbird	4
Red-tailed Hawk	87	Carolina Wren	2	TOTAL SPECIES	59
Rough-legged Hawk	10	Eastern Bluebird	57	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	11,009
Eastern Screech-Owl	3	Hermit Thrush	2		

## **The Case for eBird**

### **Linda Rudolph**

eBird is a worldwide internet resource that is supported by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon. Birders can enter their sightings and these will generate many lists for their own personal use (Country, State, County, Yard, any location, and Life and Year). There are bar charts, maps, photos and many other types of resources for the average birder to use. eBird can be essential in planning a birding trip to an unknown area. More importantly, the data provided has contributed to science and conservation.

How many people contribute to eBird? You might be amazed to know that just in the United States, 85,416 checklists were entered during the first ten days of March.

#### ***Entering Your Sightings***

To enter a list of bird sightings on your computer, you need to know where you were, the date, time, how long you were birding, the number of each individual bird species you saw, and if you traveled, the distance you drove or walked. Consider giving it a try, and go to:

- eBird.org
- Submit Observations
- Create your account and sign in.
- Here you need to enter your location. eBird has Hotspots, which are frequently birded areas. It is best to use a Hotspot if that's where you were. You can also create Personal Locations, or use someone else's Personal Location.
- Let's assume for our purposes that you went birding at Hickory Hill Park in Iowa City. Find the area by entering "Johnson, Iowa" in the "Find it on a Map" box. Zoom in on the map and you will see a brown flame at Hickory Hill Park. Click on the flame and press "Continue".
- Enter the date, time, observation type (such as Traveling or Stationary), start time, the amount of time you spent birding, the distance you drove or walked (for Traveling) and press "Continue".
- Your cursor will be over on the right in a blue box. Here you can enter the species name and then the number of birds you saw. For example, you could type in "red" and all the choices starting with red pop up. Select the species (such as Red-bellied Woodpecker) and enter the number of you saw.
- Once you are done entering all the species, select either yes or no for "Are you submitting a complete checklist...?"
- Press Submit.

You have just entered your first list. Congratulations!

#### ***Exploring the Website***

Now let's explore the website a little more. On the home page, at the lower right, you can see photos of birds that are considered rare in their location and have been attached to eBird entries. Click on the first photo and more information about it pops up. You can then scroll through the photos.

Next select the "Explore Data" tab. There are more ways to use this page than this article has space for, but here are a few.

How can you know what other birders are seeing in your area?

- Select "Explore a Region"
- Enter "Johnson, Iowa". Checklist entries appear with the most recent being first.

- Hover over the pin-shaped symbol on a checklist (it's between the date and the birder). The location of the sighting pops up.
- Click on the pin of a hotspot area sighting and the map in the upper right-hand corner will show you the location of the hotspot.

I use "Explore a Region" to plan a trip to an unknown area. For example, let's say you were going to visit Sierra Vista, Arizona for a week. Sierra Vista is in Cochise County. Go to:

- Explore a Region > Cochise, Arizona. Now all the recent sightings pop up.
- Look on the right-hand side of the page and scroll down until you get to "Top Hotspots". Here is the mother lode of useful information for trip planning.
- Click on the first hotspot. The map in the upper right shows you exactly where it is, and the lists show you what birds are being seen there.

Go back to the first page of the "Explore Data" tab. Do you want to know where Eurasian Tree Sparrows are being seen?

- Select "Species Maps". Enter the information and a map will appear. The purple areas are where the species has been reported.
- Zoom in and keep zooming in until flames appear. Click on a flame and the checklists that report the species are displayed.

As you can see, getting started in eBird is easy! In a future column, I will cover other aspects of eBird including the eBird Mobile smartphone app.

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## **New Checklist Order** **Chris Edwards**

Sharp-eyed readers may notice that the bird species checklists in this issue are in a different order than in the past. That's because the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), in the 2016 supplement to its Checklist of North American Birds, made major changes to the sequence of bird orders, families, and species. The AOU Checklist serves as the official authority on classification and names of all bird species in North America.

The checklist is arranged with what are currently thought to be the most primitive bird species at the beginning, and the most advanced bird species at the end, with closely related forms nearer to each other on the list. Originally, this arrangement was based largely on superficial similarity. More recently, DNA testing has made it possible to measure relationships among

species, families, and orders, and this has led to major shakeups in the order of the list.

Among this year's changes, pigeons and doves, cuckoos, nightjars, swifts, and hummingbirds have all moved up the list between grebes and rails; loons, herons and egrets, and hawks and eagles have all been moved after gulls and terns; and finches now come before wood warblers. Finally, House Sparrow and Eurasian Tree Sparrow have lost their customary spot at the end of the checklist, and are now found after waxwings.

The changes made to the AOU Checklist are routinely adopted by the American Birding Association, the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, eBird, and most field guide authors. So as difficult as it may be for some birders, myself included, to adapt to the new sequence of our checklists and field guides, we may as well start getting used to it – as they say, you can't fight city hall, or the AOU.



## Introduction to Birding Course March 21 – April 30, 2017 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 six Tuesday evening sessions along with five weekend field trips to area birding hot spots.

**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 per household is \$15 for a paper subscription, \$10 for an email subscription, and \$10 for students). Participants may attend all sessions or pick one or more to attend. Classes can hold 30, and advanced registration is requested – please call Sydney Algreen at (319) 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 Conservation Education Center.

**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. If you have a spotting scope, you are welcome to bring it. Club members will have several spotting scopes available to share on those field trips requiring one. All field trips depart from Kohl's parking lot, 2795 Commerce Dr., Coralville, unless otherwise noted. For more information, call Karen Disbrow at (319) 430-0315.

**Tuesday, March 21, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING I** by Rick Hollis. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment every birder needs, or might someday need.

**Saturday, March 25, 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 28, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II** by Rick Hollis. Continuation of first session topics.

**Sunday, April 2, 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 4, 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 8, 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 11, 7 p.m. BACKYARD AND FEEDER BIRDS** by James Scheib. This session will cover the common birds found in our backyards during the year, and what types of feeders and food to use to attract them.

**Tuesday, April 18, 7 p.m. BIRDS OF TERRY TRUEBLOOD AND WATERWORKS PARK IN IOWA CITY** by Jim Scheib. Learn the variety of birds that are found throughout the year at these nearby parks.

**Saturday, April 22, 8 a.m. Field Trip to TERRY TRUEBLOOD and WATERWORKS PARK.** Visit these two Iowa City parks with great trails for woodland, prairie, and wetland species. Meet at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St., Iowa City.

**Tuesday, April 25, 7 p.m. WARBLER IDENTIFICATION & REVIEW** by Karen Disbrow. Warblers are among our most colorful birds. Compare and contrast similar species in this interesting and challenging group.

**Sunday, April 30, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HICKORY HILL PARK.** Late April to May is prime time for viewing warblers in Iowa, and this park is an eastern Iowa hotspot for viewing migrant warblers and other songbirds. Meet at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St., Iowa City.



## Song Sleuth

### Rick Hollis

Song Sleuth is a new smartphone app which promises to identify birds in the field based on their songs. If the app delivers on this promise, it will be exciting for birders like me who are song-challenged. I can remember tunes and song lyrics that I learned fifty years ago, but with birdsongs it's the same thing every year: I know the song but I cannot name the bird. Other apps have promised this over the years, but have not delivered, or have been extremely limited.

Song Sleuth is here for iOS (iPhone 5 or later, sixth-generation iPod Touch, and many iPads), and it is expected by fall 2017 for Android. Song Sleuth can recognize 189 species. The app is a descendent of the original Song Sleuth, a handheld device that weighed almost two pounds and cost several hundred dollars. Song Sleuth was created by Wildlife Acoustics, which makes devices for sensing and identifying bats, marine animals, and birds.

What it does: Song Sleuth "hears" a bird song and identifies the species. The whole procedure is a bit more complicated than that, but that is the general idea. First you use your phone to record a bird song. Then you can do a certain amount of editing to produce a final song, which Song Sleuth analyzes. Future versions will allow you to keep your original recording and work on copies.

When you are finished editing, Song Sleuth consults its library of 189 bird species (most with multiple recordings), 3 amphibian species, and 4 mammal species, basing its choices on the location and date. It looks at frames of time and frequency, and builds a model for progression from one frame to the next. It then compares this model to songs on file. This process can be visualized by tracing a spectrogram from left to right. It then tells you the three most likely species. It includes not

only the vocalizations of passerine species (true songbirds) but also some non-passerines. For example, it includes seven Canada Goose vocalizations and four Canada Warbler songs. It does not work with short chips and squeaks.

It is important to get a clean recording free from background noise. David Sibley describes this process as a collaboration between the user and the app. There is extensive information in a Song Sleuth FAQ on the Sibley Guides website, and a slightly different FAQ at:

<http://songsleuth.com/m/support/song-sleuth>.

I am very excited about this, but until more species start singing it will be hard to test. If you try it, let me know.

## Books for Birders

### Rick Hollis

**Laws Guide to Drawing Birds.** John Muir Laws, with a foreword by David Allen Sibley. Heyday, 2012. 128 pages. Paperback. \$24.95. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

Sketching birds is an important part of documenting a sighting. Field guide illustrator David Sibley said he wishes this book had been available when he started drawing birds. One of the bird club's artists, Kate Kostenbader, said Laws' books (there are other volumes) are her go-to references for drawing birds.

*The Laws Guide to Drawing Birds* takes you from simple outlines to increasingly complex drawings. The introductory chapters are basics (posture, head positioning, and bills), followed by tricks for getting things to look right, details on parts (heads, wings, feathering), then some group specifics (waterfowl, raptors, etc.), and eventually mixing in coloring.

I have never been very confident in my ability to have anything that comes off the tip of my pencil look anywhere near recognizable. The only person in my family who was worse at

Pictionary was my Dad. One time during the Introduction to Birding course, I attempted to sketch a bird on the blackboard (you remember those) and a particularly astute person in the class asked me what it was. But by the time I was part way into this book, I was thinking “I can do this!” It remains to be seen whether I actually can produce semi-recognizable sketches, but even my early attempts using some of the ideas from the book were far superior to anything I had previously done. With some practice and experience, who knows how far I can go.

## Bird Notes

Rick Hollis

### *Blue-footed Booby Facts*

You have to love Blue-footed Boobies, with their big bright turquoise feet and their showy, foot-flapping dances. A recent article in *The New York Times* includes a number of interesting tidbits on booby biology:

- Boobies lay two eggs, and the first hatchling almost always pecks and bullies its younger sibling. If food is abundant, both may survive, but if the firstborn loses a great deal of weight, its bullying behavior increases 500%.
- If the younger hatchling survives and fledges, the bullying it was subjected to seems to have no effect on its ability to successfully mate and raise young of its own.
- Some boobies mate with the same partners in successive years, while others change mates from season to season. Pairs which have been mated in past years are more successful than newly mated pairs.
- Boobies who mate with a partner that is older or younger than themselves are more successful than pairs of the same the age.
- Not only is foot color a good predictor of a male’s ability to attract a mate, but if a mated male’s feet are painted a duller color

after the first egg is laid, the second egg will be smaller.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/science/galapagos-blue-footed-boobies.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/science/galapagos-blue-footed-boobies.html?_r=0)

### *Sleeping Birds*

The question of how and when birds sleep has always fascinated me. Alexander F. Skutch even devoted a book, *Birds Asleep*, to the subject. Not discussed in Skutch’s book were the birds that spend a great deal of time in the air. Seabirds, swifts, and even songbirds when crossing large bodies of water are presumed to sleep during flight, as they show no signs that sleep loss is affecting them.

A team of biologists from Switzerland developed a small device to measure brain activity and head movements. These devices were attached to the heads of Great Frigatebirds and recovered when the birds returned from foraging. (Some trips were 10 days long and covered nearly 2,000 miles.) Results from daytime showed birds awake and active. At night the birds’ brain activity changed from a wakeful pattern to a slow-wave pattern characteristic of sleep. This slow-wave pattern could occur in both brain hemispheres at the same time or could occur in one hemisphere only. The authors hypothesized the birds may have been using the “awake” half of their brains to prevent collisions. Another finding was that Great Frigatebirds sleep twelve hours per day while on land, but sleep less than one hour per day when at sea. Birds were also found to undergo Rapid Eye Movement (REM) during sleep, but it occupied a very small fraction of their sleep time, with each bout lasting only seconds.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/08/160803111738.htm>

### *Musical Birds*

For your enjoyment, here is a recording of a Pied Butcherbird:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_xanECwy5o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_xanECwy5o)

## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

### **January 8, Bird Feeder Watch Social.**

Twenty-six club members gathered at the Fullers' to look for birds, socialize, and eat lots of goodies. It was a cold morning outside, but the many bodies downing the food kept it warm inside. Twenty-three bird species were counted, and immediately following the group's departure ten Wild Turkeys wandered out to the edge of the river ice for water, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow and Red-tailed Hawk appeared. No shows were Brown Creeper, Pileated Woodpecker, Cooper's Hawk (which was good), and all waterfowl.

Participants: Barb Beaumont, Chris Brochu, Chris Caster, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim and Karole Fuller (hosts), Therese Guedon, Kurt Haman, Peter and Katie Hansen, Barbara Haring, Doina Johnson, Nancy Lynch, Ramona McGurk, Gail McLure, Teri Macey, Larry Mahoney, Cheryl Miller, Mary Noble, Connie Peterson, Damian Pieper, Linda Quinn, Linda Rudolph, Jim Scheib, Bill Scheible, Joan Schnabel.

Birds (23 species): Mourning Dove, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, European Starling, House Sparrow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal.

*– Jim Fuller*

**January 19, Meeting.** Dr. John L. Hanson, teacher of history, sociology, and government at Linn-Mar High School, gave a presentation on birding Norway. With a Fulbright Scholarship he moved his family to Norway for a year to

teach at various schools. He spent a fascinating year traveling the length and breadth of Norway, birding all along the way and as far north as the Arctic Circle. He compiled a list of 82 birds and is ready to go back to do it again. John used a map and various pictures to paint a picture of his year. We all enjoyed our look at Norway and its bird life.

Attendees: Ed Allgood, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Bruce Felin, Barbara Haring, Doina Johnson, Larry Mahoney, Ramona McGurk, Jim Scheib, Forrest Strum.

*– Karen Disbrow*

### **January 21, Bald Eagle Watch in Dubuque.**

Two club members carpooled to this event at Grand River Center in Dubuque, which was sponsored by Dubuque Audubon. The indoor programs were excellent. Illinois Raptor Center provided wonderful information with four educational birds: Bald Eagle, Red-Shouldered Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, and Barn Owl. The second program by Hoo's Woods Raptor Center was equally informative, with guest birds Spectacled Owl, Golden Eagle, Merlin, and Snowy Owl. Additionally, vendors had maps, checklists, and other items for sale.

A free shuttle ride to Lock and Dam 11 found the river ice-free and socked in with fog. We learned eagle numbers have been unusually low this winter due to warmer than average conditions. The heavy fog kept target birds at bay: no eagles, ducks, or gulls. The temperature was a balmy 42°. Fog lifted by early afternoon, enough to create our list of birds on or near the river just outside Grand River Center.

Participants: Dawn Pawlowski, Linda Quinn.

Birds (13 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Canvasback, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Rock Pigeon, Ring-billed Gull, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Crow, American Robin, European Starling.

*– Linda Quinn*

**January 22, Coralville WinterFest** at Iowa River Landing. It was a great day with many kids and families stopping by our booth. We had 15 Bald Eagles, 8 Ring-billed Gulls, 6 Canada Geese, 12 Dark-eyed Juncos, and 2 Black-capped Chickadees. Thanks to Bruce Gardner and Linda Fisher for helping out with spotting scopes.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**January 28, Owl Prowl.** It was a very bitter day with a consistent 10-15 mph wind. We started at Hickory Hill Park, to look for Northern Saw-whet Owl, Barred Owl, and Great Horned Owl, and we struck out on all three species. Usually the Barred and Great Horned respond to calls, but the wind snatched the calls away. Next we went to Damien Pieper's woods for an Eastern Screech-Owl that was reported in December, but again no bird. We then traveled out to Cemetery Road where we found three Northern Harriers. These birds are often found hunting with Short-eared Owls, our target bird. But again, no owls.

Attendees: Karen Disbrow (leader), Paul and Charmaine Kleiben, Jerri McCay, Katie Pletcher, Mark and Deb Rolfes, Linda Rudolph, Forrest Strum, Ted and Jane Wells.

Birds (11 species): Canada Goose, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Ring-billed Gull, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk (dark morph), Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**February 4, Bald Eagle Watch & Expo** at North Central Jr. High School and Coralville Dam West Overlook. This was our fourth year for this event. Linda and Robert Scarth gave a great program on Bald Eagles and other Iowa raptors. Shawn Hawks of Iowa Raptor Project brought a live Eastern Screech-Owl – seeing this owl and learning about other Iowa owls was a great treat for everyone. About 40 people

attended each talk, and the children loved the other activities. The day's highlight was the release of a two-year-old Bald Eagle at the West Overlook by the RARE Group. Friends of Hills Bank supplied hot cocoa and coffee at the eagle watch site. Thanks to all the groups who participated!

– *Karen Disbrow*

**February 16, Meeting.** Ed Wasserman, University of Iowa professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences, presented “Bird Brain? No. Brainy Bird!” Prof. Wasserman reviewed evidence on the abilities of pigeons to learn a variety of visual categories. Given that pigeons are not verbal and cannot demonstrate their categorization skill through naming behavior, he relied on a methodology in which pigeons are taught category discriminations by learning to peck at one key for one class of stimuli and to peck at other keys for other classes of stimuli. Concept formation is validated if pigeons generalize their key pecking behavior to novel examples of the training classes. Use of this training plus generalization paradigm has revealed that pigeons readily learn perceptual concepts, such as whether the stimuli presented contain instances of trees, chairs, people, or cars. They can even categorize human tissue samples that are cancerous or that are cancer free. Clearly, pigeons are very smart birds which make the most of their bird brains.

During the business portion, Karen reported that 33 people voted on a new club logo bird. Tufted Titmouse received 24 votes and Yellow-Throated Warbler received 9 votes. Chris Caster and Kate Kostenbader (via email) each showed artwork. They will create a full body pose and head shot in color and black-and-white, and possibly an outline. Chris and Kate will meet with Rick Hollis, Jim Scheib, and Karen Disbrow to discuss poses to use sometime later this spring.

Attendees: Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Bruce Gardner, Kathy Gassman, Peter Hansen, Rick Hollis, Doina Johnson, Pat Kieffer, Larry

Mahoney, Ramona McGurk, Nancy Millice, Linda Quinn, Bob and Linda Scarth, Sharon Somers, Donna Warner.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**February 18, Iowa City Freeze Fest** at Terry Trueblood Recreation Area Lodge. This event was sponsored by the Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department and Take a Kid Outdoors (TAKO). It was a great day with moderate temperatures. We set up three spotting scopes on the patio, manned by Bruce Gardner, Jerry Denning, and Linda Fisher, and I manned the displays inside. There was a constant stream of kids and families. On the lake we had Canvasbacks, Ring-billed Gulls, Ring-necked Ducks, Mallards, Canada Geese, and a Lesser Scaup.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**February 19, Quad Cities Area.** This was a very unusual day, and not just because we had a flyover Sandhill Crane at the North Dodge Hy-Vee. A record high temperature of 74 degrees was established for Davenport on this day. As a result we saw nearly as many people along the river as birds.

Our first stop was at Rapid City, IL where we found a number of Eurasian Tree Sparrows, though a pair of Common Goldeneyes were our only waterfowl. From there we headed to Lock and Dam 14 from the Illinois side where things were much more interesting. A thin sheet of ice persisted and a modest number of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls made roost. Nearby were a number of waterfowl, the best of which was a female/immature White-winged Scoter, which had been reported there previously. Also interesting were four Trumpeter Swans and an adult Mute Swan. A flock of Greater White-fronted Geese passed overhead moving north. Two American Black Ducks and a Pied-billed Grebe were also seen here.

The group elected to continue south on the Illinois side to make a stop along the Ben Butterworth Parkway in Moline. A small roost

of gulls was found resting on the boat docks, but nothing unusual and no waterfowl other than Mallards and Mallard hybrids. We crossed over the I-74 bridge to Bettendorf and visited the McDonalds there for lunch. Jason and the Longs elected to choose another eating establishment and we never did meet up again. I believe they eventually wound up at Cone Marsh.

The rest of us proceeded to Lock and Dam 15 where we found one Herring Gull, but nothing more. The most interesting thing was absence of the gambling boat and the sodding of what had been a parking lot. So it wasn't long before we were heading for Credit Island. Surprisingly, there was a large amount of ice remaining in the backwater south of the causeway and along Concord St. A good number of gulls were present, but again most were Ring-bills and the rest were Herring. And we saw as many people out as birds – the place was downright crowded. After quickly circling the island we made our exit.

We made a quick stop to again view the ice from Concord St. and I was amazed that it was still strong enough to support the weight of the Bald Eagles. I've never witnessed a bird falling through the ice, but I thought today might have been the day. It was getting warm and we had removed our jackets by this time.

Nahant Marsh was a pleasant stop. It was quiet and there is a short trail to a large observation blind. We had an American Tree Sparrow along the trail and spied a couple of Green-winged Teal amongst the Mallards. The Canada Geese already looked to be staking out nest sites.

Our last stop was at the feeding stations above Fairmount Cemetery. Eurasian Tree Sparrows were everywhere. It used to be that we would search for those; now we search for House Sparrows in the flock. There it was nice to hear singing Tufted Titmice and we added Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers to our list.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Andy and Katie Long, Jason McCurdy, Linda Quinn, Sharon Somers, Jane and Tom Wells.

Birds (40 species): Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Trumpeter Swan, Gadwall, American Black Duck, Mallard, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, White-winged Scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, House Finch, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird.

– *Chris Caster*

**March 11, Burlington Area.** Five of us met Chuck Fuller at the Port of Burlington for a great day of birding. The day was overcast and very chilly starting at 23° F and 10 mph wind. We started with the Peregrine Falcon perched at the top of the arch on the Hwy. 34 bridge. From there we traveled to Starr's Cave where we observed the Great Horned Owl nesting on the bluff. Next we went to Aspen Grove Cemetery where a Fox Sparrow was cooperative. There were few ducks on the Mississippi River, and our best views of migrant waterfowl were on several ponds. I don't recall ever seeing Greater White-fronted Geese swimming on the water; in previous years we saw them in flight or feeding in the fields.

Chuck kept the group moving and we had a total of 60 species for the day. The best bird was a Spotted Towhee seen by two of the group. The biggest miss was American White Pelican, usually a regular on this trip.

Participants: Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow (leader), Hetty Hall, Linda McHard, Gerald Petersen.

Birds (60 species): Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, American Coot, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren, American Robin, European Starling, House Sparrow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Spotted Towhee, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Western Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**March 16, Meeting.** Liz Christiansen, recently retired UI Director of Office of Sustainability and former Deputy Director of IDNR, presented "Bird Friendly Iowa." Liz has been working on a committee to develop Bird Friendly Cities in Iowa. This program is similar to the Tree City program. It is currently in four states, and Wisconsin has over 60 communities with this designation. In Iowa a large city and a small town were chosen to beta-test the categories and requirements. Going over the criteria, Iowa City, Coralville, and North Liberty all appear to have a jumpstart on the requirements. The committee hopes the program will be open to all cities and towns by the end of this year. This will be an exciting program for our state.

During the business portion, a motion was approved to pay \$50 to rent a Kent Park pavilion for our August picnic. Bruce Gardner presented a Treasurer’s report, and Rick Hollis talked about the nominating committee’s work. Rick also reported on HF 597, The WISE Solution (Water, Infrastructure, Soil, and our Economy). Karen reported \$500 was received from Cedar Rapids Audubon and \$50 was received from Lench & Cilek Ace Hardware for the Bald Eagle Watch & Expo, \$200 of which was spent on speakers. A motion was passed to use the remaining funds for face painting at upcoming Turkey Vulture and Pelican festivals.

Attendees: Karen Disbrow, Linda Fisher, Bruce Gardner, Hetty Hall, Peter Hansen, Doina Johnson, Nancy Millice, Jan Reiter, Ben Rowald, Bob and Linda Scarth, Forrest Strum.

– Karen Disbrow



## In Memoriam: Mark Oxley

Mark Oxley, long-time member of our club, died February 13, 2017 at the University of Iowa Hospitals after a short illness. Mark was born in Mason City in 1952. He received his B.S. from Iowa State University and his M.A. from the University of Iowa. He and his wife, Khristen Lawton were married in 1976, and moved to Bellingham, WA, where they both worked for the state and became avid mountaineers. Upon returning to Iowa City, Mark worked as an Electronics Technician for the Department of Internal Medicine at the UIHC for 30 years. Mark never sought the limelight, content to enjoy his family and spend countless hours out-of-doors hiking with his wife and dogs. A true naturalist, he found delight in everyday things – from birdsong at daybreak to tracking stars across the night sky. Mark was a voracious reader of science fiction, history and astronomy. Mark was a regular at our club meetings, and he will be missed. Our sincere condolences to Khristen and her family.

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Please send this form with your annual membership dues to Bruce Gardner, 3055 Wapsi Ave. NE, Iowa City, IA, 52240. Annual dues per household are \$15 for a paper subscription, \$10 for an email subscription, and \$10 for students. Make checks payable to “Eastern Iowa Birdwatch”. Members receive a 10% discount on birdseed and suet at Ace Hardware at 600 N. Dodge Street, Iowa City, and Forever Green Garden Center at 125 Forevergreen Rd., Coralville.

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**For general club information**, contact President Karen Disbrow at 319-430-0315 or [k\\_disbrow@yahoo.com](mailto:k_disbrow@yahoo.com).

**To lead or suggest a field trip**, contact Field Trip Coordinator Linda Quinn at 319-330-3328 or [quinnhenry@msn.com](mailto:quinnhenry@msn.com).

**Visit our web site** at [www.icbirds.org](http://www.icbirds.org). You may contact Webmaster Jim Scheib at 319-337-5206 or [jim@tenlongview.net](mailto:jim@tenlongview.net). Also visit Iowa City Bird Club on Facebook.

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