
Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 37 Number 3

December 2017

Schedule

Field Trips are free and open to the public. Meeting place varies and is noted in the schedule. Carpooling is encouraged and is arranged at the designated meeting place. Some trips are accessible to people with disabilities. For more information or questions, email 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.

December 17, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count. To participate in the field or as a feeder watcher, Contact Diana Pesek at (319) 560-8393 or keesiemom@yahoo.com. See page 3 for more info.

January 7, Sunday, 8-10:30 a.m. Bird Feeder Watch Social hosted by Jim and Karole Fuller at their home at 6 Longview Knoll, 1.5 miles north of I-80/N Dubuque St. exit; directions at www.icbirds.org. Watch winter birds visiting a variety of feeding stations, and view eagles from a fabulous indoor view high above the Iowa River. Coffee and juice are provided, and treats to share are much appreciated. Jim Fuller, 338-3561.

January 14, Sunday, 1-4 p.m. Coralville WinterFest, Marriott Hotel, Iowa River Landing. The club will have a viewing area with scopes and information about feeders for winter birdwatching. There will be many other fun activities for families. Call Karen Disbrow at 430-0315 if you are able to help.

January 20, Saturday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Bald Eagle Watch and Expo. Exhibits and speakers will be at Liberty High School, 1400 S Dubuque St., North Liberty. Bald Eagle watching will take place at the Coralville Dam Tailwater West Picnic Shelter. Watch our web site for a flyer. We need five people for each shift to staff scopes at the dam; contact Karen Disbrow at 430-0315 if you can help.

February 10, Saturday, 1-3 p.m. Freeze Fest at the Terry Trueblood Recreation Area lodge. Lots of activities for kids of all ages. Watch our web site for a flyer.

February 15, Thursday, 7 p.m. Meeting. Mark Brown, local birder and photographer, will present "Wildlife of the Smoky Mountains".

February 18, Sunday, 8 a.m. Quad Cities Area for gulls, waterfowl, and other birds on the Mississippi River. Chris Caster is our trip leader for this all-day trip with stops at locks and dams, riverside parks, and other hotspots like Fairmount Cemetery for winter finches. Walking is usually short-distance from frequent stops. We'll stop for lunch at a nearby restaurant. Dress for cold and wind, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. Meet at the Hy-Vee parking lot, 1125 N Dodge St., Iowa City. Chris Caster, 936-0120.

Continued on next page →

Schedule (continued)

March 4, Sunday, 8 a.m. Cone Marsh in Louisa County for Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes, migrating ducks, and other water birds. Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot, 125 Hwy. 1 W in Iowa City. We'll stop at several points around the marsh, and take a walk on the dike, returning by noon. Trip leader is Linda Rudolph, 325-8393.

March 7, Wednesday, 8 a.m. Kent Park Bird Walk with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Conservation Education Center.

March 10, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Burlington Area for spring waterfowl migration along the Mississippi River. Target birds include ducks, geese, pelicans, and more. This is an all-day trip led by Burlington local expert birder Chuck Fuller. Stops include locks and dams, riverside parks, and other hotspots. Walking is usually short distance from frequent stops. We'll stop for lunch at a nearby restaurant. Dress for cold and wind, and bring a scope if possible. Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot, 125 Hwy. 1 W, Iowa City; or at the Port of Burlington, 400 Front St., Burlington at 8 a.m. Karen Disbrow, 430-0315.

March 15, Thursday, 7 p.m. Meeting. Rick Hollis will present "Learning Bird Song: Tips & Apps".

March 20, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Beginning Birdwatcher Course: Basics of Birding I at the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park. Advance registration is requested, and is free for club members. Call Sydney Algreen at 645-1011 to register. See page 6 for a complete course schedule.

March 21, Wednesday, 8 a.m. Kent Park Bird Walk with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Conservation Education Center.

March 25, Sunday, 8 a.m. Cone Marsh in Louisa County for Sandhill Cranes, migrating ducks, geese, and other water birds. Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot, 125 Hwy. 1 W in Iowa City. Karen Disbrow, 430-0315. *Beginning Birder Trip.*

March 27, Tuesday, 7 p.m. Beginning Birdwatcher Course: Basics of Birding II at the Kent Park CEC. Advance registration is requested, and is free for club members. Call Sydney Algreen, 645-1011.

March 31, Saturday, 8 a.m. Kent Park near Tiffin. We will explore the trails in this county park looking for migrating songbirds and resident woodland birds. Meet at the CEC in Kent Park. *Beginning Birder Trip.*

April 4, Wednesday, 8 a.m. Kent Park Bird Walk with leader Rick Hollis. Meet at the Conservation Education Center.

Other Dates of Note

January 27, Saturday. Iowa Young Birders Junior Duck Stamp Day at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge near Prairie City. For more information and to register visit www.iowayoungbirders.org.

February 10, Saturday. Iowa Young Birders Field Trip to George Wyth State Park in Waterloo. For more information and to register visit www.iowayoungbirders.org.

March 1, Thursday, 6:30 p.m. Bur Oak Land Trust's Prairie Preview XXXV at the Clarion Highlander, 2525 N Dodge St., Iowa City. Mark Hirsch, author of *That Tree*, will be the featured speaker. For additional information visit www.buroaklandtrust.org.

Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 17

This year's Iowa City Christmas Bird Count will be held Sunday, December 17. Co-compilers are Diana Pesek and Chris Edwards. To participate, please contact Diana at keesiemom@yahoo.com or (319) 560-8393 by Wednesday, December 13.

We need participants in the field and as feeder watchers. If you wish to be in the field counting, you will be assigned to a group and your group leader will contact you to coordinate a meeting time and place. If you wish to be a feeder watcher, email Diana your address and she will make sure you are in the count circle and will send you a form. 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 know others who may want to participate as feeder watchers, please have them contact Diana.

On count day, we will meet at noon for a mid-day compilation (bring your own lunch) in Room N1 at the North Liberty Community Center, 520 W. Cherry St. A dinner and final compilation will be at 5:30 p.m. at Gus' Food & Spirits, 2421 Coral Ct., Coralville.

Iowa Birders Enjoy Winter Bird Irruptions

This winter season could be an exciting one for Iowa birders. In October and November there were dozens of reports of Red Crossbills across the state, including Johnson, Linn, and Washington counties. The magnitude of this irruption seems to be unprecedented in the last thirty years. Although the pace of reports has slowed in recent weeks, be on the lookout for this species throughout the winter! Crossbills

are usually seen in stands of conifers or at feeders. There have also been a few recent reports of White-winged Crossbills and Common Redpolls in Iowa, and Pine Siskins appear to be widespread. For more on winter finch irruptions, with an emphasis on the eastern U.S. & Canada, see Ron Pittaway's Winter Finch Forecast at:

<http://www.jeaniron.ca/2017/wff17.htm>.

Iowa is also experiencing perhaps its largest irruption of Snowy Owls since the winter of 2011-12, with at least 40 reports so far distributed across the entire state. Most Snowy Owls that find their way to Iowa are nomadic and rarely stay in one location for more than a few days. If you want to see one of these birds, monitor sightings on the IA-BIRD listserv and follow up on reports as soon as possible. Or find one on your own by driving rural roads, especially at dawn and dusk when the birds are most active. Matt Wetrich has been mapping reports of Iowa Snowy Owls – follow along this winter as the map is updated at:

www.iowabirds.org.

Membership Renewal Reminder

It's time to send in your membership dues for 2018. Our annual membership dues per household are \$15 for a print subscription, \$10 for an email subscription, or \$10 for students for a print subscription. Your dues help support our publications, events, and volunteer activities. Members also receive a 10% discount on birdseed and suet at Dodge St. Ace Hardware and Forever Green Garden Center. Check your mailing label or contact Treasurer Larry Mahoney at ltjmahoney@aol.com for the year you have paid through. Please complete the membership renewal form on the inside back cover and send it with your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" to Larry Mahoney, 2223 Cae Drive, Iowa City, IA 52246. Or go to our website and use your PayPal account to pay.

2017 Cy-Hawk Big Day Challenge

Chris Edwards

The fourth annual Cy-Hawk Big Day competition was held on Sunday, September 17. This is an annual Big Day competition between the Iowa City Bird Club birding for the Hawkeyes, and Big Bluestem Audubon Society of Ames birding for the Cyclones. Birders from other areas of the state are also welcome to join either side. The club with the most species at the end of the day wins the coveted Kent-Dinsmore traveling trophy, a plastic duck decoy which is beautifully painted black and gold on one side, cardinal and gold on the other side, and affixed to a wooden base. More importantly, the winning club gets bragging rights for the next year.

This year a fundraising component was added to the event, and all participants were asked for a minimum \$5 donation. The 17 birders who participated raised \$85 for Iowa Audubon, to support the group's bird conservation and education programs.

September 17 was a beautiful sunny day with temperatures in the 70s. The Iowa City Bird Club fielded four teams this year. Chris Edwards, Linda Rudolph, and Elliott Stalter visited Twinview Heights, Lake Macbride State Park, Macbride Nature-Recreation Area, and Hawkeye Wildlife Area. They had the top list for our club with 89 species. Mark Brown and James Huntington visited Hickory Hill Park, Terry Trueblood Recreation Area, Waterworks Prairie Park, and Hawkeye Wildlife Area. Barry Buschelman, Rick Hollis, and Sharon Somers birded Swan Lake, Hawkeye Wildlife Area, and Scales Bend. Karen Disbrow, Linda Fisher, and Ramona McGurk birded Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Swan Lake, West Branch Sewage Ponds, and rural Cedar County.

Our club total was 107 species, down from 113 last year. Overall, we found eight waterfowl species, five raptor species, eight shorebird species, and seventeen warbler species, but only three sparrow species. Highlights included Black-billed Cuckoo, Sandhill Crane, Short-billed Dowitcher, Merlin, Philadelphia Vireo, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Canada Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak. It was a team effort – every group added at least one species to the overall list.

Big Bluestem Audubon Society fielded two teams this year. Eric Ollie, Wolf Oesterreich, and Doug Harr birded Saylorville Reservoir, Big Creek State Park, and Jester Park and found 93 species, the top overall effort. Karl Jungbluth, Jeff Nichols, and Mary Doud birded Ledges State Park, Hickory Grove Park, and Hendrickson Wildlife Management Area. Highlights for Big Bluestem included Greater White-fronted Goose, Western Grebe, American Avocet, American Golden-Plover, Merlin, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Big Bluestem's total was also 107 species, so this year's competition results in a tie. Per the rules, the trophy will stay with the Iowa City Bird Club for the next year.

It is interesting to compare the species lists from the two clubs – it provides an unscientific snapshot of the species seen in two different areas of the state on the same day. Of the 131 total species found, 83 species or 63% were seen by both groups. Each group found 24 species or 18% that were not found by the other group.

BIRDS FOUND ONLY BY IOWA CITY BIRD CLUB (24 SPECIES)

American Wigeon	Pileated Woodpecker	Tennessee Warbler
Wild Turkey	Least Flycatcher	Northern Parula
Black-billed Cuckoo	Philadelphia Vireo	Magnolia Warbler
Sandhill Crane	N. Rough-winged Swallow	Bay-breasted Warbler
Short-billed Dowitcher	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Solitary Sandpiper	Ovenbird	Yellow-throated Warbler
Greater Yellowlegs	Golden-winged Warbler	Canada Warbler
<i>Accipiter</i> sp.	Blue-winged Warbler	Blue Grosbeak

BIRDS FOUND ONLY BY BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON (24 SPECIES):

Greater White-fronted Goose	Forster's Tern	Eastern Towhee
Common Merganser	Northern Harrier	Savannah Sparrow
Western Grebe	Barred Owl	Lincoln's Sparrow
American Coot	Olive-sided Flycatcher	Eastern Meadowlark
American Avocet	Warbling Vireo	Brown-headed Cowbird
American Golden-Plover	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Northern Waterthrush
Least Sandpiper	Sedge Wren	Palm Warbler
Caspian Tern	Marsh Wren	Yellow-rumped Warbler

BIRDS FOUND BY BOTH GROUPS (83 SPECIES):

Canada Goose	Osprey	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Wood Duck	Bald Eagle	Eastern Bluebird
Blue-winged Teal	Red-tailed Hawk	Swainson's Thrush
Northern Shoveler	Belted Kingfisher	American Robin
Mallard	Red-headed Woodpecker	Gray Catbird
Northern Pintail	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher
Green-winged Teal	Downy Woodpecker	European Starling
Pied-billed Grebe	Hairy Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing
Rock Pigeon	Northern Flicker	House Sparrow
Eurasian Collared-Dove	American Kestrel	House Finch
Mourning Dove	Merlin	American Goldfinch
Common Nighthawk	Eastern Wood-Pewee	Chipping Sparrow
Chimney Swift	Eastern Phoebe	Vesper Sparrow
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Great Crested Flycatcher	Song Sparrow
Sora	Eastern Kingbird	Red-winged Blackbird
Killdeer	Yellow-throated Vireo	Common Grackle
Pectoral Sandpiper	Blue-headed Vireo	Black-and-white Warbler
Wilson's Snipe	Red-eyed Vireo	Nashville Warbler
Spotted Sandpiper	Blue Jay	Common Yellowthroat
Lesser Yellowlegs	American Crow	American Redstart
Franklin's Gull	Tree Swallow	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Ring-billed Gull	Cliff Swallow	Black-thr. Green Warbler
Double-crested Cormorant	Barn Swallow	Wilson's Warbler
American White Pelican	Black-capped Chickadee	Scarlet Tanager
Great Blue Heron	Tufted Titmouse	Northern Cardinal
Great Egret	White-breasted Nuthatch	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Green Heron	House Wren	Indigo Bunting
Turkey Vulture	Carolina Wren	



Introduction to Birding Course March 20 – April 29, 2018 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 six 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 is \$15 per family (or \$10 for students) for a print subscription, or \$10 for an email subscription. Participants may attend all sessions or pick one or more to attend. Classes can hold 30, and advanced registration is requested – please call Sydney Algren 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. For more information, call Karen Disbrow at (319) 430-0315.

Tuesday, March 20, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING I by Karen Disbrow. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment every birder needs, or might someday need.

Sunday, 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 27, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II by Karen Disbrow. Continuation of first session topics.

Saturday, March 31, 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 3, 7 p.m. WHERE TO BIRD IN JOHNSON COUNTY by Bruce Gardner. Well known, lesser known and secret places to watch birds and study nature in and around Johnson County.

Saturday, April 7, 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. **Meet at the CEC in Kent Park.**

Tuesday, April 10, 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.

Saturday, April 14, 8 a.m. Field Trip to LAKE MACBRIDE or other local areas. **Meet at the Coralville Kohl's parking lot across from McDonald's.**

Tuesday, April 17, 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 21, 8 a.m. Field Trip to WATERWORKS PARK. Visit this Iowa City park with great trails for woodland, prairie, and wetland species. **Meet at Waterworks Park, off Dubuque St.**

Tuesday, April 24, 7 p.m. WARBLER IDENTIFICATION & REVIEW by Karen Disbrow. Warblers are among our most colorful birds, but identification can be a challenge. Compare and contrast similar species.

Sunday, April 29, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HICKORY HILL PARK. May is prime time for viewing warblers in Iowa, and this park is an eastern Iowa hot spot for viewing migrant warblers and other songbirds. **Meet at Hickory Hill Park, at the parking lot at the end of Conklin Lane, off N Dodge St.**

The Nebraska Sandhills

Terri Macey

Think birding in Nebraska in the spring and most everyone thinks Sandhill Cranes. But the Nebraska Sandhills offer much more, including the dramatic mating displays of Greater Prairie-Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse, viewed at Calamus Outfitters in the Sandhills of Central Nebraska (<http://www.calamusoutfitters.com>).

Calamus Outfitters is the ecotourism side of an active cattle ranch outside of Burwell, Nebraska. The younger members of this multi-generational ranching family knew if they wanted to continue living and working on the ranch they needed to do more than raise cattle. So they partnered with the World Wildlife Fund to steward their land, which includes a healthy population of Greater Prairie-Chickens and Sharp-tailed Grouse, two rapidly declining species in the West. Now birders travel from all over the country and Canada to view the leks.

Their reasonable fee (\$250 per person, double occupancy) included two nights' lodging, a hearty breakfast and dinner each day, and guided trips to the leks with knowledgeable and friendly naturalists. Arriving at the lek before dawn, we watched the Nebraska sky lighten while two dozen prairie-chickens convened to perform their dramatic dancing, booming, and sac-inflating mating displays. The next morning we watched a dozen Sharp-tailed Grouse perform similar, but not identical, displays.

Other bird species we were able to view included Western Meadowlarks, a nesting Long-eared Owl, dozens of perching Bald Eagles, male turkeys in full display, and migrating Sandhill Cranes. A trip to the Sandhills, for my money one of the best and last wilderness areas in the country, is always memorable. Next spring, travel west to see the drama and majesty of what one author has called "the last prairie."

Books for Birders

Jason Paulios

Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World. Noah Strycker. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017. 336 pages. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

I'm a sucker for any book describing a Big Year of birding. I've read the American Big Year classics more than once (*Wild America*, *Kingbird Highway*, *Feather Quest*). In 2008 a British couple, Alan Davies and Ruth Miller embarked on a more ambitious global big year and many followed along through their online journal or read the subsequent book describing this record of seeing over 4,000 species of birds in a year. American author and field scientist Noah Strycker used these prior published birding successes as inspiration and believed he could see 5,000 species in a year. His book, *Birding Without Borders: An Obsession, a Quest, and the Biggest Year in the World* follows his journey in 2015 where he set a (short lived) record for most birds seen in a calendar year of 6,042 species. This is a fun, short read for most birders or fans of adventure travel. With the online innovations available to us now Strycker was able to accomplish so much more in both his planning and last minute changes, but even the internet can't save you when you're at 11,500 feet in an elfin forest in Peru and your truck has two flat tires and a dead battery! He met so many interesting birders in his travels and the book rightfully highlights many of the more colorful, friendly, and outgoing people among all the lists of new bird names. The writing is serviceable, but I'm not sure it's good enough to keep a non-birder interested. He ends the book with a list of 50 pages (!) of species seen, a chart breaking down countries visited and percent that were new, and an overview of the gear he took. Overall, "Birding Without Borders" was an inspiring read for this Iowa birder, so much so that I booked a week in Costa Rica after finishing!

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

August 20, Potluck Picnic. This year the club's annual potluck picnic tradition was revived! The event immediately followed the annual shorebird field trip to Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area. Ten people gathered at a shelter in Kent Park to enjoy food and conversation. We took a few minutes to appreciate all the wonderful leaders from our club and beyond that have helped us over the past year, to enjoy and learn the wonders of birds.

Attendees: Elizabeth Aubrey, Chris Brochu, Kaci Carolan, James Huntington, Pat Kieffer, Ed Kuhrt, Terri Macey, Cheryl Miller, Linda Quinn, Sharon Somers.

– Linda Quinn

September 10, Pelican Festival at Hawkeye Wildlife Area. The day featured beautiful weather and great camaraderie. This year there were 18 exhibitors, 40 volunteers who staffed the booths and spotting scopes, and 327 attendees. Local Boy Scouts provided food. A flock of 1000 American White Pelicans was seen on the water, and at 3:15 p.m. up to 2000 were observed in layers in the sky heading west. Next year's festival will be held on September 9, 2018 – save the date!

– Karen Disbrow

September 21, Meeting. The meeting began with several announcements:

1. Members were encouraged to attend the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) assembly on October 12. The assemblies give Iowans an opportunity to discuss their vision for Iowa's outdoor recreation and land management. Contact Brad Freidhof of the Johnson County Conservation Department at 319-645-2314 for more information about REAP.

2. Information was provided about the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Project

FeederWatch. Participants are asked to monitor their backyard feeders once a week, November to April, to provide valuable information about bird population changes. More information can be found at <https://feederwatch.org/>.

3. Linda Fisher took orders for an excellent Iowa wildlife calendar.

4. Group leaders and meeting presenters were thanked for their past contributions with selections of candy bird eggs.

5. Attendees completed a survey asking for input about what sort of presentations they would like to see in the future at our monthly meetings. Linda Quinn and Sharon Somers will tally the results and use them to inform topics for future meetings.

6. Mention was made of birding tours along the Mississippi River from McGregor, Iowa. More information was emailed to members in the week following the meeting.

Following the announcements, Mark Madsen, former President of the Bur Oak Land Trust, gave a talk on "The Hidden Gems of Johnson County".

Mark highlighted the parcels of natural and restored prairie and woods in Johnson County that are maintained by the Bur Oak Land Trust and are open to the public for birding (and hiking) pleasure. Eastern Iowa has a rich diversity of plants, insects, animals and birds that are being compromised by urban sprawl and large scale commercial agriculture. Although there are some natural areas in the area that are protected by the state and federal government, Iowa ranks near the bottom of the 50 states in terms of the amount of publicly protected land. Land trusts, such as the Bur Oak Land Trust, are private 501c3 non-profit organizations whose mission is to protect land.

Private land can be protected in basically two different ways. Land can be directly donated to a land trust where the land trust becomes the owner and bears all the expense of appropriately managing the land consistent with the mission of the organization. In most cases, the land

donor would be able to deduct the value of the land from their state and federal income taxes. The other alternative is to place a conservation easement on the property. The landowner retains ownership of the land and is not required to allow public access. The land can also be sold. However, restrictions are placed on the activities and uses of the land in order to protect the conservation values such as wildlife habitat. Because these restrictions reduce the value of the land, property owners may be entitled to a tax deduction that represents the difference in the value of the land with and without the conservation easement if the IRS criteria for public benefit are met.

The Bur Oak Land Trust was incorporated in 1978 as the Johnson County Heritage Trust and the name of the organization was changed in 2014. Its mission is: To protect and conserve the natural areas of Johnson and surrounding counties for future generations. Currently, the Bur Oak Land Trust owns nine properties and has conservation easements on another fourteen properties. Most of the properties that are owned by the Bur Oak Land Trust are open to the public and are very good places to view birds throughout the year. In the past, Rick Hollis has lead regular birding outings to the Bur Oak Land Trust properties and field trips organized by the Iowa City Bird Club have also explored these areas. The locations of the properties are listed on the Bur Oak Land Trust website (<https://www.buroaklandtrust.org/>). They vary in size from 1.5 acres (Strub Prairie, a true prairie remnant) to 105 acres (Turkey Creek, woodland and reconstructed prairie along Turkey Creek). Many of the properties such as Turkey Creek, O'Mara Newport, Muddy Creek Woods, Hora Woods, Big Grove, and Big Grove Extension feature mature woodlands and are excellent places to view migrating and resident birds that require extended forested areas. The Belgum Grove property has a large (5-acre) pond and is a good place to view migrating waterfowl in the early spring.

The Bur Oak Land Trust strongly encourages everyone to enjoy their properties and to become involved in the efforts to protect and conserve the natural areas that exist. Anyone interested in getting more information about how they can participate in volunteer efforts with the Bur Oak Land Trust should contact Tammy Wright, the Executive Director or Seth Somerville, the Property Stewardship Specialist. Contact information is given on the website.

Attendees: Jerry Denning, Drew and Judy Dillman, Vic and Nola Edwards, Linda Fisher, Wendelin Guetner, Peter Hansen, Lois Hughes, Merle Ihne, Doina Johnson, Terri Macey, Mark Madsen, Lani Perez, Tom and Carol Rosenberger, Ben Rowold, Jim Scheib, Sharon Somers, Bill and Donna Warner.

– *Terri Macey and Mark Madsen*

September 30, Grammer Grove Hawk Watch. Six members of the Iowa City Bird Club joined Mark Proescholdt and several other birders at the Grammer Grove Wildlife Area in Marshall County for the day's hawk watch and to explore some of the area's birdy trails. It was a beautiful day, partly cloudy with some northwest winds and moderate temperatures. We convened at the Kohl's parking lot at 7 a.m. and piled into two cars for the roughly 1¾-hour drive. After a pit stop at the Casey's in Albion we arrived at Grammer Grove at about 9:15. Mark, along with Ken and Mary Ann Gregory and Eric Ollie, were on site and reported that there was not much raptor activity yet, so most of us headed down the trails that weave in and out of a variety of habitats, including dense deciduous forest, small open prairie, a solemn stand of tall conifers, and a trail bordering the Iowa River.

We spotted several Sharp-Shinned Hawks and a female Ring-necked Pheasant, along with numerous songbirds including many migrant Northern Flickers, Blue Jays, and Yellow-rumped Warblers and several flocks of White-throated Sparrows. Near the end of our walk we spooked a large perching bird, possibly an owl,

although none of us got a good enough look to be sure.

Back at the hawk-watching site, along the road leading into the wildlife area with a clear view to the north across farm fields, we settled in for the rest of the morning and early afternoon. Broad-winged Hawk migration was petering out by then (several hundred per day had streamed through in the two weeks before), but Turkey Vulture and Sharp-shinned Hawk numbers were very good. Numerous Barn Swallows filled the skies. Raptor highlights were three Merlins, a Peregrine Falcon, and an Osprey. One of the Merlins came by just as the last contingent of club members was packing up to leave, and it solicitously perched in an oak tree to our east for a couple of minutes, giving us a great view. Just as it departed, a huge flock of Franklin's Gulls streamed overhead.

Grammer Grove along with most of Marshall County was covered by glaciers in earlier eons, and the wildlife area boasts one prominent remnant of the Kansan Glacier of a million years ago, an enormous granite boulder just below the open shelter area. At one point or another each of us made the short trek to see this marvel.

Mark is a delightful host and expert birder who has been keeping count of the raptors migrating through this area for many years. I hope Grammer Grove will become a regular ICBC field trip, perhaps scheduled a week or two earlier to catch the Broad-winged Hawk migration. One club group arrived back at Kohl's about 4:00, while the other stayed a little longer and returned around 5:30.

Raptors: Turkey Vulture (33), Osprey (1), Bald Eagle (11), Sharp-shinned Hawk (26), Broad-winged Hawk (2), Red-tailed Hawk (5), Merlin (3), Peregrine Falcon (1), *Buteo* sp. (3).

Other birds (24 species): Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo,

Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren (heard), Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, American Goldfinch, White-throated Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal.

Participants: Elizabeth Aubrey, Jerry Denning, Charmaine Kleiber, Terri Macey, Linda Quinn, and Sharon Somers (ICBC group), and Ken and Mary Ann Gregory, Candace Havely, Eric Ollie, and Mark Proescholdt.

– Elizabeth Aubrey

October 8, Tailwater River Walk Trail. The trip started at the head of the River Walk Trail below the Coralville Dam at 8 a.m. and went until noon. There were eleven participants and we had near-perfect weather, with sunshine and no wind.

On the River Walk Trail we saw 35 species. The highlights were a Pileated Woodpecker which was spotted by Rebecca Clark. She is new to the area and was on her very first bird walk. We also had a Peregrine Falcon that shot over the hill to the East of the river and came almost straight at us before turning south to follow the river. There were Yellow-rumped Warblers in almost every tree. There were so many warblers that we went around the group at the end of the hike to estimate the number we saw with everyone offering a number. The estimates ranged from 100 to 200 and so we thought a "safe" number was 125.

Then we drove to the beach above the dam. This can be a good spot for roosting gulls. There was a family on the beach, so we only saw a few Ring-billed Gulls here.

Next came a hike on the Woodpecker Trail. The most amazing discovery was that we didn't see a single Yellow-rumped Warbler on our hike, even though we were only a half-mile or

so from the River Walk Trail. We didn't have too much time to look for birds. The most interesting part of the hike was when we stopped at an overlook. From this vantage point we could see that the sky was full of gulls, vultures, pelicans, and raptors. Most of the raptors were too distant to ID but it was fun to try!

Birds (44 species): Canada Goose, Chimney Swift, Killdeer, Franklin's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Peregrine Falcon, Eastern Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Cardinal.

Participants: Elizabeth Aubrey, Rebecca Clark, Drew and Judy Dillman, Linda Fisher, Linda Quinn, Mark and Deb Rolfes, Linda Rudolph (leader), Sharon Somers, Donna Warner.

– Linda Rudolph

October 15, Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve. Our scheduled hawk watch on Saturday, October 14 was rained out, so we rescheduled for the following day from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The sky was mostly cloudy, the temperature was between 48 and 52 degrees, and the wind was strong from the NW with gusts up to 20 miles per hour. Ten members enjoyed quite an avian display as birds tried to navigate the windy conditions. Large numbers of Turkey Vultures were seen, and we had Red-tailed Hawks and Bald Eagles soaring right over our heads, giving us jaw-dropping views. Other

raptors stayed far away and remained a mystery. Other birds seen in large numbers were American White Pelicans (184), Franklin's Gulls (200), and Double-crested Cormorants (198).

Raptors: Turkey Vulture (123), Bald Eagle (34), Northern Harrier (1), Sharp-shinned Hawk (7), Cooper's Hawk (5), *Accipiter* sp. (9), Red-tailed Hawk (28), *Buteo* sp. (3), unidentified raptor (14).

Other species (15): Canada Goose, Northern Pintail, Franklin's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Cedar Waxwing, White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal.

Participants: Elizabeth Aubrey, Rebecca Clark, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Shawn Hawks, Rick Hollis, Connie Peterson, Linda Quinn, Linda Rudolph, Sharon Somers.

– Linda Rudolph

October 19, Meeting. The meeting began with a description of the new format, which will consist of a speaker at the beginning of the meeting, a break for refreshments, committee reports and other business, and then a short presentation from a member about interesting birding events or locations they would like to share with other members.

Karen Disbrow introduced our speaker, Marlene Ehresman, Executive Director of the Iowa Wildlife Center, a wildlife rehabilitation and education center in Boone County. Marlene gave a presentation on "Bats of Iowa". Some interesting facts about bats: bats are not rodents, but are unique flying mammals; there are over a thousand species of bats; 20% of mammals are bats; bats' closest relatives are shrews. Marlene finished her talk by showing us a bat that was living at the Iowa Wildlife Center. Anyone

interested in more information about the center can find them at www.iowawildlifecenter.org.

After the talk we completed the business portion of our meeting:

1. Larry Mahoney, Treasurer, reported that we have 110 active members. As of October 19 we had a balance of \$1,928 in our account. It is now possible to pay annual dues on our website using the PayPal link.

2. It was announced that the Christmas Bird Count will be held on December 17, 2017. Detailed information will be provided at a later date.

3. Linda Quinn and Karen Disbrow described upcoming field trips and other events including the Port Louisa trip on November 18.

Following the business portion of the meeting, Terri Macey described a Trumpeter Swan that was hanging out with the swan decoy in her suburban pond.

Attendees: Paul and Janet Abbas, Dean Abel, Rebecca Clark, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Vic and Nola Edwards, Linda Fisher, Peter Hansen, Rick Hollis, Doina Johnson, Pat Kieffer, Terri Macey, Larry Mahoney, Mary Noble, Ed Rolenc, Linda Quinn, Tom and Carol Rosenberger, Bed Rowold, Linda Rudolph, Bill Scheible, Ferris Strum, Donna Warner.

– Terri Macey

October 22, River Valley Wetland and Bickett-Rate Preserve. For the first portion of our outing we drove to River Valley Wetland near the Cedar River in Cedar County. We were in search of fall migrants and found some despite the intermittent rain. Yellow-rumped Warblers were still plentiful and were overhead almost the entire walk; it was difficult to know whether we were seeing new birds or the same flock. At one point we watched them feast on poison ivy berries. Of the sparrow species we found, we ended up having great looks at everything but American Tree Sparrow. I think everyone saw the fly-by Northern Harrier well and we said goodbye to what were likely the last

Eastern Phoebes of the season. I thought I heard a lone Pine Siskin flyover but it got away before confirmation. Our biggest miss was probably Lincoln's Sparrow – I assumed that one would be pretty easy.

At this point Jason had to return to Iowa City, but the group continued on to Bickett-Rate Preserve to see the Althea Sherman Swift Tower. The welcome we found there warmed our hearts both literally and figuratively. Mike and Barbara Boyle and Bob Scarth greeted us in the 1848 house called Edgewood Hall with coffee and treats, and photo displays about the life of Chimney Swifts and Althea Sherman. Many wonderful stories followed from the three presenters that demonstrated much dedication to swifts.

Barbara guided groups of three into the swift tower, climbing up the winding stairs, peeping out viewing holes and small windows. We were amazed at the ingenuity of Althea back in 1915, and we marveled at the small size of the nest remaining from last season. Amazingly, in the 80 years of active tower use, nests have been attached in the chimney on the same side, to the same board. Barbara shared several stories to illustrate that “Chimney Swifts are a gentle and social species.” Her observations of the life of swifts will be posted soon at:

<http://www.altheasherman.org/>.

ICBC members were invited to visit Bickett-Rate between April and September when the swifts are present – hike the grounds and watch the swifts fly around the tower, listen in the pasture for Bobolinks, come inside Edgewood Hall to view the webcam. The property gate is open – bring your kids and grandkids! Or come to bird the hiking trails through the adjoining woods (it is best to call ahead to make sure it's not being used for bow-hunting).

Participants: Paul and Janet Abbas, Jerry Denning, Jason Paulios (co-leader), Linda Quinn (co-leader), Norbert and Katie Sarsfield, Sharon Somers, Bill and Donna Warner.

Birds (30 species): Greater White-fronted Goose, Mallard, Mourning Dove, Killdeer, Northern Harrier, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Goldfinch, Eastern Towhee, American Tree Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal.

– *Jason Paulios and Linda Quinn*

November 16, Meeting. Karen Disbrow introduced our speakers, Jim Walters of The Songbird Project and James Miller, who manages the Pleasant Valley Golf Course Purple Martin colony. They presented a wealth of interesting information on Purple Martins.

They noted that while we have a great deal of information about Eastern Bluebirds, since there are so many nest boxes and nest monitors, we actually have more information about Purple Martins. Martins are the largest North American swallow and are a neotropical migrant. Eastern populations are 100% dependent on human-provided housing.

These birds had a behavioral shift as the U.S. became more populated. Native American tribes attracted martins by putting up hollowed gourds for nesting. Since martins are cavity-nesters, they shifted from nesting in hollow trees to nesting in the provided gourds. The assumption is that the gourds provided better predator protection since they were in human settlements. As the Native Americans were pushed out and their settlements destroyed, Europeans continued this practice and built elaborate houses for the martins, especially in rural areas.

As farms and rural areas shrank, martins fell upon hard times. About 25 years ago there was a

renewed interest in martins and they began to be studied scientifically. We now have a better understanding of their migratory and nesting cycles and their nesting requirements. The birds winter in Brazil and only about 25% of birds that fledge each year make it successfully to Brazil and back. They generally return to Iowa around April 1-10, but are beginning to return earlier. This can create problems since their food sources may not be available earlier.

In closing the talk, Jim reminded us that these are beautiful songbirds and “A Purple Martin colony will bring joy to any neighborhood.” There is a continuous need for people to monitor new Purple Martin colonies and Jim is always open to having new volunteers.

After the talk and a break we completed the business portion of our meeting:

1. Please pay your 2018 dues by January 1st.
2. The Christmas bird count will be held on December 17, 2017. Karen Disbrow sent out an email with details about this great event.
3. The Field Trip committee was absent, on a birding trip in Texas, but asked for feedback about whether people would like the committee to provide more trips requiring reservations, such as the Port Louisa trip in November or the boat trip near McGregor in the fall.
4. In January we have the annual social feeder-watch at the Fullers. If you’ve never attended, you will be amazed at the variety of birds. It’s fun to have a warm spot to chat with club members and munch on potluck treats. More trips and events are in the planning stages.
5. Karen Disbrow discussed upcoming events.

Have a happy winter holiday and may you have wonderful birding adventures in 2018!

Attendees: Paul and Janet Abbas, Jerry Denning, Karen Disbrow, Vic and Nola Edwards, Doina Johnson, Terri Macey, Larry Mahoney, James Miller, Ben Rowold, Jim Walters.

– *Terri Macey*

November 18, Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge. Our group enjoyed a very informative bus tour followed by a short bird walk at Port Louisa. This U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service site has a nice modern visitor center located up on the bluff overlooking approximately 8300 acres of lowland marsh and forest reserves, which run along the levee fronting the Mississippi River. I myself had never been there and we all wanted to see what potential this area might hold for future birding outings that our club might set up.

Access to the refuge is governed by rules imposed by the USFWS and the area is not open to birders at any time they choose. On the other hand, it seems that education and public tours are a priority of the staff there. This trip was done as a bus tour through part of the refuge under the guidance of Jessica Bolser, who herself is a very good birder. A group of about 30 people rode the bus down to the levee, entered past a gate and drove a well-established road (when the river is not high) for about 90 minutes through extensive managed wetlands. We saw at least three nice viewing platforms setup for watching birds and other wildlife. One is up on the bluff overlooking the whole area, one outside the gate for viewing a marshland area, and one in the heart of the managed area.

The weather had been rainy in the morning but by the time of our 1 p.m. tour the rain had stopped and it was cloudy and windy and about 41°. Later the sun emerged and we had a beautiful November afternoon, although still windy. Due to the wind, the birds were tucked well back in the sloughs and often hard to view except at a distance. Large numbers of ducks were moving around avoiding our yellow school bus, so undoubtedly there were a number of species present that we did not identify. But Jessica would call out all the species she was sure of. We also learned a lot about other subjects, like northern pecan groves (uncommon in our area as they are at the extreme north end of their range), marsh plants like prairie cord grass and buttonbush, and the habits of the

mammals that inhabit the area. Notable were the Bald Eagles, as they were hanging out all over the place. We saw 22, about one-third mature adults and the rest immature, usually in groups of 3-5. Jessica pointed out a nest, which she monitors and which has successfully fledged young for each of the last five years.

After the bus tour we all walked the 3/4-mile path behind the visitor center, down the bluff and back up again. The birds there were fairly quiet but we got some woodland species and noted some large old sycamore trees.

I think this refuge would be a good place for an early spring bird tour when the waterfowl migration is getting underway and even for a May warbler tour. Jessica said that we just need to call ahead and that bird tours could walk the road the bus took, which would (if the spring water level permits) give the group a route right between wetland areas, resembling what we do at Otter Creek Marsh. There are rules on access, but probably these would not limit us much. Jessica herself could be relied upon to tell us in advance what was going on as far as bird activity.

All in all it was a very enjoyable outing. On our way out along CR G56 we spotted what was most likely a Barred Owl, and then a falcon-like bird that took off across the cornfields before we could figure it out. It looked larger than a kestrel – a Merlin or a Peregrine Falcon perhaps?

Participants: Barry Buschelman, Jerry Denning (leader), Drew Dillman, Pat Kieffer, Terri Macey, Ben Rowold.

Birds (21 species): Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Ruddy Duck, Rock Pigeon, American Coot, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Barred Owl, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, American Crow,

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, European Starling, Red-winged Blackbird.

– Jerry Denning

Support the Chickadee Check-Off

Since 1982, when the Iowa legislature created the Fish and Wildlife Fund Tax Check-off, Iowans have been able to bring a little wildness into the tax season. The Fish and Wildlife Tax Check-off, affectionately called the Chickadee Check-off, was created to allow people to make a charitable donation to wildlife conservation in Iowa out of their tax refunds or by tacking a few dollars on to any taxes owed. When filling out the state income tax form, just look for the contribution line (usually somewhere between lines 55-60) and write in any dollar amount next to Fish/Wildlife.

All the money contributed through the Chickadee Check-off helps support the Wildlife

Diversity Program at the Iowa DNR. This program has statewide responsibility for all the wildlife that can't be hunted, fished, or trapped, from Peregrine Falcons to Poweshiek Skipperling butterflies. You can learn more about the program on their website: www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity.

Please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off this tax season and supporting wildlife conservation in Iowa!



IOWA CITY BIRD CLUB MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Please send this form with your annual membership dues to Larry Mahoney, 2223 Cae Drive, Iowa City, IA 52246. Annual membership dues per household are \$15 for a print subscription, \$10 for an email subscription, or \$10 for students for a print subscription. 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.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____ Amount Enclosed _____

Check here for e-mail subscription only



Iowa City Bird Club

www.icbirds.org

Annual membership dues per household are \$15 for a print subscription, \$10 for an email subscription, or \$10 for students for a print subscription, payable by January 1 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 Larry Mahoney, 2223 Cae Drive, Iowa City, IA 52246. You may contact Larry at ltjmahoney@aol.com.

For general club information, contact Rick Hollis at 319-665-3141 or xiboia@earthlink.net.

To lead or suggest a field trip, contact Field Trip Coordinator Linda Quinn at 319-330-3328 or quinnhenry@msn.com.

Visit our web site at www.icbirds.org. You may contact Webmaster Jim Scheib at 319-337-5206 or jim@tenlongview.net. Also visit Iowa City Bird Club on Facebook.

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch is published three times per year, in April, September, and December. Send submissions and comments to Editor Chris Edwards at credwards@aol.com. You may also contact Chris at 319-430-4732.

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

Chris Edwards, Editor
4490 Daniels Cir. NE
Solon, IA 52333

