

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 18 Number 2

September 1998

Calendar

Field trips, unless otherwise noted, leave from Terrill Mill Park, located across N. Dubuque Street from the Mayflower. **Meetings** are generally held at 7:00 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month at Lucas Elementary School, 830 Southlawn Drive, near Towncrest in eastern Iowa City.

September 6, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area for shorebirds. If shorebirds are scarce, we'll look for warblers. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

September 19, Saturday, 9:00 to noon or later. Annual Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve. Come join us on the hill and watch the hawks sail past. Located north of North Liberty along Mehaffey Bridge Road just past Sugar Bottom Recreation Area. There will be related activities at nearby Macbride Raptor Center throughout the morning. For more information call Dave Conrads (335-9293) or Chris Edwards (626-6362).

September 20, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. Hickory Hill Park for warblers and other migrant passerines. James Huntington, 338-1837.

October 11, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. Redbird Farms Wildlife Area. This DNR area southwest of Iowa City offers a variety of interesting habitats. Meet at the parking lot of the former Jacks and Eagles at the corner of Riverside Drive and Highway 1 SW in Iowa City. Mary Noble, 338-6097.

October 15, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting. Jim Durbin from Cedar Rapids Audubon and the IOU will present “Iowa’s Natural Year.” Jim will answer the question of just how many seasons Cedar Rapids has.

November 7, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Lake Red Rock for gulls and waterfowl. Lake Red Rock is located near Pella and is Iowa’s premier gull hotspot. Jim Fuller, 338-3561.

November 19, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting. Dave Conrads of the Macbride Raptor Center will present “Migratory Gas Stations: Sharp-shinned Hawks, Energy and Migrations.”

Table of Contents

Other Dates of Note.....	2	Shorebird Identification Basics.....	7
Field Trip and Meeting Reports.....	2	Shorebirds of Iowa Quick Reference.....	9
Book Reviews.....	4	From the President’s Messy Desk.....	10
1998 Johnson County Spring Migration Count.	5	Bird Notes.....	11

Other Dates of Note

September 11 – 13, Friday – Sunday. Iowa Ornithologists' Union Fall Meeting near Des Moines. The weekend will include field trips, programs, and a banquet. Pete Dunne, well-known author, speaker, and field trip leader, will be the featured guest. For more information call Rick Hollis at 338-4834.

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

April 18, Ryerson's Woods. A large group enjoyed a pleasant morning afield at this wooded park on the south side of Iowa City. Many early spring migrants were seen, and we enjoyed the abundant spring wildflowers.

People (19): Dean Abel, Barbara Beaumont (leader), Margrieta Delle, Mike Dooley, David Dupeu, Chris Edwards, Julie Englander, Bev Garund, Therese Guedon, Ramona McGurk, Patty Nakaoki, Mary Noble, Louis Pailliotch, Damian Pieper, Linda Quiqley, Jean Sanders, Joel Serlin, Sara Swartzendruber, Helen Yoder.

Birds (25 species): Bald Eagle, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, White-throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird.

Wildflowers: Bellwort, Bloodroot, Blue Violet,

Cut-leaved Toothwort, Dutchman's Breeches, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Rue Anemone, Trout Lily, Virginia Bluebells, Yellow Violet.

May 3, Fullers' Woods. A trip to Jim and Karole Fuller's property in Cedar County, with its diverse woodland, wetland, and prairie habitats, is always a treat, but this trip was most notable for its lack of migrants. North winds during the preceding ten days left the woods strangely silent, and only two warblers, an Ovenbird and a Yellow-rumped Warbler, were found. A Red-tailed Hawk scolded us loudly as we passed beneath her nest. The highlight was a red fox bounding through the meadow as we returned to our cars. The group drove to nearby Cedar Valley Park and hiked along the Cedar River, with no more success at finding birds.

People (14+): Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Chris Edwards, Karen Disbrow, Julie Englander, Jim and Karole Fuller (leaders), Rick Hollis, Li-Hsien Lin, Christopher Lu, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble, Louis Pailliotch, Carol Thompson, and several others. (Sorry about any omissions – this list was compiled from memory. – Ed.)

Birds (39 species): Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Barred Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Ovenbird, Northern Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Goldfinch, House

Sparrow.

May 24, Iowa River Corridor Project in Benton, Iowa & Tama Counties. Today was cool, gray and misted off and on. Not the kind of day I like to start birding on if the calendar says May. But it is what showed up, so we made the best of it. Dave met us at the Lily Lake in Amana, and led us on a tour of the area he is involved with. Birds were short, and as has been the case everywhere this year, warblers seemed even scarcer. The chance to see this neat new place and imagine what it might be like to come back in a few years on a warm sunny day was exciting. An future article may describe this under-birded area.

People (4): Dave De Geus (co-leader), Julie Englander, Rick Hollis (co-leader), Jean Sanders.

Birds (63 species): American White Pelican†, Double-crested Cormorant†, Great Blue Heron††, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard*, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel†, Ring-necked Pheasant, Killdeer, sandpiper sp. (probable Pectoral), Ring-billed Gull, tern sp. (probable Common)††, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, owl sp., Common Nighthawk, Whip-poor-will, Belted Kingfisher**, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Parula, Black-and-White Warbler, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Dickcissel, Chipping Sparrow,

Grasshopper Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Common Grackle, Northern Oriole, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

* Seen at Terrill Mill Park before we left.

** Seen on our trip to Amana.

† Seen at Coralville Reservoir on our return trip.

†† Seen at Lily Lake in Amana.

May 30, Maquoketa River Canoe Trip with the Sierra Club. We had five canoes with ten adults and two children. Only two bird club members, Therese Guedon and Barbara Beaumont, participated. The day turned out sunny to hazy to cloudy with a few sprinkles of rain, but it was warm and not windy, so it was a pleasant day for a canoe trip. Because there were no other birders, we didn't stop to look for birds. The list is composed mostly of birds that I heard. Someone who knows more bird songs could have identified more, and if we had stopped for a hike the list would have been longer. This is a great trip for birding in late May.

Birds (33 species): Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Wood Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, American Redstart, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Northern Oriole, American Goldfinch.

June 13, Lake Macbride State Park. Today was a lovely, mostly sunny day. I, in my role

as Permanent Substitute Field Trip Leader, covered for Chris Edwards, who was out with a cold. We walked the trail from the boat landing near the entrance to the Cottage Reserve. Forest birds were numerous although we missed a couple of expected species: Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, any species of thrush, Yellow-throated Warbler, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager, and Rufous-sided Towhee. We also failed to find the Lesser White-fronted Goose that had been hanging out with the Canadas. This bird is almost certainly an escapee, but a bit of practice with something we may see if we travel far enough afield seemed like a good idea. All in all the trip would have been perfect, but for the damage sustained to Chris Caster's binocs. It does seem a little funny that of the 2 Orchard Orioles sighted, both were not seen by six people – the same six people. Normally I would have commented on this extraordinary coincidence, but the person who saw them was kind enough to keep the species list and the person list.

People (7): Chris Caster, Julie Englander, Rick Hollis (leader), Richard & Nancy Lynch, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble.

Birds (53 species): Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, *Empidonax* sp., Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Horned Lark, Purple Martin, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Yellow-throated Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Prairie

Warbler, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

Mammals: Deer, Raccoon.

Book Reviews

Birds Do It, Too: The Amazing Sex Life of Birds. Kit and George Harrison. Willow Creek Press. 1997. 179 pp. plus a glossary and a bibliography. Available at the Iowa City Public Library. A detailed bibliography is a pleasant surprise in a general audience book such as this. There are more than 30 lovely black and white sketches by Michael J Riddet. The book has 33 chapters in five sections. These first three sections are on "How Birds Mate," "Courtship & Seduction," and "Married Life." The last two major sections are on odd life styles and observations that might make a movie to be rated R, if it were humans instead of birds.

– Rick Hollis

Vulture: Nature's Ghastly Gourmet. Wayne Grady. Sierra Club Books. 1997. 110 pp., including bibliographical references and an index.

This book talks about vultures, both New World Vultures and the related Old World Vultures. This is not a “coffee table” book, but it is far from a scientific treatise. It think all in all there is less information than in the above book. I was also somewhat put off by the publisher’s use of space: much wasted space with an “artsy” approach which was wasted on this reader. There are some lovely pictures, some new facts, but mostly an entertaining, light bit of reading.

– *Rick Hollis*

Missouri Breeding Bird Atlas. B. Jacobs and J. D. Wilson. Missouri Department of Conservation. 1997. 430 pp., soft cover. Available from the Nature Shop, PO Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102 for \$13 including shipping and handling. I have not seen this, but the price is right to learn what lurks beneath our border.

– *Rick Hollis*

1998 Johnson County Spring Migration Count

Chris Caster

The county-wide bird count was held on Saturday, May 9th. The weather conditions were very good for birding, but relatively few birds were to be found. Although spring came early this year, by the count day there had not yet been any strong southerly winds to push the May migrants into our area. Even when a species was recorded it was often only a single bird. So the day was pretty slow for most of us. Participants tallied only 113 species, far below the 145 recorded last year.

The most glaring deficiency was in the shorebird count, despite the reported good habitat. Only five shorebird species were found this year, whereas twenty species were found last year. Also the species count for warblers and vireos was down slightly. Fifteen different species of warblers and vireos were found this year, whereas twenty of those were found last year. But most of the other bird groups produced species counts similar to last year's.

After the missed shorebirds, some of the more notable misses included Great Egret, Forster's Tern, Marsh Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, Ovenbird, and Swamp Sparrow. Also Upland Sandpiper, Loggerhead Shrike and Whip-poor-will had been found earlier in the week, but could not be produced on the day of the count. Eastern Screech-Owl would have likely been found if anyone had been up to look for it. On the positive, two Northern Mockingbirds not counted last year, were found at the usual location southeast of Iowa City. And the Lake Macbride area continues to provide us with Prairie and Yellow-throated Warblers. Another good find was a Clay-

colored Sparrow.

Participants included Julie Buchsbaum, Chris Caster, Mike Dooley, Chris Edwards, Tom Kent and Lou Pailliotch. Thanks to all who helped. Special thanks goes to Tom Kent who anchored the day. Tom was the only participant to spend the entire day in the field. It seemed to have been a tough weekend for most of us. But you know what they say, "If you're too busy to bird—you're too busy!"

Species Recorded

Pied-billed Grebe-----	4
American White Pelican-----	52
Double-crested Cormorant-----	10
American Bittern-----	1
Great Blue Heron-----	17
Green Heron-----	1
Canada Goose-----	42
Wood Duck-----	12
Green-winged Teal-----	8
Mallard-----	26
Blue-winged Teal-----	46
Northern Shoveler-----	24
Gadwall-----	3
American Wigeon-----	4
Ring-necked Duck-----	1
Lesser Scaup-----	3
Ruddy Duck-----	9
Turkey Vulture-----	12
Osprey-----	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk-----	4
Cooper's Hawk-----	1
Broad-winged Hawk-----	2
Red-tailed Hawk-----	12
American Kestrel-----	2
Ring-necked Pheasant-----	9
Wild Turkey-----	3
Northern Bobwhite-----	1
Sora-----	2
American Coot-----	417
Killdeer-----	35
Lesser Yellowlegs-----	18
Spotted Sandpiper-----	2
Least Sandpiper-----	16
Dowitcher sp.-----	2

Ring-billed Gull-----	25	Field Sparrow-----	2
Black Tern-----	3	Vesper Sparrow-----	3
Rock Dove-----	4	Lark Sparrow-----	6
Mourning Dove-----	31	Savannah Sparrow-----	3
Great Horned Owl-----	1	Song Sparrow-----	41
Barred Owl-----	3	White-throated Sparrow-----	29
Chimney Swift-----	3	White-crowned Sparrow-----	4
Belted Kingfisher-----	1	Bobolink-----	4
Red-headed Woodpecker-----	29	Red-winged Blackbird-----	312
Red-bellied Woodpecker-----	4	Eastern Meadowlark-----	7
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker-----	1	Western Meadowlark-----	6
Downy Woodpecker-----	2	Common Grackle-----	73
Hairy Woodpecker-----	2	Brown-headed Cowbird-----	58
Northern Flicker-----	7	Blackbird sp.-----	4
Eastern Phoebe-----	1	Orchard Oriole-----	1
Great Crested Flycatcher-----	2	Baltimore Oriole-----	25
Eastern Kingbird-----	9	House Finch-----	9
Horned Lark-----	4	American Goldfinch-----	59
Purple Martin-----	3	House Sparrow-----	360
Tree Swallow-----	11		
Cliff Swallow-----	32		
Barn Swallow-----	26		
Blue Jay-----	70		
American Crow-----	50		
Black-capped Chickadee-----	20		
Tufted Titmouse-----	7		
White-breasted Nuthatch-----	3		
House Wren-----	41		
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher-----	2		
Eastern Bluebird-----	8		
Veery-----	1		
American Robin-----	74		
Gray Catbird-----	10		
Northern Mockingbird-----	2		
Brown Thrasher-----	15		
Cedar Waxwing-----	2		
European Starling-----	205		
Warbling Vireo-----	2		
Red-eyed Vireo-----	1		
Golden-winged Warbler-----	2		
Tennessee Warbler-----	1		
Nashville Warbler-----	11		
Yellow Warbler-----	2		
Yellow-rumped Warbler-----	8		
Black-throated Green Warbler-----	1		
Yellow-throated Warbler-----	1		
Prairie Warbler-----	1		
Palm Warbler-----	1		
Cerulean Warbler-----	1		
American Redstart-----	10		
Northern Waterthrush-----	2		
Common Yellowthroat-----	11		
Scarlet Tanager-----	1		
Northern Cardinal-----	52		
Rose-breasted Grosbeak-----	12		
Indigo Bunting-----	1		
Dickcissel-----	1		
Eastern Towhee-----	4		
Chipping Sparrow-----	41		
Clay-colored Sparrow-----	1		

Help Save the 10 HP Motor Limit on Lake Macbride

Every year the bass fishing lobby exerts their power in Des Moines to have the Legislature consider removing the 10 HP motor restriction on Lake Macbride. There are many of us who would like to maintain Lake Macbride as the last lake in Iowa where both fishing and non-motorized water sports can co-exist in safety and where wildlife is not disturbed by loud noise and wakes. During the last two legislative sessions, we have been greatly helped to do so

by State Rep. Ro Foege and State Senator Bob Dvorsky.

Please help us support these lawmakers. Vote for them if you are in their districts and encourage your friends to do so, also. Contributions can be sent to Foege for Citizens, PO Box 128, Mt. Vernon, IA 52314 or to Committee to Elect Dvorsky, 412 6th St., Coralville, IA 52241. If you live outside their districts, please lobby your own legislators to keep the motor restriction at Macbride.

– *Nancy Lynch*

Shorebird Identification Basics

Chris Edwards

Shorebirds are one of the most difficult groups of birds for beginners to learn. Sorting through those flocks of drab sandpipers in their shades of gray and brown is a challenge even for experienced birders. Keep the following guidelines in mind, and with a little patience and determination you too can become a master of the mudflats.

When you are just starting out, become familiar with the common species first. When you can quickly recognize the most common species in a flock, you can use those birds as a basis for comparison with others that you may be unfamiliar with. Four of the most common shorebirds in Iowa, from smallest to largest, are Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Killdeer, and Lesser Yellowlegs.

- The Least Sandpiper is one of the small sandpipers known as “peeps”. It is very small, slender, and has a short thin bill. It is generally darker brown above and on the breast than the other peeps. Its short yellowish legs often appear dark in the field.
- The Pectoral Sandpiper is an abundant medium-size shorebird whose most reliable field mark is a heavily-streaked “bib” which ends abruptly on the lower breast. It is larger and has a longer neck than the peeps.
- The Killdeer is easily identified by its double breast band, its loud “*kill-dee*” calls, and its conspicuous behavior. It is one of the plovers, plump birds with short legs and short, round bills. They dart across the ground, stop suddenly, and then run again, searching for food.
- The Lesser Yellowlegs is a slender gray-and-

white bird with a long neck and long, bright yellow legs. It has a thin, straight bill and is a very active feeder.

Study these birds well and learn to recognize them in a snap. Then when you find a bird in a flock that you are unfamiliar with, it’s likely that one of these four species will be nearby. Compare your bird to one of them to get a general impression of its shape and size.

Shape and size are the most important clues to a shorebird’s identity. Before studying the details of a bird’s plumage, carefully study its shape. Is the body plump or slender? How long is the neck? Are the legs long or short? How long is the bill, and is it straight, drooping, or upturned? Do the folded wings extend beyond the tip of the tail? In many cases shorebirds can be identified by shape alone. Many of the relative differences between species are subtle and it does take practice and experience to recognize them.

It’s important to note that a bird’s posture may temporarily affect its shape. For example, a bird may appear to be plump and short-necked while resting but slim and long-necked when alert and active. Watching a bird in a variety of behaviors is the best way to compensate for this.

Size is also an important clue, but it can be difficult to judge the size of a lone bird. It is more useful to compare a bird’s size in relation to other birds nearby. Luckily, most shorebird species are gregarious and are often found in flocks. There is some variation in size within each species. For example, male Pectorals are

larger than females.

After you study a bird's shape and size, you may still need to examine the details of its plumage to identify it. When trying to identify a difficult bird it is important to determine its age first. Most species have at least three distinct plumages: adult breeding, adult non-breeding, and juvenal. In the spring, shorebirds usually acquire their breeding plumage sometime between March and June, so migrants seen in Iowa may be in fresh breeding plumage or they may still be in their drab non-breeding plumage.

After the nesting season, adults molt into their non-breeding plumage during their southbound migration or after they reach their wintering grounds, sometime between August and December. Most adults seen in Iowa during the summer and early fall are still in their breeding plumage, but their feathers are faded and worn and the birds appear much duller-colored than in the spring. Later in the fall, many of the adults seen on migration have already molted into their plain non-breeding plumage.

In contrast, juveniles seen in the fall have bright, fresh plumage, and the feathers of many species have well-defined pale edges or spots, giving their upperparts a scalloped or scaly appearance. The difference between the two age groups can be quite striking. Once you are aware of this principle, it is fairly easy to separate a juvenile Pectoral Sandpiper from an adult in worn breeding or non-breeding plumage. Determining the age of a particular bird can help prevent misidentifications.

The standard field guides often emphasize leg color as an important field mark. In many cases leg color can be helpful, but it can also be misleading and should be used only in conjunction with other important field marks. Many species show considerable variation in leg

color, and many times leg color appears darker than it really is due to poor lighting conditions or mud on the legs.

A useful but often overlooked method for identifying shorebirds is to learn their calls. Some shorebirds which are difficult to separate in non-breeding plumage, such as Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs and Short- and Long-billed Dowitchers, are easily differentiated by their calls. A working knowledge of shorebird vocalizations also makes it easier to pick out the uncommon species in a flock, especially if they are flying over or just arriving. An excellent place to start learning shorebird calls is with *More Birding by Ear*, a 3-CD set in the Peterson Field Guide Series.

The basic field guides, especially those from National Geographic and Peterson, are adequate for the beginning shorebird watcher. When you are ready to tackle the more difficult identification problems, there are several excellent resources. Kaufman's *Advanced Birding*, in the Peterson Field Guide Series, includes several chapters on shorebird identification. An excellent identification reference is *Shorebirds: An Identification Guide* by Hayman, Marchant and Prater. Covering all the shorebirds of the world, it includes complete descriptions and more than 1,600 detailed paintings of shorebirds in various plumages.

You can get started watching shorebirds with just a pair of binoculars, but a spotting scope and tripod can be invaluable. Shorebirds are frequently seen in open areas and at great distances, and the spotting scope's extra magnification and stability can be the difference between seeing a fuzzy brown speck in the distance or seeing a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. This also allows you to locate a peep in your scope, open your field guide, and look back and forth without losing the bird.

We are lucky to have one of the best shorebirding spots in Eastern Iowa nearby at Hawkeye Wildlife Area. Most of the shorebirds species found in Iowa are seen there regularly, and rare shorebirds are occasionally found. The quality of the habitat is dependant on the water level and varies from year to year. The best times of year are usually mid- to late April (before the water level is raised for boaters) and late summer to early fall (before the water level is raised again for hunters). The best areas are usually Babcock Access, Sand Point, and Greencastle Avenue, all on the south side of the reservoir, but there is often suitable habitat at other locations. So what are you waiting for? Pack up your field guide and spotting scope, grab the rubber boots and insect repellent, and hit the mudflats!

SHOREBIRDS (

Quick Refer

Family and Species Size Key Fieldmarks

Stilt and Avocet

Large size; long neck and legs; long thin bill; bol		
Black-necked Stilt	Large	Black upperparts and
American Avocet	Large	Black and white patte

Plovers

Small to medium size; plump body; short neck; short thick bil		
Piping Plover	Small	Very short thin bill; pa
Semipalmated Plover	Small	Very short thin bill; da
Killdeer	Medium	Double breast band; c
American Golden-Plover	Medium	Golden-brown upperp
Black-bellied Plover	Medium	White wing stripe and

Sandpipers

The largest group of shorebirds, exhibiting a wide range of va		
Least Sandpiper	Small	Very small; short thin
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Small	Very small; plump; sh
Western Sandpiper	Small	Similar to previous sp
Baird's Sandpiper	Small	Wings extend beyond
White-rumped Sandpiper	Small	Wings extend beyond
Spotted Sandpiper	Small	Teetering walk; pl
Sanderling	Small	Plump body; white
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	Small	Buffy underparts
Dunlin	Medium	Plump body; short
Solitary Sandpiper	Medium	White eye ring; da
Stilt Sandpiper	Medium	Long, slightly droc
Pectoral Sandpiper	Medium	Heavily streaked "
Ruddy Turnstone	Medium	Plump; short, uptu
Common Snipe	Medium	Very long bill; plu
Lesser Yellowlegs	Medium	Slender body; long
American Woodcock	Medium	Plump body; very
Short-billed Dowitcher	Medium	Very long straight
Long-billed Dowitcher	Medium	Very long straight
Upland Sandpiper	Medium	Grassland habitat;
Greater Yellowlegs	Large	Bright yellow legs
Willet	Large	Long thick straigh
Hudsonian Godwit	Large	Very long upturne
Marbled Godwit	Large	Very long upturne

Phalaropes

Small to medium size; mostly gray and white in fal		
Red-necked Phalarope	Small	Non-breeding black
Wilson's Phalarope	Medium	Long thin bill; pn-b

From the President's Messy Desk

I had not yet used these pages to express my personal thanks for all that Carol Thompson and Barb Beaumont have done for the ICBC over the past however many years when I find that we are likely losing another active, valuable member: Bud Gode, who will be moving to AZ full time. All three of you have been extremely important for the continued progress of the ICBC. The departure of all of you leaves behind many happy memories and enormous holes. Carol and Bud alone were good to lead two – three field trips a year. Carol was always good for a meeting presentation almost every time she was asked. Barb's departure from our community and as Field Trip Marshal will make for a lot of extra work for someone when it comes time to put a newsletter out and we have to beg for trip leaders. To honor our friends' departures, I invite all of you to help fill their shoes:

- **Volunteer to lead a field trip.**
- **Volunteer to give a talk.**
- **Volunteer to write something for the newsletter.**
- **Volunteer to be the Field Trip Marshal.**

None of these are by themselves difficult. Put them on top of other jobs and they become difficult. For any of these, call, write or e-mail Chris or myself. Thanks and good luck Barb, Bud, and Carol. Hopefully we will see you somewhere from time to time. Carol's new address is:

Carol Thompson
528 Spring Meadow
Stephenville, TX 76401
(254) 968-2029
cthompson@tarleton.edu

Bud's new address will be published when it is available.

A community resource that we too little avail ourselves of is the variety of talks given in various departments by the UI. I was recently fortunate enough to sit in on a talk by Tim Wright (U of MD) on the Evolution of Vocal Repertoire in a Parrot. Tim focused on the vocal behavior of the Yellow-naped Parrot (henceforth YNP). Parrot evolution within the genus *Amazona* has produced many closely related groups of species. The taxonomy varies depending on the book and the authority one follows. The YNP, found on the Pacific Slope of Costa Rica, is either *Amazona auropilliata auropilliata* or is *A. oratrix auropilliata*, a part of a complex which includes at least four additional distinct and isolated subspecies. *A. oratrix oratrix*, the Yellow-headed Parrot, is found in Mexico and was seen by some bird club member in February. *A. o. belizensis* is found in Belize and NW Guatemala, *A. o. hondurensis* in NW Honduras and *A. o. tresmariae* on the Isla Tres Maria and other islands further off the coast of Eastern Mexico. This genus and this group in particular are popular as cage birds due to the ease with which they learn new things and their long lives. Tim presented studies on two calls that YNPs use. The Greeting Call (GC) and the Pair Duet (PD). Each has multiple forms across the YNP's range in Costa Rica. Although some variation exists, the forms are distinct and no intermediate calls have been found. Most birds only use one GC, but there are a few birds who can "speak" two dialects. He mapped three dialects for the GC, one in the north, one in the south and one up near the border with Nicaragua. There were also dialects in PDs and these followed the same boundaries as did GC dialects. Using playback experiments, Tim found that pairs responded much more strongly to PDs recorded from nearby birds and barely reacted to the same dialect recorded far away or to foreign dialects.

Pairs did not respond at all to calls of a related species from the Atlantic Slope of Costa Rica.

The next question of course is how this relates to genetic differences. Do birds in one region use the same dialect because of their genes or do they use the same dialect because that is what they hear? Tim is working on this. His DNA sampling techniques for adults is interesting. He smeared some sticky stuff on the nest cavity entrance and caught a few feathers. The long lives and ready ability of this species to learn may preclude some of the egg crossing experiments that have been done in other species. To compare this with what we know from passerines, much of the song is learned, although the rhythm and general tone quality are genetically determined. Eastern and Western Meadowlarks can even learn the song of the other species if they hear it in their youths, or even while still in the egg. Their calls are genetically determined and inflexible.

That is all for me this month.

**Take Care and Good Birding,
Rick**
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Bird Notes

Avian News: the Good, the Bad and the Ugly

The Good

Kirtland's Warbler at record numbers: 805 singing males were registered this year, an all-time high since counts were begun in 1951.

Endangered species proposed for delisting: In addition to the well-publicized Bald Eagle, these include the Peregrine Falcon and the Aleutian Canada Goose.

Endangered species proposed for downgrading to the threatened list: These include the Brown

Pelican, the 'io (Hawaiian Hawk), and the Tinian Monarch. All in all, 29 species are being considered for down-listing, according to Interior Secretary Babbitt.

Great Lakes Piping Plover reproducing well: 23 breeding pairs produced 43 fledglings in 1997, the best season since 1973. Even before the fledging success, counting the 17 non-breeding adults, the total returning adults was 63, which doubles 1990's total of 24.

Missing birds found anew: At least four species have been rediscovered after significant time lapses, including the Cherry-throated Tanager in Brazil (last record 1951), the Satanic Eared-Nightjar in Sulawesi (3 records since 1980), and the Bearded Wood-Partridge in Hidalgo, Mexico (1986).

Newly described species: The Rock Firefinch (*Lagonosticta saguinodorsalis*) in Nigeria, a new rail (*Gymnocrex?* sp.) in Indonesia, and a new species of forest robin (more closely related to the European Robin) from the Central African Republic.

The Bad

1,111 globally threatened / endangered birds, according to British Birds.

The Ugly

Endangered to extinct: Two species are to be removed from the endangered list as they are extinct, the Guam Broadbill and the Marianas Mallard.

– Rick Hollis

Browsing the Web

An interesting-looking web site for travelers is <http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/birding.htm>. Chris Moellering's Northeast Indiana Birding web page at <http://www2.fwi.com/~moellering/index.html> is worth checking out. Among other goodies it has a neat section on drawing birds and a section with all the changes (to date) in the National Geographic Society Field Guide, at <http://www2.fwi.com/>

~moellering/ngs.html. Unfortunately, not all of these goodies are available to all software/hardware combinations. I can see some of his material fine on one computer, but not on another. Another nice source of information is the Nature Science Update section of the web page of the prestigious British scientific journal Nature, with the longest URL I have ever seen: <http://www.nature.com/Nature2/serve?SID=65612621&CAT=Corner&PG=Update/updatehome.html>. Contrary to its name, Nature does not have much about natural history, but what it has is first rate. The Update section has short, comprehensible articles summarizing recent findings. Each summary article ties to a research paper in the same issue. In issues over the past few years, the following have been discussed:

- Birds and Dinosaurs: the Debate is Over, by Henry Gee, 2 July 1998.
- Birds are Bizarre, by Henry Gee, 26 March

1998.

- British Birds Are Nesting Earlier, by Henry Gee, August 1997.
- What's In a Bird Dropping, by Helen Phillips, 24 April 1997.
- Why Do Birds Fly South? Part I, by Henry Gee, 26 September 1996.
- Why Do Birds Fly South? Part II, by Henry Gee, 24 October 1996.

The presentations are so interesting that I may very well take the time to summarize them separately.

– Rick Hollis

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Iowa City Bird Club

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