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# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

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Volume 23 Number 1

April 2003

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## Schedule

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

**April 17, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Jim Durbin, of the Cedar Rapids Audubon Society, amateur naturalist, birder, and all-around great guy will present on "Planting for Birds"—a timely spring topic.

**April 18, Friday, 6:30 p.m. Night Sounds Foray** to Hawkeye Wildlife Area and Williams Prairie. Bring your flashlight and dress warmly for this evening trip to hear the sounds of amphibians, marsh birds and owls. Leader: Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**April 26, Saturday, 5:30 p.m. Warbler Potluck** at the home of Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street in Iowa City. We will enjoy a potluck dinner, view the video *Watching Warblers*, and plan for the upcoming spring migration count. Bring a dish or two to share; table service, drink, and ham loaf provided for \$1 donation. Call Bernie at 337-9140 for more information.

**April 27, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area** and other local areas for shorebirds. Leader: James Huntington, 338-1837.

**May 3, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Breakfast with the Birds at Herbert Hoover National Historic Site** in West Branch. Meet at the Visitor Center and join Dan Peterson of the HHNHS and Tom Kent for a discussion of the birds that may be found at the site, followed by a hike through the tall-grass prairie and other habitats. Coffee, juice, and rolls will be provided. For information call Dan Peterson at 643-2541.

**May 4, Sunday, 8:30 a.m. Lake Macbride State Park.** Join us as we explore and discover the birds at Lake Macbride. Meet at the north-side campground overflow parking lot. For more information contact Park Superintendent Gwen Prentiss at 624-2200 or Chris Caster at 339-8343.

**May 7 - 24, Wednesdays – Saturdays, 6:00 - 7:30 a.m. Warbler Walks in Hickory Hill Park** with James Huntington, 338-1837. Meet at the north shelter near the parking lot at the Dodge St. entrance.

**May 10, Saturday. Johnson County Spring Migration Count.** Contact Chris Caster at 339-8343 to participate. See page 4 for more information.

Continued on next page →

**May 15, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Judy Felder and members of the Indiangrass Hills consortium will present on their prairie restoration efforts at this Iowa County location, which was nominated as an IBA and will be a club field trip destination in June.

**May 24, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Dudgeon Lake** near Vinton for warblers. Leader: Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**June 8, Sunday, 8:30 a.m. Kent Park.** Bird the many varied habitats of Kent Park. Meet at the Kent Park campground parking lot. For more information contact Brad Freidhof at 645-2315.

**June 19, Thursday, 5:45 p.m. Informational Tour of Hawkeye Wildlife Area** with manager Tim Thompson. Meet at the maintenance shed at the corner of James Avenue and Swan Lake Road. Tim will give us a tour of the area and provide an update on current and ongoing improvements for wildlife habitat at this popular birding destination. Tim Thompson, 354-8343.

**June 22, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Indiangrass Hills** in Iowa County. Come enjoy the prairie birds, learn about prairie plants, and explore the unique areas of this grassland. Leader: Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**July 19, Saturday. Iowa City Fourth of July Butterfly Count.** Contact Chris Edwards at 626-6362 to participate. See page 5 or visit the club web site for more information.

**August 2, Saturday, 8:30 a.m. Lake Macbride State Park.** Explore the woods and lake for summer bird inhabitants. Meet at the north-side campground overflow parking lot. For more information contact Park Superintendent Gwen Prentiss at 624-2200 or Rick Hollis at 665-3141.

**August 10, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Local areas for shorebirds.** Leader: James Huntington, 338-1837.

**August 21, Thursday, 6:00 p.m. Picnic** in Lower City Park, Pavilion 5 across from the large parking lot. Bring something to grill, a dish to share, table service, and a drink. For more information call Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

## Other Dates of Note

**April 28, Monday, 7:00 p.m. Friends of Hickory Hill Park annual membership meeting** at Trinity Episcopal Church in Iowa City. Contact Sarah Walz at 466-0908 for additional information.

**May 2-4, Friday-Sunday. Free Camping Weekend at Lake Macbride State Park.** Interpretive programs will also be offered. Call Gwen Prentiss at 624-2200 for information.

**May 10, Saturday, 8:30 a.m. – Noon. International Migratory Bird Day Celebration** at Macbride Raptor Project Nature Center. See page 4 for more information.

**May 16-18, Friday-Sunday. Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring Meeting** at the Hartman Reserve Nature Center in Black Hawk County. Field trips will include George Wyth Memorial State Park, Big Marsh, and Sweet Marsh. Contact Karen Disbrow at 339-1017 or visit [www.iowabirds.org](http://www.iowabirds.org) for more information.

**May 17, Saturday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. NatureMapping Bird Module Workshop at Kent Park.** See page 4 for more information.

**July 11-12, Friday-Saturday. Women in the Outdoors Workshop at Kent Park,** sponsored by the Johnson County Conservation Board and the National Wild Turkey Federation. See page 5 or call Brad Freidhof at 645-2315 for more information.

## From Our President

### Chris Caster

The returns on the volunteer forms were pretty good and the ICBC officers learned a great deal regarding whom to call on for various things. Thanks to those who responded. These forms will still be available at meetings for those who forgot or misplaced theirs.

We had a number of good suggestions from club members, one of which was the use of nametags. The membership of the ICBC has been pretty steady for a number of years, but we have experienced recently an influx of new members and it is certainly helpful in getting everyone acquainted. Thanks to Jim Scheib for producing the tags for everyone. Along those lines, I would certainly encourage all members whether at meetings or on outings to welcome new persons to our group. And let us not assume that just because a person is new to us, they are new to birds.

I thought that it would be useful to have someone at each meeting to provide club information to drop-ins. Linda Fisher has been nice enough to help with this charge. We also plan to make our latest mailing list, dues and contact information available at each meeting. This will assist our Treasurer in dues collection and allow members to provide us with any new contact information, such as a change in e-mail address.

New routines, even simple ones, always seem complicated at first. We hope to get everyone used to signing in and picking up their nametag as they walk in to the meetings. Margrieta Delle has been given a list of persons who said that they would be willing to help with refreshments at meetings. Thanks to those helping.

The current group of officers would like to have some discretionary club funds to assist and contribute to various projects or purposes that we might find useful in promoting birds or bird

conservation in our area. The annual club dues provide for the newsletter and some distribution of club schedules and brochures, but don't leave much left over. If you have any fund-raising ideas we might consider, please contact one of the club officers. Of course one way to make money is to save it. If you wouldn't mind receiving your Eastern Iowa Birdwatch by e-mail please contact Chris Edwards.

Thanks to Karen Disbrow and all our leaders and presenters for putting together what looks like a wonderful schedule of events. Can't wait for spring to finally arrive.

## News

Our club web site is now even easier to find – just type [icbirds.org](http://icbirds.org) into your browser. The site features maps, upcoming events, photographs, past newsletters, and much more. Jim Scheib has done a great job and continues to add new information on a regular basis. Check it out!



We are now offering e-mail only subscriptions to *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch*. Subscribers under this method will be notified by email as soon as the newsletter is available on the web. The \$10 membership dues will be used to promote club goals instead of paying for publication and mailing costs. Please let Chris Edwards know if you would like to sign up for this option.



Cal Knight's many friends in the Iowa City Bird Club contributed \$151 to the Iowa City Hospice in Cal's memory. Thanks everyone for your generosity.



**RENEWAL REMINDER.** If you haven't paid your annual \$10 membership dues for 2003, please do so now to remain on our mailing list. If "02" is printed next to your name on your mailing label, you need to renew. Please make your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" and send it to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City, IA, 52246.

## NatureMapping Workshop

What: NatureMapping Bird Module Workshop  
 When: Saturday, May 17, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
 Where: Kent Park Conservation Education Center  
 Cost: \$15 including lunch  
 Contact: Jason O'Brien, (515) 294-6440

The Iowa NatureMapping Program is a citizen-based wildlife monitoring program through the Iowa State University Extension Service. This Bird Module workshop is open to all Level I trained NatureMappers. It will cover specifics on bird monitoring, identification, and conservation, and train you to participate in three DNR surveys: Raptor Nesting, Colonial Waterbird Nesting, and Peregrine Falcons. The workshop is designed to give you the opportunity to interact with DNR wildlife biologists, while getting some field experience in bird watching and monitoring bird nests. An optional 7 a.m. bird hike is available for those who wish to participate in casual birding before the workshop. Cost for the workshop is \$15, including lunch. Registration forms are available at [www.extension.iastate.edu/naturemapping](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/naturemapping). For more information contact Jason O'Brien at [jpbrien@iastate.edu](mailto:jpbrien@iastate.edu) or (515) 294-6440.

## International Migratory Bird Day - Saturday, May 10

The theme for this year's International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is "Birds – Catalysts for Conservation." IMBD is an annual celebration of one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird – its journey between summer and winter homes. IMBD was created to focus public attention on the need for action to conserve birds and their habitats. Celebrating bird migrations is your opportunity to introduce others to the wonder of birds and to help ensure that they will always be a part of our future. IMBD is recognized in Canada, the U.S., Mexico, and Central America through bird festivals and bird walks, education programs, and other activities. You can learn more about

IMBD and purchase related products including shirts and posters at [www.BirdDay.org](http://www.BirdDay.org). Celebrate locally by participating in one or both of the following two events.

## Spring Migration Count

The Johnson County Spring Count will be held on Saturday, May 10. This count is held nationwide in conjunction with International Migratory Bird Day. Like the Christmas Bird Count, the purpose of this count is to find as many species of birds as possible and record their numbers. Participants may spend as many hours as they wish birding during the day on Saturday. Some like to get out there before sunrise and bird until after sunset, but if you only have a few hours that would be equally appreciated. Feeder watchers and backyard birders may also help. An organizational meeting and potluck dinner will be held on April 26 at Bernie Knight's to coordinate our activities. A checklist will be provided at this meeting for all participants which will need to be returned for compilation. Anyone interested in participating may call Chris Caster at 339-8343 for more information.

## Migration Celebration at Macbride Raptor Center

In celebration of the 11th annual International Migratory Bird Day, Macbride Raptor Project, in conjunction with the Iowa City Bird Club, will host an educational open house at their Nature Center at the University of Iowa's Macbride Field Campus Saturday, May 10, from 8:30 a.m. until noon. For more information, contact Gail Dawson or Jodeane Cancilla at (319) 398-5495. Scheduled events:

- 8:30 "ON A WING AND A PRAYER" –A discussion of neotropical migrants, their plight and important bird areas.
- 9:30 SONGBIRD WALK –Join members of the Iowa city Bird Club for a walk through

the woods looking for, listening for and discussing the returning songbirds.

- 10:30 "IOWA BIRDS OF PREY" –Meet two of the resident raptors at the Macbride Raptor Project. A staff member will present a hawk and an owl while discussing the project and the natural history of raptors.
- 11:30 OSPREY INTRODUCTION –A slide show and discussion about one of MRP's exciting volunteer opportunities.
- 8:30-NOON SONGBIRD BANDING – Merideth Caskey and Ed Saehler, with the U of I Wildlife Camps and School of the Wild, will staff the bird blind with a demonstration of the songbird banding process.
- 8:30-NOON CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES – a variety of bird related activities for children of all ages.

## Women in the Outdoors Workshop

A Women in the Outdoors Workshop will be held July 11 and 12 at Kent Park near Oxford. The workshop is sponsored by the Johnson County Conservation Board and the National Wild Turkey Federation. Participants will choose one of several concurrent programs during each of four sessions held during the two days. The programs will include wild edibles, raptors, feather craft, birding, willow craft (additional fee), global positioning systems and orienteering, fly-fishing, natural beauty, canoeing, arts in the outdoors, and backyard landscaping. The cost is \$50 which includes lunch, snacks, and door prizes. For more information contact the Johnson County Conservation Board at 645-2315.

## Butterfly Count

The fifth annual Iowa City Fourth of July Butterfly County will be held Saturday, July 19. (In case of rain it will be held July 20.) Last year while visiting Kent Park, Hawkeye Wildlife Area and Lake Macbride, we saw 34 species and

1,526 butterflies. Ours is one of almost 400 counts sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). Rules are similar to Christmas Bird Counts: counters record all butterflies observed within a 15-mile diameter circle, on a single day during a period from several weeks before to several weeks after July 4th. Our count is held in the same count circle used for the Christmas Bird Count. If you would like to participate, please contact Chris Edwards at 626-6362 or [credwards@aol.com](mailto:credwards@aol.com).

## Release of Film— *Winged Migration*

This is an 85-minute movie by French filmmaker Jaques Perrin. It was originally released in Dec. 2001 under the French title, *Le Pueple Migratuer*. It won a French Academy Award for Best Editing in 2002. It has won prizes at film festivals around the world. Although it was a 2003 Oscar Nominee for Best Documentary, it doesn't seem to be a documentary in the traditional sense. The reviews I have read describe it as a fantastic feat of filmmaking that portrays the wonder of bird migration and educates by generating far more questions than answers. The making of this film took over four years and utilized the skills of more than 450 people including 17 pilots and 14 cinematographers traveling with the birds across 7 continents. It is being distributed in the United States by Sony Pictures Classics and will be released in New York City on April 18<sup>th</sup>.

At the suggestion of Diana Pesek, I approached the Bijou Theatre in Iowa City and asked if they could show the film. The Bijou did not have it on their schedule, but the Director, Andy Stoll, was excited to learn about the film and eager to bring it here. He will try to have it on the summer schedule. Additionally Mr. Stoll said that he would look into the possibility of using this as a fund raising event for the bird club. I hope to make an announcement regarding the film at the May meeting. – Chris Caster

## Impact of the West Nile Virus

Chris Caster

In 1999, human cases of West Nile Virus were found in the New York metro area. During 1999 and 2000 there were 83 human cases and 9 deaths. Since 1937, the virus had been known to cause disease in Africa and West Asia, but was unknown in the Western Hemisphere until now. In the last two years it has spread rapidly. It now occurs in 44 states. To date it has infected and killed nearly 300 people in the U. S. (two in Iowa) and it has been isolated from 162 different species of dead birds. WNV has been found in a variety of other vertebrates too, from bears, to deer, to seals, to bats, to squirrels, and alligators. It is too early to say what its impact may be in years to come. It is sure to continue its spread and will likely be found in Central and South America as well. Some writers have dubbed the epidemic as "the silence of the crows". And it calls to mind other invasions of virulent organisms upon populations without immunity—smallpox in the Native Americans, avian poxvirus and avian malaria in the Hawaiian Islands. For already endangered species this disease is of real concern.

West Nile Virus is a single stranded RNA virus of the genus *Flavivirus*. It was first isolated in 1937 and has been known to cause disease in humans in Africa and West Asia. Other members of this genus produce diseases like yellow fever and St. Louis encephalitis. Flaviviruses are arboviruses, which means to say that they are arthropod borne. Ticks transmit some Flaviviruses, but mosquitoes transmit most. Competent bird reservoirs will sustain an infectious viremia with viruses circulating in the bloodstream for 1 to 4 days following their initial exposure, after which the bird will develop life-long immunity from disease. During this period of viremia, any mosquitoes feeding on this bird reservoir will take in virus particles with the blood meal. The virus particles are unaffected by the mosquitoes' digestive processes and will reside in the salivary glands. When the mosquito

feeds again, some of these viruses may be injected into another organism. What happens next depends on the number of viruses transmitted and the immune response of the new host organism.

According to the Center for Disease Control, most people will not develop any type of illness when exposed. It is estimated that 20% will develop West Nile fever, which results in mild flu-like symptoms. About 1 in 150 persons will develop the more severe form of the disease—West Nile encephalitis or meningitis. This can result in high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, paralysis, coma and possibly death. The incubation period in humans is from 3 to 14 days. Symptoms of mild illness will resolve in a few days. Symptoms of severe disease may last weeks and in some cases the neurological effects may be permanent.

An article appeared in the March 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* entitled, "State urges chemical fight to stem West Nile virus." With nearly 300 human deaths nationally last year, the CDC is urging all states to take this threat seriously and initiate mosquito control measures. Currently the State Public Health Department is working to revise its West Nile and Other Mosquito-Borne Viruses/Prevention, Response and Control Plan. State officials hope to have the revision distributed to county health officials by mid-May. Then it will be up to each county to decide what course they will take. Currently only Story and Polk counties spray for mosquitoes. Des Moines spends about \$100,000 a year to spray known breeding sites with larvicides. Ames spends \$11,500 a year on a larvicide and fogging program. In a *Gazette* article on March 27, Linn County officials indicated that they would not be likely to initiate any pesticide measures, due to budgetary constraints and for liability reasons. Most of

their mosquito control measures would be aimed at public education. Johnson county officials are rather tight-lipped regarding their plans. They are still waiting on further recommendations from the state, but seem to have the same concerns as Linn County.

The pattern of occurrence of WNV in the Midwest has been very interesting. The Chicago area was hardest hit. Cook County, IL had 594 human cases with another 68 in the surrounding three counties. A few other urban areas had sizable outbreaks: Detroit, St. Louis, and New Orleans in particular. However in Milwaukee, just up the road from Chicago, there were only 9 human cases. Wisconsin had only 47 cases statewide. Illinois, outside of the Chicago area had another 152. While the St. Louis area had 142 cases, the rest of Missouri only had 36 cases. In Iowa, we had 54 persons test positive for WNV. Surprisingly, Nebraska had 123 cases statewide.

Knowledge of the mosquitoes involved may help explain this pattern. 36 of the approximately 200 mosquito species found in the United States have been found to carry the virus. The virus resides in the salivary glands and can be transmitted to a host during feeding. The female mosquitoes of some species can be fairly particular about where they obtain their blood meal, only feeding on birds for instance. Some mosquitoes not only feed on birds, but will also bite horses and people as we all know. These more opportunistic species are the ones that concern our public health officials.

According to Dr. Wayne Rowley, an entomologist with Iowa State University, there are 54 different species of mosquitoes in Iowa. Two of these, *Culex pipiens*, the Northern House Mosquito, and *Culex tarsalis* are of primary concern. Both prefer to feed on birds, but will alternatively feed on mammals including humans. *C. pipiens* is found throughout the state. *C. tarsalis* is found primarily in western Iowa, doing well in irrigated areas. This mosquito is much more opportunistic than *C.*

*pipiens* and the presence of *C. tarsalis* in heavily irrigated Nebraska can explain why they reported so many more incidences of human infection than did Iowa or Missouri. Two other species are of concern in Iowa—*Aedes vexans*, the Floodwater Mosquito, and *Ochlerotatus trivitattus*, the Three Striped Mosquito. These occur statewide and feed primarily on mammals. Dr. Rowley isn't sure why cities like Chicago had the outbreaks they did. Iowa maintains a dozen mosquito-trapping stations in late summer. Last year 524 mosquito pools were tested and 8 of these were positive for WNV. Six of these were of *C. pipiens* and there was one each of *C. tarsalis* and *O. trivitattus*. These eight positive pools came from five Iowa counties: Scott, Blackhawk, Carroll, Sioux and Woodbury. Nationally, *C. pipiens* and another species *C. restuans* account for 59% of the mosquito pools testing positive for WNV. *Culex restuans*, the White-dotted Mosquito, feeds exclusively on birds.

The first evidence of WNV in Iowa came from a dead American Crow in Scott County in September 2001. In 2002, testing of dead birds, mostly crows, confirmed the spread of the virus across 90 Iowa counties. In addition to the human cases in Iowa, the virus was also found in 1,039 horses. Fortunately, there is an equine vaccine, the Ft. Dodge Vaccine, because without it about 40% of diseased horses will die. It is hard to say how badly the birds in Iowa have been impacted. For financial reasons, the state limited the testing of bird specimens. Once a bird from a county tested positive, no more specimens from that county would be tested. Because 2003 is a new mosquito season the same testing of birds will be done this year. Dead crows in particular should be submitted to county health departments for forwarding to the U of I Hygienic Laboratory on the Oakdale Campus for testing.

Perhaps the best evidence of the virus's impact on local birds comes from the Macbride Raptor Project. From June through October of last year it received 60 birds suffering from WNV—51

Great Horned Owls, with the rest being Red-tailed Hawks and Barred Owls. These birds came from just four counties—Benton, Linn, Cedar, and Johnson. On one busy day seven raptors were brought in for care. According to Jodeane Cancilla these numbers were fairly typical for Midwest raptor rehabilitation clinics. Most of these birds were found on the ground in a disoriented stupor and in a weakened state. Many would have tremors or head tics. The clinic would provide the sickened birds with food and water, B complex vitamins with Iron, and anti-inflammatory medication. Unfortunately only 5 of the 60 birds actually survived. West Nile Virus not only attacks the central nervous system, but the liver and kidney of these birds as well. By the time the birds were brought in their conditions had already failed significantly. Jodeane encourages people to bring these birds in as soon as they appear. Some have watched the birds for a few days before deciding that they were really sick. A sturdy cardboard box works well for capture and transportation of raptors. No humans have contracted the disease from contact with the birds, but it is recommended that persons handling infected birds wear protective gloves.

It isn't clear why so many Great Horned Owls are dying from WNV. Jodeane speculates that it may be due to their large numbers in our area. They are generalists and are doing quite well. It has been speculated by others that the owls are feeding on infected crows and possibly contracting the virus by that route. The spread of WNV is not limited to mosquitoes. Studies have demonstrated the virus in oral and cloacal swabs and birds caged with infected birds have contracted the disease in the absence of mosquitoes. There is even evidence to suggest that the virus may be transmitted to chicks inside the egg. Additionally Louse Flies (Hippoboscidae), a common bird parasite, have been shown to contain the virus, but it is yet unclear whether the virus can survive long enough in the fly's system to be transmitted to

another bird. There is much we still don't know about this disease.

The only local census data available for non-raptors is that of our Christmas Bird Counts, which is of limited use this early in the epidemic. Certainly American Robins were hard to find on Iowa CBCs in 2002, but in the absence of dead robins testing positive for WNV it would be inappropriate to think that they had succumbed to the virus. It is more likely that they simply moved farther south this year and will return in the spring. In parts of the county where large numbers of dead birds have been found, the data from recent CBCs may be useful. The data that is available is sobering. A special count was held last October in the Chicago area. 74 trained monitors found chickadees to be completely absent from large areas of six counties. Also in February of this year, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Great Backyard Bird Count reported American Crows in alarmingly fewer numbers in Illinois and Ohio where the virus had a strong presence.

Nationally, experts are concerned about the effects of the virus on endangered birds. In potentially good news, Dr. John Fitzpatrick of the Archbold Biological Station in Lake Placid, FL reports that no Florida Scrub Jays have been found with the virus to date. West Nile Virus is certainly present in Florida and members of the crow and jay family are thought to be highly susceptible. It is not certain what conclusions to draw from this apparent contradiction.

According to Tom Stehn of the Fish and Wildlife Service, WNV has reached the Whooping Crane wintering area at Aransas, TX. He says that the adult Sandhill and Whooping Cranes seem to be relatively resistant. However there is concern for the chicks. Last year, 7 Mississippi Sandhill Crane chicks died at a breeding facility near New Orleans.

**Continued on page 11.**



## **2002 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count**

### **Chris Edwards**

The 52nd annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 15. The total of 71 species was the fourth-highest total ever recorded and slightly above the ten-year average of 66 species. It was partly sunny throughout the day, with a slight easterly wind, and the temperature reached a pleasant 53 degrees. The Coralville Reservoir and Lake Macbride were mostly frozen, but the Iowa River was open, and there was no snow cover. The warmer than average temperatures prior to count day encouraged many birds, especially passerines, to linger in the area later than normal. The frozen water meant that only average numbers of water birds were found however. Among the many rarities found this year, three stand out: Ovenbird, Turkey Vulture, and Gray Catbird.

#### ***Hérons to Pheasants***

Unlike last year, many water birds were absent, although three Great Blue Herons were notable. A Turkey Vulture seen north of Amana Road was only the second sighting of this species in the history of the count. Mallards and Canada Geese were seen in above-average numbers, but other waterfowl were scarce with only six other species found in small numbers. A single Green-winged Teal at Hawkeye Wildlife Area was a rare find. Raptors were seen in above average numbers. All-time high counts of Bald Eagles and Sharp-shinned Hawks were recorded, and above-average counts of Northern Harriers, Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels were made. Wild Turkey numbers were higher than normal, continuing a recent trend, but Ring-necked Pheasant numbers were the lowest in almost ten years.

#### ***Owls to Wrens***

It was a typical year for owls, although we failed to find an Eastern Screech-Owl despite a modest effort. A roost of Long-eared Owls at Kent Park and a single Northern Saw-whet Owl at Hawkeye Wildlife Area were found. It was an excellent year for woodpeckers, with all seven species found in above-average numbers. Red-bellied Woodpeckers were recorded at an all-time high, and a good count of 51 Red-headed Woodpeckers were found. Pileated Woodpeckers were seen for just the third time in ten years, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a nice find. American Crows were seen in about half of their usual numbers. It was not an invasion year for Red-breasted Nuthatches, with just a single bird found, but the fourteen Brown Creepers were an all-time high. Carolina Wrens were also at an all-time high, and a single Winter Wren was found.

#### ***Thrushes to Warblers***

Fruit-eating birds were somewhat scarce. Cedar Waxwing numbers were below normal, and for the first time in almost thirty years no American Robins were found. A Hermit Thrush was an excellent find, and a Gray Catbird found north of Swan Lake was only the third record ever for an Iowa City count. Brown Thrashers are becoming somewhat regular, as this year's bird was the fourth in the last five years. Although Northern Shrikes are the more expected of the two shrike species, a Loggerhead Shrike west of North Liberty was the second record of that species in three years. The most extraordinary sighting of the count was an Ovenbird, which was observed and photographed in the yard of Steve Elliot and Jan McDonald of Iowa City. This is only the second Ovenbird found on a Christmas Bird Count in Iowa, following a sighting last year in Cedar Rapids.

#### ***Sparrows to Finches***

All of the expected sparrow species were found. Lingering White-throated Sparrows were present at an all-time high number, but only small numbers of Swamp and White-crowned Sparrows were seen. Fox Sparrows have historically been extremely rare on the count, but they have been found in the last four

years, including one this year at Kent Park. With warm temperatures and a lack of snow cover, open field birds were scarce, with no Snow Buntings or Lapland Longspurs and only three Horned Larks detected. Red-winged Blackbirds were present in above-average numbers, but only single individuals of Brown-headed Cowbird, Common Grackle, and Rusty Blackbird were noted, the latter only the second record in ten years for that species. Winter finches were notable in their absence this year. Purple Finches were reported in small numbers by several feeder watchers, but no Pine Siskins were found.

The Ovenbird recorded this year brings the all-time Iowa City Christmas Bird Count species list to 129. Of these, 112 have been seen within the past ten years. Birds that have been seen only once include: Greater White-fronted Goose (1986), Mute Swan (1994), Redhead (1971), Greater Scaup (1980), Osprey (1978), Merlin (1992), Franklin's Gull (1990), Thayer's Gull (1993), Lesser Black-backed Gull (1993), Glaucous Gull (1993), Snowy Owl (1966), Northern Mockingbird (1962), Curve-billed Thrasher (1980), Nashville Warbler (1993), Pine Warbler (1992), Spotted Towhee (1998), Savannah Sparrow (1994), and Baltimore Oriole (1987). A number of possible species have never been seen, including American White Pelican, Ross's Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Tundra Swan, White-winged Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Prairie Falcon, Sandhill Crane, Bonaparte's Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Marsh Wren, Townsend's Solitaire, Varied Thrush, Lincoln's Sparrow, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Great-tailed Grackle, Pine Grosbeak, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

This year there were 34 field observers in 11 parties. Field observers were Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Carl Bendorf, Chris Caster, Allysa Cohen, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Mary Edwards, Jonni Ellsworth, Julie Englander, Mike Feiss, Linda Fisher, Randy Graesser, Lanny Haldy, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bill Kent, Tom Kent, Ken Lowder, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, Ramona McGurk, Gail McLure, John McLure, Mary Noble, Kari Oeltjen, Jim Scheib, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns, Clay Steele, Dick Tetrault, and David Weiss.

Dick Tetrault organized our feeder-watching effort this year. There were 18 feeder watchers at 14 locations: Bob Dunn, Steve Elliott and Jan McDonald, Ann Feddersen, Tony Franken, Carolyn Gardner, Margaret Herr, Janet Hollis, Ken and Janice Hook, Barbara Kalm, Lou Luckel, Jim and Ann Ridenour, Gerry Tetrault, Robert and Nan Towner, and Jim Walters.

A pre-count planning meeting was held on December 10 at the home of John and Gail McLure. On the day of the count we met at noon for lunch at the North Liberty Community Center, at which time we had 64 species. At the end of the day, many participants gathered at Café Brown Bottle in North Liberty for a well-deserved meal and compilation.

Nationally, this year marked the 103rd consecutive Christmas Bird Count. In 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman and many other conservationists were disturbed at the slaughter of birds at an annual holiday event called a "side hunt," in which the winner was the team that shot the most birds. As a protest, on Christmas Day of that year, Chapman organized 27 friends in 25 locations. Instead of shooting birds, they counted them. That simple protest turned into the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. Today, more than 45,000 people from all 50 states, every Canadian province, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and many Pacific Islands participate in this annual bird census. Christmas Bird Count results are published annually in a special issue of *American Birds*. The results of all counts from 1900 to the present are also available on the Internet at [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org), a cooperative project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Thanks to everyone who participated for making this year's count such a success!

SPECIES LIST					
Great Blue Heron	3	Great Horned Owl	3	Hermit Thrush	1
Turkey Vulture	1	Barred Owl	8	Gray Catbird	1
Canada Goose	1901	Long-eared Owl	7	Brown Thrasher	1
Gadwall	2	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	European Starling	517
American Black Duck	2	Belted Kingfisher	4	Cedar Waxwing	130
Mallard	3084	Red-headed Woodpecker	51	Ovenbird	1
Northern Shoveler	2	Red-bellied Woodpecker	96	American Tree Sparrow	291
Green-winged Teal	1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	Fox Sparrow	1
Common Goldeneye	1	Downy Woodpecker	153	Song Sparrow	28
Common Merganser	16	Hairy Woodpecker	25	Swamp Sparrow	4
Bald Eagle	96	Northern Flicker	35	White-throated Sparrow	110
Northern Harrier	5	Pileated Woodpecker	2	White-crowned Sparrow	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	Loggerhead Shrike	1	Dark-eyed Junco	663
Cooper's Hawk	1	Blue Jay	166	Northern Cardinal	436
<i>Accipiter</i> sp.	1	American Crow	595	Red-winged Blackbird	166
Red-tailed Hawk	114	Horned Lark	3	Meadowlark sp.	1
Rough-legged Hawk	2	Black-capped Chickadee	317	Rusty Blackbird	1
American Kestrel	28	Tufted Titmouse	59	Common Grackle	1
Ring-necked Pheasant	8	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Wild Turkey	105	White-breasted Nuthatch	99	Purple Finch	15
Ring-billed Gull	420	Brown Creeper	14	House Finch	70
Herring Gull	6	Carolina Wren	11	American Goldfinch	204
Rock Dove	317	Winter Wren	1	House Sparrow	909
Mourning Dove	153	Golden-crowned Kinglet	3		
		Eastern Bluebird	3		

## West Nile Virus (continued)

One Whooping Crane chick in Wisconsin tested positive for WNV, but apparently showed no effects. The virus is expected to reach the cranes' breeding grounds in a few years. If Whooping Crane chicks in Canada are affected by WNV the flock could be in trouble.

Many zoos across the country have vaccinated birds with the Ft. Dodge equine vaccine. It is uncertain whether it will provide the birds protection, but since the vaccine doesn't appear to produce any negative effects it is often given with the hope that it might work. The Macbride Raptor Project plans to vaccinate its display birds. Each of the 26 birds will require a series of three injections and the total cost will be in the vicinity of \$1,000. But not every institution is vaccinating. The International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, WI feels that their situation is not so grave as to warrant stressing their birds with injections that may confer little immunity. Currently the American Bird

Conservancy, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, and the CDC are working to develop a new recombinant DNA vaccine specifically for birds. Early trials by the CDC have been encouraging. In November the San Diego and Los Angeles Zoos used the experimental vaccine on their California Condors. There have been no negative effects and if further tests show the vaccine to be effective, there are plans to vaccinate all 128 captive condors and the nearly 70 birds living in the wild.

Fortunately the most serious outbreaks have been focal, and common species should recover as they build immunity. I personally wonder about birds like the Kirtland's Warbler, Least Terns, Piping Plovers, and Black Rails, and how they might be impacted. It is hard to conceive of vaccination programs for birds like these. It appears in most cases that we can only hope for the best.

## **A Kingfisher's Death at Cedar Lake**

**Mike Dooley**

In mid February, Bill Scheible and I were capping off an outing around Johnson and Benton Counties by stopping in at Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids. After searching the channel for the mysterious Black-crowned Night-Heron with no luck, we headed for the lake itself. After we rounded the bend before the footbridge, I noticed a ragged-looking form near the top of a snag along the shore, right near us. I put my binoculars on it and there was the familiar, resident kingfisher, one of its wings tangled in fishing line and stretched out, the other end of the line wrapped around a branchlet, the rest of the bird limp and contorted and hanging dead off the snag. It was an extremely disheartening sight to see this old friend, who fished for its very livelihood, having come to such an unnatural and appalling end, probably taking on the line when it dove. I pointed Bill toward this sight and he was equally dismayed, as any birder would be. The image wouldn't leave me for some time afterward, and I was frankly surprised how much the whole incident bothered me. The kingfisher—and sometimes there was a pair—had come to be a familiar year-round companion on outings to Cedar Lake. I think most of us who have birded there expect to see one sooner or later during any trip we make.

I reported this incident over IA-BIRD and many sympathetic responses were posted, and I received a few private messages as well. One suggestion was that I get a photograph for use in drawing attention to the bird's unnecessary death in some kind of media outlet, perhaps on the web. With modest equipment I was able to get a fairly good image, but Bob and Linda Scarth of Cedar Rapids, much more serious photographers than myself, took it on themselves to obtain a truly professional image, which they made available to me for however it might be useful.

Meanwhile I wanted to voice concern in some effective fashion over the problem of trashed fishing line being left at natural areas. An excellent offer came from birder Don Robinson of Bettendorf, who volunteered to post a letter from me on the Iowa Outdoors website, a popular site with the sportfishing community. He made it clear that my remarks should be framed in a calm and diplomatic manner. I related the incident and made an appeal to all sportfishers to collect their broken fishing line. The webmaster posted not only my letter but also the photo I had sent to Don. The post received several responses, all sympathetic to the cause, and including an anecdote about a fisherman's young son who began collecting line and other refuse after the two of them were done for the day. The father asked what he was doing and the boy replied that he had learned in school about all the wildlife that can become entangled in fishing line. From then on the father made a point of collecting his own and other discarded line whenever he went fishing.

Meanwhile I made up a simple flyer, on another suggestion, that could be put up in bait and tackle shops. At center is the Scarths' photograph. The caption reads, "Dead kingfisher, entangled in fishing line, found at Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids, 16 February 2003," and above the photo a headline reads, "Please, don't leave your fishing line behind." On my first two forays, both Cedar Rapids shop owners agreed to post the flyer. I still need to get to more fishing stores.

Finally, I was interviewed by Orlan Love, the outdoors editor for the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, and an article on the incident and my efforts appeared in the Friday, April 4th paper. Diane Pesek of Cedar Rapids works at the *Gazette* and hers was the original effort resulting in the article. I myself learned in Orlan Love's article that the third and fourth graders of the Cedar Rapids Unitarian Universalist Church are creating a sign, using the Scarths' photograph, to post along Cedar Lake.

The problem with monofilament for birds and other animals is that they can't see it, probably especially when the line is underwater. Nor will underwater line eventually deteriorate since the sun's ultraviolet rays don't penetrate strongly enough. The best solution is recycling, because line simply thrown in the trash can eventually become a problem for birds who scavenge landfills. Currently the sole recycler of monofilament line in the United States is Pure Fishing of Spirit Lake, Iowa. The company recycles the line into cage-like underwater fish habitats. They also offer free recycling bins for tackle shops. Information on this program is available by calling Pure Fishing at (877) 777-3850, ext. 8419.



## Book Review

### Chris Edwards

**National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North American, Fourth Edition.** National Geographic, 2002. 480 pages. \$21.95.

If I were allowed to own only one bird book, this would be the one. (I know that's a bold statement, but fortunately it's only a hypothetical scenario!) The National Geographic guide has long been a favorite of many birders. It strikes a nice balance by being both comprehensive and reasonably compact. The guide covers all of North America and includes more than 800 species, presented in taxonomic order, typically three or four species to a page. Painted illustrations are shown on odd-numbered pages, with accompanying text and range maps on opposing pages.

The long-awaited third edition, published in 1999, was a major upgrade incorporating 80 additional species, numerous taxonomic changes, and many new color plates. This new fourth edition is more of a minor maintenance release. According to the introduction, it includes "hundreds of new range maps, many new color plates, and copious new facts added to the text." I found only seven new plates, covering shearwaters, cormorants, bitterns and night-herons, godwits, auklets, tyrant flycatchers, and *Oporornis* warblers. The godwit plate is an especially welcome replacement. The trend on the new plates is to maintain the same number of species on each page but to include many more illustrations of those species. This is generally a good thing, but it does lead to smaller and sometimes less detailed illustrations. As an example, the new plate for tyrant flycatchers depicts nineteen individual birds in various plumages and positions, compared to four illustrations of the same four species in the old edition.

All the most recent taxonomic changes made by the American Ornithologists' Union are reflected in this edition. Black-crested Titmouse and Wilson's Snipe are here, and the Oldsquaw is replaced by the more politically-correct Long-tailed Duck. Range maps for many species, including some Iowa species, have indeed been updated. The presence of Eurasian Tree Sparrows in southeast Iowa, although not mentioned in the text, is finally shown on a range map. A nice addition to the book is a one-page "quick-find" index to bird families near the back of the book, but still missing are the color-coded index tabs that are used effectively in some other guides.

In short, this is an improved version of a classic, indispensable field guide. If you don't own a previous edition, this volume should be at the top of your shopping list. However, if you already have the third edition, you may want to take a look a close look before deciding to shell out at the cash register, as the improvements are relatively minor.

## Local Highlights from the Iowa RBA - Winter 2003

Mike Dooley

With shorebird conditions less than ideal at Hawkeye W.A., Johnson County was not much heard from on the Iowa Rare Bird Alert during the Fall 2002 season, but picked up the pace for the Winter season, more than doubling its reports.

In January at Hawkeye Wildlife Area in the northwest part of the county, single MERLINS were seen west of the upper Coralville Reservoir along Swan Lake Rd. and along Amana Rd. on the north side of the reservoir. A NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL was discovered in cedars up the hillside along Amana Rd. just east of Blain Cemetery Rd., a familiar spot for this species. The owl was first reported in early February and relocated twice over the following two weeks. This general area also produced a single CAROLINA WREN sighting in late February. Much farther to the west on Amana Rd., just outside Amana itself, a HARLAN'S RED-TAILED HAWK was identified in mid February. On the south side of Hawkeye, wintering GRAY CATBIRD and YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER singles were found along Swan Lake Rd. west of James Ave. in late January. The only flock of LAPLAND LONGSPURS reported in the area was of 55 along James Ave. just north of F-28, in mid February.

In the Lower Coralville Reservoir-Lake Macbride area, two WINTER WRENS were found in the first week of January at a creek in Sugar Bottom R.A. One was relocated several times into the first week of February. That same week, one birder's search missed the wren but turned up a HERMIT THRUSH in the area. A HARLAN'S RED-TAILED HAWK was observed at Lake Macbride's south arm in early January.

Iowa City itself produced a number of reports on the RBA this winter season, including a PEREGRINE FALCON at the south edge of town in late February and a late-December GLAUCOUS GULL on the Iowa River on the University of Iowa campus. Backyards accounted for the other Iowa City reports, including a rare late-January OVENBIRD visit. Other interesting backyard birds included YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKERS in January and February, a GRAY CATBIRD which lingered from late December to late January, BROWN THRASHER reports from two different residences, and one of the state's few PURPLE FINCH sightings this year, a pair at a feeder in mid February.

Outside of the Hawkeye-Coralville Reservoir area and Iowa City, two LONG-EARED OWLS were seen at Kent Park west of Tiffin in early February.

## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

**January 25, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** This field trip was originally slated for the Mississippi River at Davenport. Although the previous day's scouting found numerous Common Goldeneyes under the I-80 bridge, a thorough search of the river from LeClaire south to Muscatine only produced a handful of Ring-billed Gulls, thus an alternate location was chosen.

Instead we headed for Hawkeye Wildlife Area and parked along James Ave. about ½ mile north of Swan Lake Rd. From there we had a nice leisurely walk down a grassy service road that wandered east, eventually ending at the Sand Point parking lot. It was pretty chilly despite the sunshine and lack of wind. Unfortunately there weren't many birds to be found until we reached the Sand Point lot. There we enjoyed an immature harrier hunt the fields out towards the point. An adult accipiter flew by at eye-level, which led to an interesting group discussion

regarding the reliability of apparent size and tail-shape in identifying these birds. A flock of Cedar Waxwings at the Swan Lake Woods might have been the most interesting of all. They took little notice of our group and let us approach quite closely. A few pairs exhibited an interesting fruit passing behavior in which the berry they held would be passed back and forth between the birds repeatedly. A few of us also had a nice look at a Red Fox crossing James Avenue.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Bob Dick, Dara Dick, John Donelson, Linda Donelson, Linda Fisher, Den Henrickson, Ramona McGurk, Diana Pesek, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns.

Birds (16 species): Bald Eagle, *accipiter* sp., Northern Harrier, owl sp., Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal.

– Chris Caster

### February 8, Amana Turkey Walk and Feast.

Twenty-two people spent 1½ hours in the Amana woods. Although overcast, it was a pleasant walk. Around 10 a.m. we headed for the Colony Inn and breakfast. Wild Turkeys were found on the way back in at least three places.

Participants: Ed and Jean Allgood (leaders), Chris Caster, Alyssa Cohen, Michael Cohen, Bob Dick, John Drysdale, Susan Drysdale, Jonni Ellsworth, Linda Fisher, Roger Fisher, Therese Guedon, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, Ramona McGurk, John McLure, Darlyne Neff, John Neff, Mary Noble, Jim Scheib, Ron Swartzendruber, Sara Swartzendruber, Helen Yoder.

Birds (23 species): Bald Eagle, possible Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Rock Dove, Mourning

Dove, owl species, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– Jean Allgood

**February 20, Meeting.** Mel Moe, DNR Wildlife Biologist, drove all the way from Mt. Ayr in southwest Iowa to present on the reintroduction of Greater Prairie Chickens at the Kellerton Grasslands in Ringgold County. When the Midwest was first settled the interior race of the Greater Prairie Chicken was found from Ohio to the Rockies. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the prairie chicken was the most abundant game bird on the Iowa prairie. As agricultural land use intensified, populations of prairie chickens started to decline. In Iowa, the last verified nesting prior to reintroduction attempts was in Appanoose County in 1952. Currently only Kansas and Nebraska have populations large enough to supply excess birds for reintroduction elsewhere. Mel says that some of our prairie chickens came from Kansas via Michigan in an interesting three-way trade involving Wild Turkeys and Canada Geese. In Iowa over 550 prairie chickens were released from 1987 to 1993.

The Iowa DNR and Partners in Flight initiated the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area. The goal is to have a core area of 2,000 acres of publicly owned and managed grasslands within a 10,000-acre block that contains at least another 2,000 acres of privately held grassland habitat. This area has also been nominated as an IBA. The DNR is also looking into reintroduction elsewhere and the Neil Smith National Wildlife Refuge southeast of Des Moines may be a good reintroduction site.

Studies in Missouri have shown that the Greater Prairie Chicken requires a minimum of 160 acres of suitable habitat for nesting to occur. The DNR has been managing for the tall-grass prairie

the birds require to provide food, nesting cover and shelter from the elements. Summer hailstorms and hard winters can be devastating to the prairie chickens. Rows of trees along ridge-tops are also being eliminated, because these provide perches for raptors. Unlike pheasants, prairie chickens are strong fliers and can out-fly predators like the Northern Harrier when spotted from a distance. On the other hand they are nearly defenseless when dived upon from a nearby perch.

Greater Prairie Chickens are notable for their use of leks. These are areas of very short grass, often on hilltops, where the males display and copulation with females will occur. The display will begin at sun-up and continue for about an hour. Males may sometimes return to the lek within an hour of sunset to display, but the females will not. These leks are used year after year and the best viewing is at sunrise on fair mornings during the months of March and April. The DNR has built a viewing platform adjacent to the largest lek for which the Iowa Ornithologists' Union donated a spotting scope.

Thanks Mel, I know everyone found your talk extremely interesting and enjoyable.

Attendees: Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Chris Caster, Margrietta Delle, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Meredith Gooding, Judy Felder, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Marie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, the Moe family, Kari Oeltjen, Diana Pesek, Sandy Rhodes, Sue Sarlette, Linda Scarth, Robert Scarth, Jim Scheib, Sharon Sheib, Sheri Six.  
– *Chris Caster*

**February 23, Owl Prowl.** 35 people met to go prowling for owls on a crisp winter afternoon. First we visited Hickory Hill Park to view a roosting Northern Saw-whet Owl. Roosting owls can be very susceptible to human disturbance when their locations become well-known. To lessen this disturbance, we took turns quietly approaching the owl in small

groups. We then visited a spot near Holiday Road in Coralville where taped Barred Owl and Eastern Screech-owl calls were played, but no owls responded or put in an appearance.

Our next stop was Kent Park, where two Long-eared Owls had recently been seen. Two members of our party approached the roost from the back side, hoping that if the owls flushed the rest of the group would get to see them fly. Alas no owls were seen that day. From there we went to Greencastle Avenue to a favorite roosting spot for Long-eared Owls, where we found fresh pellets and whitewash on tree trunks but no owls. All in all it was a great day with a marvelous group of people, ranging in age from 6 to 84.

Participants: Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Andra Dill, Karen Disbrow (leader), Chris Edwards, Dan Edwards, Linda Fisher, Roger Heidt, James Huntington, Troy Kelsay, Quintin Kelsay, Bernie Knight, Maureen Knight (Seattle, WA), Marge Kurtz, Tom Kurtz, Dave Kyllingstad, Ken Lowder, Cathy Mandarino, Ramona McGurk, Cathy Mittelberg, Tara Mittelberg, Andrea Novak, Gerald Pearson, Diana Pesek, Cindy Ribble, Steve Ribble, Liz Robinson, Sue Sarlette, Jim Scheib, Brad Smith, Jackie Stokes, John Stokes, Gerald White, Pauline White.

Birds: Bald Eagle (2), Red-tailed Hawk (15), Northern Saw-whet Owl (1). Also a herd of 35 White-tailed Deer.  
– *Karen Disbrow*

**March 8, Burlington Area.** We left Iowa City at 6:45 a.m. to meet up with Chuck Fuller at the Port of Burlington at 8:10 a.m. The conditions were cool and hazy with calm winds. We went to a concrete storm sewer near the river where we saw a Winter Wren and heard a Carolina Wren. Then we went on to the cemetery where two Yellow-rumped Warblers which had spent the winter were seen. We drove to Geode State Park to catch a glimpse of a Red-shouldered Hawk, but he did not appear. On the way we passed a cornfield with about fifty Wild Turkeys, the largest group I had ever seen.



We visited the rural bird feeder which had been frequented all winter by the juvenile Black-headed Grosbeak. After 1½ hours with no grosbeak, we moved on to the Mississippi River. Two American Pipits were spotted with several gulls and eagles on an ice floe in the river. We watched a small flock of American Coots being harassed by the eagles. The coots, being poor fliers, were submerging to elude the eagles. Eventually the coots were worn out and an immature eagle snagged one of them. Three male Buffleheads were displaying and putting on quite a nice performance for a lone female.

Lapland Longspurs were found in a field close by. The temperature had taken a dive and the winds had picked up by then. We headed back to the bird feeder to give the Black-headed Grosbeak another chance to show up. Luckily the bird did show up and we watched him for about 30 minutes before calling it a day. We returned to Iowa City about 5:30 p.m. Thanks very much to Chuck Fuller who shows us all the best spots in the Burlington area for birds and is a great host.

Participants: Karen Disbrow, Linda Fisher, Chuck Fuller (leader), Cathy Mandarino, Diana Pesek.

Birds (48 species): Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Winter Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, Northern Cardinal, Black-headed

Grosbeak, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**March 27, Meeting.** Karl Jungbluth, with the National Weather Service Office in Des Moines, gave us a very interesting talk on Radar Ornithology. Sidney Gauthreaux pioneered this field in the early 60s while a graduate student in Louisiana. Using radar he was the first to prove that trans-Gulf bird migration does occur. Dr. Gauthreaux now heads the Clemson University Radar Ornithology Lab. Its educational website and others can be reached from Karl's personal webpage, which is now linked to our ICBC webpage.

Radars work by transmitting a beam of microwave signals. Some of this energy is reflected back to the radar site from objects in the atmosphere such as water droplets. Therefore it is not surprising that birds, bats and even insects—all of which are mostly water, would also produce radar echoes. Karl showed us many examples of how these echoes are distinctly different from those produced by precipitation.

The development of NEXRAD WSR-88D weather radar was a boon to ornithology. It is a Doppler radar and so it is capable of providing the velocity of an object relative to the radar station. Objects moving towards the station will appear a different color than those moving away. It allows the separation of birds from slower moving insects and stationary ground clutter. Currently the Partners in Flight initiative is using this technology to locate important migratory stopover sites that have been overlooked by ground observers. Karl showed us numerous images of flocks leaving from reservoirs and river corridors near Des Moines.

During migration birds will typically depart 30 to 45 minutes after local sunset. You can time sunset on a radar loop by looking for the sun strobe that will occur on the radar image

towards the west. After sunset a large circle of echoes will emerge surrounding the radar site. These echoes will become a donut in shape as the birds gain altitude, because the radar beam is low to the ground near the station and rises at a 0.5-degree angle of elevation as it moves away. Typically migrating flocks are most dense around 1,500 feet, but this varies with wind speeds and directions at altitude. Birds will seek the altitude where their migration is most efficient. This may be as high as 15 to 20 thousand feet in trans-Gulf migration. Birds migrate during the night for various reasons. At night the air cools and becomes less turbulent, making flight easier. Birds' bodies also work more efficiently at lower temperatures. Nocturnal migrants are then able to use the daytime hours to feed.

Migration is hard work and birds will wait until conditions are favorable to move. Trans-Gulf migration takes around 18 hours if the conditions are favorable. If conditions are not favorable many birds will wait. As a result the migration might seem a little slow in our area despite seemingly favorable conditions here. In the spring, migration is favored by the southerly winds behind the passage of a warm front. Birds will migrate until just before dawn, when they land to rest and forage wherever that happens to be. If they encounter unfavorable conditions they will land sooner. The presence of a stationary front can be a significant barrier to northern migration and can result in large numbers of migrants stopping over at particular latitude. Karl recommends getting out into that morning drizzle if you want to find birds.

Attendees: Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Chris Caster, Margrietta Delle, Bob Dick, Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Jim Durbin, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Bess Folk, Edgar Folk, Tony Franken, Mary Gilbert, James Huntington, Dave Kyllingstad, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, Darlyne Neff, John Neff, Kari Oeltjen, Gerry Pearson, Diana Pesek, Dan Peterson, Sue Sarlette, Linda Scarth, Robert Scarth, Jim Sheib,

Bill Scheible, Corinne Schoer, Lowell Schoer, Sheri Six, Richard Tetrault, Sarah Walz.

– *Chris Caster*

**March 30, Cone Marsh.** It was a crisp, sunny morning when we arrived at the marsh. We began our tour in the northeast corner, where we scoped the vast expanse of ponds and mudflats. A group of four Trumpeter Swans with red neck collars were present and treated us to a close fly-by. A variety of ducks including Hooded Mergansers and Green-winged Teal were seen. Several shorebird species were found probing the mud. One yellowlegs steadfastly refused to be identified as Greater or Lesser, and was dubbed "Wickham's Yellowlegs" in honor of its discoverer. A Sandhill Crane bugled as it flew off to the fields to the north, and several Rusty Blackbirds were seen.

We moved on to the road along the south side of the marsh, where large numbers of dabbling and diving ducks were seen at fairly close range. The swans put in another starring appearance, and two Eurasian Tree Sparrows were seen briefly. Next we walked the main dike, a.k.a. Coot Central. In the trees near the shore, we saw the day's only Golden-crowned Kinglet and enjoyed the songs of a hidden Fox Sparrow. Sharp eyes spotted a large flock of American White Pelicans soaring high up against the clouds. At the boat ramp in the northwest corner of the marsh, we studied a very cooperative Eastern Phoebe feeding along the water's edge.

After a late morning pit stop in Lone Tree, many participants called it a day, while a smaller number made a stop at the S & G Sandpit south of Iowa City. This is private property, but Mike Dooley obtained permission for our group's visit. (Mike tells us that the manager of S & G has been appreciative of his bird monitoring efforts and has been receptive to suggestions for improving the habitat for birds.) During our visit, we saw a nice assortment of waterfowl including several female Red-breasted Mergansers. As we were walking back to our cars, we flushed a small yellowish sparrow which

flew a short distance and dropped back into the grass. We gave chase, but each time we approached, it flushed and flew farther away. Finally it landed on the ground in a more open brushy area, and was identified as a LeConte's Sparrow, a life bird for one of our party and a new addition to the property's bird list. It provided a nice capper for the day.

Participants: Bob Dick, Mike Dooley, Chris Edwards (leader), Linda Fisher, Tony Franken, Therese Guedon, Troy Kelsay, Ken Lowder, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, John Maguire, Mary Ellen Maguire, Cathy Mandarino, Gerald Pearson, Diana Pesek, Sue Sarlette, Jim Scheib, Sharon Scheib, Bill Scheible, Bob Stearns, Joan Stearns, Pete Wickham.

Birds: (68 species): Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, American Golden-Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Goldfinch, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

— *Chris Edwards*

## Adopt-a-Highway Program

If you were present at the February meeting, Chris Henze of the Johnson County Secondary Road Department was a no-show. You might recall that Johnson County will not post roadside signs for groups participating in their program. Since we did not get the chance to discuss this with Chris, I have looked into the State DOT Adopt-a-Highway Program. The state's choices of roads aren't as esthetically appealing, and the choices are few, but we would get a sign advertising our presence in the community. I was provided with a short list of highway stretches that are available for adoption. Some of these were not at all desirable, because they run through heavily commercial districts. Below are two available stretches of Johnson County highway that in my opinion would work:

- 1) Highway 965, from mile marker 110.7 to 103.0—runs north from the North Liberty boundary near Dubuque St. to the Amoco Oil facility. This is a pleasant stretch of road, isn't too messy, and would be safe to work.
- 2) Highway 923, from mile marker 84.4 to 86.8—runs north from Observatory Rd. at Hills to the crest of the ridge north of 480<sup>th</sup> Street. This road is within earshot of Highway 218, doesn't have much traffic and thus wouldn't give us much exposure.

If I had to choose, adoption of the Highway 965 stretch would be my choice. It is closer to places we frequent and it would give us decent exposure. Based on the volunteer form returns, a sufficient number of persons expressed a willingness to participate in this program. If we are going to do this, I personally think that someone needs to step forward to be an Adopt-a-Highway Coordinator. This person will need to go to the DOT shed near the Oakdale Prison to obtain supplies and handle things like rain dates. And of course the Coordinator will need a list of committed club members. The required commitment is for two clean-ups annually. This shouldn't be much of a burden. If anyone is interested in acting as Coordinator, I encourage him or her to contact me ASAP. We don't know how long this opportunity will remain.

— *Chris Caster*

## ♪ Bird Notes ♪

### Rick Hollis

#### *Avian Evolution*

It seems like every time I look at a summary of scientific journals there is another article on the relationship between bird ancestors and dinosaurs or the evolution of flight. Truly bizarre was the four-winged dinosaur recently described. In the journal *Science* (2003 299: 402-404) Kenneth Dial puts forth yet another idea into the origin of flight. You know how we sometimes flap our arms to keep our balance when we are falling – we use them to maintain balance. He suggests that a small dinosaur fleeing a predator may have flapped its wings to gain balance. Like a spoiler on a race car, the flapping wings would have acted to keep the animal sure-footed by holding its feet against the ground. Obviously, Dial could not film winged dinosaurs, but looking at young partridges he found good examples of running ability with wings, but without the ability to fly. He found baby partridges could scurry up a 45-degree incline using just their strong legs. When they flap their developing wings, they can go straight up a 90-degree slope. Mature partridges can actually run under a slight overhang while flapping their wings.

Like other theories, Dial's would suggest that flight evolved gradually in land-dwelling animals. Feathers could have first evolved to protect from cold and wet weather, and later act to aid in running. Other theories hold that tree-dwelling creatures used their early wing-like structures to glide between and from trees.

#### *Environmental Balance in the Courts*

Some of the Bush administration moves towards 'balance' in environmental action have been overturned in court. In January a federal judge in Tucson chastised the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for excluding 8.9 million acres of forest in Arizona and New Mexico from the designated critical habitat area of the Mexican

Spotted Owl. The ruling denounced the agency for slashing the amount of critical habitat designated for the owl. Continuing, the judge ruled that the USFWS illegally withheld critical information from the public and peer reviewers, and refused to consider protecting essential, but currently unoccupied, owl habitat.

The case could have ramifications for dozens of other cases in which the final critical habitat designation has eliminated thousands or millions of acres of proposed critical habitat. Citing the importance of habitat loss to the majority of endangered species, the ruling declared that "Formal designation of critical habitat is a key protection to endangered and threatened species." This will certainly be appealed.

#### *Superb Fairy-Wrens and Sneaky Helpers*

The Superb Fairy-Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*) of southeast Australia and Tasmania has a complicated breeding system in which a dominant male shares his territory with up to four subordinate males. Females pair up with one male but were already known to sneak out to neighbors' territories before dawn for secret sex. Early studies thought these subordinates were mere helpers, but newer studies indicate that their help goes far beyond raising chicks and defending the home territory. The newest studies show that males sing to entice females into early-morning liaisons. Sneaky males stick close to their betters, perhaps to maximize the confusion: the further a female travels for a tryst, the more likely she is to end up with a second-rate swain, the team found. (The Royal Society, Proceedings: Biological Sciences, Volume 270 Number 1513 Page 379-384.)

#### *Two Individual Birds Which Have Played Important Roles in Captive Breeding Programs*

Canus, a one-winged Whooping Crane, died in January of natural causes, a few weeks short of his 39th birthday. Canus played a crucial role in establishing a captive breeding population of Whooping Cranes. This bird was found in the wild with a fractured wing in 1964. At that time

there were just 42 Whooping Cranes left in the world. Canus was shipped to Maryland in 1966 to become the first Whooping Crane in the endangered species recovery program at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. Today, the Whooping Crane population has increased to about 420 birds.

Here are two quotes from staff members at Patuxent:

“Canus the individual may be gone, but his legacy will persist in the growing populations of wild Whooping Cranes in North America. He was a great symbol for restoration of wildlife populations, and he will be missed.”

“Although Canus’ role as a sire helped in bringing the Whooping Crane back from the brink of extinction, teaching us how to keep his species alive and how to breed them was really his most significant contribution. When Canus became a resident at Patuxent, we had to learn what to feed Whooping Cranes, how to get them to breed, and how to keep their eggs alive. The staff is really shaken up over the death.”

At our February meeting, Jean Allgood and Sharon Scheib were discussing the Allgoods’ upcoming trip to California, and looking for California Condors. Free-flying condors were made all the more interesting by the possibility of seeing Igor (formally AC8). Igor was probably the last condor born in the wild and was definitely the last remaining free condor at the time of his capture in 1987. AC8 had been released as his reproductive life was over and researchers thought his earlier experience as a free-flying bird might help the younger birds. Our discussion was sadly ironic, because we did not know that the day before the meeting, AC8’s body was found in southern Kern County, California. A necropsy determined that the bird died of a gunshot; as of early April, prosecutors were receiving charges against the suspect. With the death of AC8, only 79 birds remain in the wild, and another 118 birds are in breeding programs. AC8 spent fifteen years in the reproductive program saving his species, and

then was free only from May 1, 2002 until February 19, 2003. Things have not changed since AC8 was flying free for the first time.

I think we sometimes forget that specific, individual animals can make contributions to programs such as these, long before people can make contributions with ultra-light airplanes, etc. Both of these birds did. From our standpoint at the beginning of the 21st century, it appears that the Whooping Crane Recovery Program will be successful, especially if a second and third flock can be established. Looking through my binoculars, it is far too early to make any bets about the California Condor. Released birds are flying, but are struggling with the same issues that killed their grandparents.

### ***Ruddy Ducks Under Fire***

In early March, the British government announced a proposal to do away with Ruddy Ducks. Ruddies were introduced to Europe in the fifties by a bird fancier and they did quite well. They spread from their initial site all over Britain, and to make matters worse, ruddies now appear in 20 European countries. Ruddies have long been considered a threat to Europe’s native stiff-tail, the White-headed Duck. They mate very aggressively with white-heads. The White-headed Duck populations are collapsing and gene pools are danger of being swamped. The project was to be carried out by government marksmen. At this point feathers flew as everyone and their brother and sister pointed out objections to the proposal: the White-headed Duck is in danger because of over-hunting rather than breeding with its American relatives; it is too expensive—at £915 per duck one could fly them to New York business class. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, speaking for the White-headed ducks, says that the eradication plan, while “regrettable,” is a necessary measure to keep them from becoming extinct. Now various politicians are spouting off, saying the ducks’ only crime appears to be to mating with the Spanish White-headed Duck. (From the *New York Times* and BBC Online.)

# Iowa City Bird Club

*Eastern Iowa Birdwatch* is published three times per year (usually April, September, and December). Members are encouraged to send articles, reviews, notes, and comments to editor Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317, or e-mail at [credwards@aol.com](mailto:credwards@aol.com).

**Annual membership dues** are \$10.00, payable by January 1st for the coming year. Make checks payable to Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, and mail to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee St., Iowa City, IA 52246. Check your mailing label for the year you have paid through.

**For general bird club information**, contact Iowa City Bird Club president Chris Caster at 339-8343. **To lead or suggest a field trip**, contact field trip coordinator Karen Disbrow at 339-1017. **The club web site** is maintained by Jim Scheib and is located at [www.jccniowa.org/~icbc/](http://www.jccniowa.org/~icbc/).

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