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# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 23 Number 2

September 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.

**September 13, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Birding Lake Macbride by Boat.** Hosts Richard and Nancy Lynch will arrange for watercraft (canoes, kayaks and pontoon boat) and provide refreshments after the outing. Please call them at 624-3014 if you plan to attend.

**September 18, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting.** Ed Folk of Iowa City will help us beat the Iowa heat when he presents on his seven birding trips to the Antarctic's Larsen Ice Shelf.

**September 20, Saturday, 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Annual Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve,** with programs and activities at the Macbride Raptor Center. See page 2 for more information.

**September 27, Saturday, 5:00 p.m. Museum Of Natural History Reception** to benefit Hageboeck Hall of Birds, followed at 7:00 p.m. by a special showing of *Winged Migration* at the Bijou theater. Cost is \$25 per person. See page 6 for details.

**September 28, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area** for sparrows, waterfowl, and other early fall migrants. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**October 5, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Cone Marsh.** Check out this local birding hotspot for waterfowl. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**October 10 – 12, Friday – Sunday. Iowa Ornithologists' Union Fall Meeting** at Hitchcock Nature Area in western Iowa's Loess Hills. See page 2 for more information.

**October 16, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting.** Kent Nickell from Waterloo has made a name for himself as a digiscoper. Come learn about this up-and-coming photographic technique that many birders now use to document their sightings.

Continued on next page →

**October 19, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area and Wickiup Hill Natural Area** in Linn County for diving ducks and other migrants. Meet at 7:30 at Hy-Vee in Iowa City, or at 8:00 a.m. at Perkins, 33rd Ave. exit of I-380, in Cedar Rapids. Diana Pesek, 363-3522.

**November 7 – 9, Friday – Sunday. Second Annual Rivers and Bluffs Fall Birding Festival** at Lansing in Allamakee County. See page 3 for more information.

**November 16, Sunday. 8:00 a.m. Coralville Reservoir and Lake Macbride** for waterfowl and gulls. Bob Dick, 337-4945.

**November 20, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting.** Marlene Ehresman of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation will travel from Ames to present on her recent publication “A Bird’s Eye View—A New Perspective on Managing and Protecting Land for Neotropical Migratory Birds.”

**December 14, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count.** Details will be provided in next issue.

## News

**RENEWAL REMINDER.** It’s not too early to pay your \$10 membership dues for 2004. Checks should be made payable to “Eastern Iowa Birdwatch” and sent to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City, IA, 52246. Members who have renewed by late December will receive their new 2004 membership card by January 1st, which entitles the bearer to a 10% discount on bird seed at Wildlife Habitat in Coralville.

## Fall Hawk Watch

Bring the family and friends for a migration celebration! Saturday, September 20th, 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. Bring binoculars, blankets, lawn chairs and picnic lunches for hawk watching on the ridge at Stainbrook State Preserve, located along Mehaffey Bridge Road just north of the entrance to Sugar Bottom Recreation Area.

Programs at the Raptor Center at nearby Macbride Nature-Recreation Area will include:

- 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Hawk Identification Seminar by Jodeane Cancilla
- 10 a.m. Osprey Introduction Slide Presentation by Jodeane Cancilla
- 12 p.m. Live Raptor Program by Macbride Raptor Project Staff

- 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Songbird Banding by Meredith Caskey

For more information call 398-5495 or 335-9293.

## IOU Fall Meeting at Hitchcock Nature Area

The Iowa Ornithologists’ Union Fall Meeting will be held Friday, October 10 – Sunday, October 12 at the Hitchcock Nature Area in the Loess Hills of western Iowa. HNA is one of the best wildlife viewing areas in the state. Of particular interest to birders are the annual hawk watches conducted from September to December. Each fall thousands of hawks, eagles and vultures migrate south past the area, along with literally millions of other migrants ranging from butterflies and dragonflies to robins, blackbirds, and pelicans.

The weekend’s activities will include:

- Saturday and Sunday morning field trips to Fontenelle Forest, DeSoto Bend NWR, Boyar Schuete NWR, Lake Manawa, Mid-American Power Plant, and Hitchcock Nature Area.
- Saturday afternoon programs including *History of the IOU* by Tom Kent, *Birding Trinidad and Tobago* by Dick Stillwell, *Update on Important Bird Areas* by Ric

Zarwell, and *Hitchcock Nature Center Hawk Watch, 1992-2003* by Mark Orsag.

- Saturday evening banquet and program, *Birds and Mammals of Africa* by Ty Smedes.

For more information consult the Iowa Birding web site at [www.iowabirds.org](http://www.iowabirds.org) or contact Karen Disbrow locally at 337-1017.

## Rivers & Bluffs Fall Birding Festival

The second annual Rivers & Bluffs Fall Birding Festival will be held November 7 – 9 along the Mississippi River at Lansing in northeast Iowa. This year's event is being co-sponsored by the Iowa City Bird Club. This is peak migration season on the Mississippi for thousands of Tundra Swans, ducks, and geese. Field trip participants will also search for Golden Eagles and Ruffed Grouse. Highlights include two half-day field trips; programs including "How to Create a Bird Haven at Home"; live Bald Eagle, hawk, and owl interpretive programs; a Mississippi River cruise; meals at local restaurants; live music and special fun on Saturday night. Registration is only \$5. The festival organizers are Ric and Betty Zarwell. For more information contact them at [zarxzar@salamander.com](mailto:zarxzar@salamander.com) or call Karen Disbrow locally at 337-1017.

## A Museum of Natural History and Hageboeck Hall Update Chris Caster

Work continues in the Hageboeck Hall of Birds (pronounced Hedge-beck) despite continuing staffing limitations. New educational labels will go up in the Laysan Island Cyclorama this month, exploring the ecology of the island and describing the Cyclorama's unique place in the history of museum exhibits. A new sound system will feature twenty-two bird calls mixed

into the traditional narrative providing an audio tour of all but two of the species on display.

In early July, with the help of a grant obtained from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), two professional conservators spent two days examining the Cyclorama. They reported the mural and specimens are generally in excellent condition but in need of a thorough cleaning – not surprising after 90 years. Their detailed recommendations for cleaning and preserving the Cyclorama for another 100 years are expected next month.

In the fall the Museum anticipates turning to the east room of Hageboeck Hall where two major exhibits remain to be finished.

The Birds and You exhibit will draw upon University collections and donor-supplied memorabilia to document the long-standing relationship between birds and humans as illustrated by birds' long history as religious and cultural symbols. The exhibit will also explore the role of birds in the lives of some of the important contributors to the Museum's bird collection.

A 45-foot mural on the east end of the gallery will form the backdrop for the Iowa Environmental History Wall that will tell the 12,000-year ecological, biological and cultural history of Iowa through birds. The plan is to create a multi-layered collage of antiques, historic memorabilia, images, text and bird specimens, that will describe the cultural forces that have shaped the Iowa landscape since the arrival of humans. Drawing on various collections on campus, and with the help of donors, the aim is to create an exhibit that will be an invaluable teaching tool and a vivid message for visitors of all ages.

If you want to help support the completion of Hageboeck Hall contact the Museum or the University of Iowa Foundation.

## From Our President Chris Caster

Hello everyone, I hope you've all had a good summer. We have a lot on our fall schedule. In addition to the usual docket of outings the Iowa City Bird Club is co-sponsoring two larger events.

Many of you likely attended the reception at Bird Hall in 1997 hosted by Museum Director George Schrimper. The renovation has come a long way since then and if you haven't visited the Hall of Birds, you really should. But with the University's budgetary crunch the project has come to a halt, and the east room remains undone. A new designer will need to be hired and it is estimated that nearly \$60,000 will be needed to finish the job.

As you may already have heard the University's Bijou Theater will be showing the film *Winged Migration* for one week beginning Thursday, Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>. Karen Disbrow and I have been working with Dave Brenzel, the Program Director for the U of I Museum of Natural History, the Bijou Theater, and the U of I Foundation to create a fund-raising event around the film towards the completion of the Museum's Hageboeck Hall of Birds. Fortunately the people at the Bijou are sympathetic and have agreed to donate a portion of the proceeds from the film showing to the renovation project. The Bird Club's role will be to encourage as many people as possible to attend the film during its one week run. So please attend and tell everyone you know. We should have the schedule of times on our website when they become available. This is a great way to help promote birds and our organization as well as raise money for a good cause.

Additionally on Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, there will be a special showing of *Winged Migration*. The Bird Club will help host a reception at the Hall of Birds followed by a showing of the film in the Illinois Room at the Iowa Memorial

Union. Tickets should be purchased in advance through the U of I Foundation at \$25 per person. This special evening is being promoted statewide and seating is limited. Early signup is encouraged, as it will help the Museum plan for drinks and hors d'oeuvres at the reception.

The ICBC is a co-sponsor of the 2nd Annual River and Bluffs Fall Birding Festival, November 7-9 in Lansing, IA. This event is organized by Ric and Betty Zarwell and is sure to be a good time. The highlights are the large congregations of migrating Tundra Swans and Bald Eagles along the Mississippi. The area around Lansing is perhaps the most scenic in the state and there are a number of locations nearby that are good for migrating raptors, Ruffed Grouse or Golden Eagle at the right time of year. It is a fun area for Iowa birders to know and a relaxing place to spend a weekend.

The Zarwells are expecting a few of us to volunteer some time to help with the weekend. If you think that you might wish to attend beginning Friday, Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> and would be willing to man a registration booth or something along those lines, please let either myself or Karen Disbrow know.

Lastly we are all greatly saddened by the death of our friend Margrieta Delle in May. She was a pleasant person to be with and extremely giving of herself to the Bird Club and other local organizations. The ICBC has already received a check for \$100 towards a memorial in her name and I have had other inquiries of persons willing to donate. I ask that everyone who knew Margrieta to please think on what might be appropriate and respond to me on or before our Sept. 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Thanks to Bernie Knight for now shouldering the duties of Refreshment Coordinator for our meetings. I have provided Bernie with a list of persons willing to help with refreshments at our meetings. If called upon, please help Bernie as you are able.

## Remembering Margrieta Delle Karen Disbrow

Margrieta Delle died at 9 p.m. on May 15, 2003; she was 80 years young. I knew Margrieta as a naturalist with a great understanding of how important habitat is to the survival of all species. Birds, butterflies, frogs – she was interested in everything in nature. Zest and joy in life! That was Margrieta.

Margrieta was a charter member of the Iowa City Camera Club and won every local and regional award possible for her photography. She was an active member of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union for 40 years. The Johnson County Songbird Project had a dedicated and active member in Margrieta. And of course, the Iowa City Bird Club. She brought the treats to each meeting because she wanted to, not because she was asked to take on this duty.

Margrieta had very bad eyes from the time she was a child, but she had great ears. She played the piano and organ. She birded primarily by ear. In the 1990s after retiring she had laser surgery and could actually see without her coke bottle glasses. That was a great day for Margrieta. It was a piece of freedom. Margrieta appreciated freedom and really understood what it meant.

Margrieta was born on January 23, 1923 in Riga, Latvia to Prof. Peter and Alisa Delle. In 1941 at the age of 18 Margrieta was taken by the Nazis as part of the forced labor for their factories in Germany. Her parents had been rounded up by the Nazis earlier and she never saw them again. After the war Margrieta made her way to an American-run refugee camp. In 1949 the Zion Lutheran Church of Iowa City sponsored a number of refugees, including Margrieta, and she came to Iowa City. She enrolled in classes and received her B.S. and

M.S. in Biochemistry from the University of Iowa. She worked as a research assistant in the cardiac research labs at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics for 40 years until she retired at age 70.

Margrieta had many accomplishments in photography and ornithology. Along with Rick Hollis she taught a course in birding through Kirkwood and the Museum of Natural History. She participated in field studies on Scarlet Tanagers and Wood Thrushes for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and her work on Project Tanager was featured in *WildBird* magazine. In 1990 Margrieta and Bud Gode started a frog survey route at Hawkeye Wildlife Area for the Iowa DNR as part of an ongoing national initiative to determine the abundance and location of frog species.

There is much more I could say about Margrieta, but I will end with this – I was very lucky to have known her, birded with her, and gone frogging with her. The month of May was her favorite time of year because the birds came back. I like to think that on May 15 she joined the warblers on their migration... she would have loved that!



The Iowa City Bird Club has started to receive funds for a memorial to honor Margrieta. We are taking suggestions for what would be an appropriate memorial. She had many books, most of them on nature. The books written in Latvian were donated to the University of Iowa Libraries. I would like to auction the remaining books to raise additional funds for her memorial. For a listing of titles please visit the club web site at [icbirds.org](http://icbirds.org). The books are located in a room of the Museum of Natural History where they can be viewed by asking Dave Brenzel for assistance. All the books are in very good or excellent condition. Details about the auction will be announced at an upcoming meeting.

## 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. In fact there is very little narration other than the use of swift explanatory titles. One reviewer described it as a mosaic of tiny narratives that track the birds on their travels toward successful migration. Another reviewer described the film as alternately stunning and dull—there's a whole lot of flapping going on for 85 minutes. But another reviewer described the results as intimate and spectacular.

Perrin was inspired to make the film after receiving aerial footage from Canadian ultra-light pilot Bill Lishman of his 15 imprinted goslings. According to Perrin, "When you make a movie about nature it should be like opening a window in the viewer's soul." This film will bring you closer to the mystery of migration than you would have ever thought possible. 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 40 countries and 7 continents. It is being distributed in the United States by Sony Pictures Classics and was first released in New York City on April 18<sup>th</sup>. It is scheduled to appear in many locations around the country, including a one-week run at the Bijou in Iowa City in late September.

Just a forewarning—migration has its perils and some birds are killed. I have been informed that there are some scenes that may be disturbing to bird-lovers of any age.

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Please join us in Iowa City Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>, for a special showing of *Winged Migration* to enjoy this spectacular Academy Award-nominated film in the company of fellow bird enthusiasts, learn more about plans to finish Hageboeck Hall of Birds and raise money to accomplish this goal.

Saturday, September 27<sup>th</sup>

5:00-6:30 Reception at the Museum of Natural History, Macbride Hall

7:00-8:45 Film Showing at the Bijou Theater, Iowa Memorial Union

Sunday, September 28<sup>th</sup>

8:00 am Optional outing with the Iowa City Bird Club to Hawkeye Wildlife Area

The fee will be \$25 dollars per person. Seating is limited so please RSVP before September 20<sup>th</sup> to make your reservation. Make your check payable to the U of I Foundation and mail it with this form to: The University of Iowa Foundation, P. O. Box 4550, Iowa City, IA, 52244-4550.

Yes, I wish to reserve seats for the special showing of *Winged Migration* on September 27<sup>th</sup> to raise funds for the completion of the Hageboeck Hall of Birds.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Seats to Reserve \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

## 2003 Johnson County Spring Migration Count

### Chris Caster

The weather forecasts leading up to the count made us think that we might experience a repeat of last year's miserable conditions. Fortunately most of us only encountered a trace of rain during the morning hours and conditions were sunny most of the day. By afternoon the temperature had warmed to around 75 degrees. The sun became intense enough that those walking the shoreline at Hawkeye Wildlife Area welcomed the occasional cloud-cover. Towards dusk the clouds really socked in and the wind came up making a last ditch effort at a displaying woodcock nearly futile.

But boy what a day! This year's count brought everything we could reasonably have hoped for in Johnson County birding and we fielded a crew capable of making the most of it. In the end we logged 174 species on the day, a total not likely to be repeated anytime soon. This was a result of the tremendous balance we found amongst the different bird groups: 4 herons, 12 waterfowl, 9 raptors, 19 shorebirds, and 24 warblers. In previous years we have not approached these totals for any group, let alone all at once. The rising waters that we feared would drive the shorebirds off of the mudflats at Sand Point had not yet gotten high enough. The proceeding week had been warm enough to push many warblers northward into Iowa. And we had just enough eyes in the field to locate the few lingering migrant raptors.

The best bird was certainly the Long-tailed Duck present on the pond below Jim Fuller's house since April 8th. It was nice enough to hang around for the count. It was last seen on May 23rd, a record late date for the state by 11 days.

We had a number of other birds that had not yet been recorded in the six previous Spring Counts: Common Loon, Red-necked Grebe, Northern Pintail, Marbled Godwit, Baird's Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Bonaparte's Gull, and Philadelphia Vireo.

Other good birds included American Bittern, Great Egret, Greater White-fronted Goose, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Black-bellied Plover, Willet, White-rumped Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, Wilson's Phalarope, Herring Gull, Eastern Screech Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Bell's Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Veery, Northern Mockingbird, Cape May Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Clay-colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Birds that had been seen recently, but could not be located on count day were: Upland Sandpiper, Gray Partridge, and American Woodcock. Thanks to everyone for helping.

Participants included Ann and Jack Bagford, Chris Caster, Bob and Dara Dick, Mike Dooley, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Jim Fuller, James Huntington, Tom Kent, Ken Lowder, John and Gail McLure with grandson J.D. McLure, Cathy Mandarino, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Bill Scheible, Bob and Joan Stearns, and Pete Wickham. Feeder watchers: Larry Wahlberg.

<i>SPECIES LIST</i>			
American Bittern	2	Canada Goose	223
Common Loon	3	Great Blue Heron	32
Pied-billed Grebe	4	Great Egret	4
Red-necked Grebe	1	Green Heron	18
American White Pelican	500	Turkey Vulture	51
Double-crested Cormorant	80	Greater White-fronted Goose	1
		Wood Duck	32
		Gadwall	8
		Mallard	84
		Blue-winged Teal	170
		Northern Shoveler	17

Northern Pintail	1	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	2	Northern Parula	13
Green-winged Teal	4	Belted Kingfisher	4	Yellow Warbler	48
Ring-necked Duck	2	Red-headed Woodpecker	22	Chestnut-sided Warbler	32
Long-tailed Duck	1	Red-bellied Woodpecker	37	Magnolia Warbler	22
Ruddy Duck	1	Downy Woodpecker	38	Cape May Warbler	1
Osprey	2	Hairy Woodpecker	3	Yellow-rumped Warbler	253
Bald Eagle	1	Northern Flicker	22	Black-throated Green Warbler	11
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	Pileated Woodpecker	1	Blackburnian Warbler	10
Cooper's Hawk	1	Eastern Wood-Pewee	2	Yellow-throated Warbler	1
Broad-winged Hawk	12	Least Flycatcher	15	Palm Warbler	34
Red-tailed Hawk	10	Eastern Phoebe	12	Bay-breasted Warbler	2
American Kestrel	1	Great Crested Flycatcher	22	Blackpoll Warbler	5
Peregrine Falcon	1	Eastern Kingbird	28	Cerulean Warbler	7
Ring-necked Pheasant	61	Loggerhead Shrike	3	Black-and-white Warbler	22
Wild Turkey	17	Bell's Vireo	5	American Redstart	52
Northern Bobwhite	4	Blue-headed Vireo	14	Prothonotary Warbler	1
Sora	5	Yellow-throated Vireo	17	Ovenbird	25
American Coot	3	Warbling Vireo	10	Northern Waterthrush	21
Black-bellied Plover	5	Philadelphia Vireo	2	Common Yellowthroat	80
Semipalmated Plover	4	Red-eyed Vireo	9	Wilson's Warbler	3
Killdeer	37	Blue Jay	95	Scarlet Tanager	6
Greater Yellowlegs	5	American Crow	80	Eastern Towhee	9
Lesser Yellowlegs	256	Horned Lark	3	Chipping Sparrow	71
Solitary Sandpiper	4	Purple Martin	17	Clay-colored Sparrow	1
Willet	9	Tree Swallow	229	Field Sparrow	13
Spotted Sandpiper	35	N. Rough-winged Swallow	20	Vesper Sparrow	2
Hudsonian Godwit	1	Bank Swallow	13	Lark Sparrow	2
Marbled Godwit	2	Cliff Swallow	93	Savannah Sparrow	8
Semipalmated Sandpiper	3	Barn Swallow	86	Grasshopper Sparrow	13
Least Sandpiper	425	Black-capped Chickadee	49	Song Sparrow	41
White-rumped Sandpiper	2	Tufted Titmouse	29	Lincoln's Sparrow	4
Baird's Sandpiper	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	15	Swamp Sparrow	4
Pectoral Sandpiper	5	Carolina Wren	5	White-throated Sparrow	97
Dunlin	2	House Wren	81	Harris's Sparrow	3
Short-billed Dowitcher	4	Sedge Wren	3	White-crowned Sparrow	8
Long-billed Dowitcher	6	Marsh Wren	3	Northern Cardinal	181
Wilson's Phalarope	5	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	15	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	88
Franklin's Gull	21	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	37	Indigo Bunting	35
Bonaparte's Gull	1	Eastern Bluebird	12	Dickcissel	13
Ring-billed Gull	150	Veery	1	Bobolink	97
Herring Gull	1	Gray-cheeked Thrush	6	Red-winged Blackbird	753
Caspian Tern	22	Swainson's Thrush	10	Eastern Meadowlark	37
Forster's Tern	12	Wood Thrush	7	Western Meadowlark	19
Black Tern	12	American Robin	117	Yellow-headed Blackbird	1
Rock Dove	50	Gray Catbird	116	Common Grackle	86
Mourning Dove	53	Northern Mockingbird	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	75
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2	Brown Thrasher	37	Orchard Oriole	9
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	European Starling	143	Baltimore Oriole	77
Great Horned Owl	3	Cedar Waxwing	37	House Finch	8
Barred Owl	11	Blue-winged Warbler	2	American Goldfinch	65
Common Nighthawk	7	Golden-winged Warbler	12	House Sparrow	113
Whip-poor-will	1	Tennessee Warbler	18		
Chimney Swift	4	Nashville Warbler	36		



## A Birding Map of Hickory Hill Park

Map by Sarah Walz with text by Jim Scheib, Jim Fuller, and James Huntington

While the heaviest birding activity at the park is during spring migration in April and May, many common Iowa birds can be found at Hickory Hill Park all year. Some of the common residents are **Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, American Robin, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Crow, Red-tailed Hawk, Barred Owl, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Mourning Dove, European Starling, and House Sparrow**. Common woodpeckers include **Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers** and (Yellow-shafted) **Northern Flicker**.

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### *Spring and Fall Migrants*

All Iowa warbler species have been found in the park during migration. Common species include **Yellow-rumped, Tennessee, Black-and-white, Chestnut-sided, Wilson's, Magnolia, Yellow, and Nashville Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, and American Redstart**.

**Connecticut Warblers** are rare, regular migrants. In the spring they arrive around May 20 and have been found in the north and south canyons (1,6) on the ground in dense thickets. Don't expect them to sing before about 8 a.m. as they generally await the sun to warm things up. In the fall they are often found among jewelweed plants. **Mourning Warblers** are sometimes found in the same areas. **Black-throated Blue Warblers** are very rare migrants in September and have been found in the south canyon and around the triangle (1,3).

**Ovenbirds** sing from the south mature growth area (2) and the south canyon (1). Both **Hooded** and **Kentucky Warblers** have been found in the North Canyon but not on a yearly basis (6). **Yellow Warblers** and **Blue-winged Warblers** have been found along the west edge of the lower field (7) and sometimes just west of the park property. **Waterthrush species** can best be found along the creeks (4,10,11).

All the Iowa **thrush species** can be found in the south canyon (1). Most Iowa **flycatchers** including **Alder** and **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** move through the park in migration. Look along wooded edges and creeks. **Blue-gray Gnatcatchers** are common migrants. **Winter Wrens** and **Ruby-crowned** and **Golden-crowned Kinglets** are seen in the South Canyon (1) in April and October. **White-eyed Vireos** are possible in the south canyon (1) and near the west end of the retention dam (5).

Listen for **Carolina Wrens** in any of the forested areas (1,2,3). **Broad-winged Hawks** can be seen roosting near the triangle (3) during migration. **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** are found in early spring and late fall, mostly in old growth areas (1,2,3). **Belted Kingfishers** are reported along the east fork of Ralston Creek (11). **Clay-colored Sparrows** have been found in the cedars or shrubs near the northern side of the lower field (7) during a narrow window that seems to center around May 10.

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### *Summer Residents*

**Scarlet Tanagers** have been known to nest in the south mature growth area (2). **Wood Thrushes** may also nest in the same area. **Eastern Bluebirds** have nested along the edges of the upper field (8). **Barn Swallows** have nested in the Dodge St. entrance shelter. **Great-crested Flycatchers** (cavity nesters) could nest mostly in old growth areas (1,2,3).

**American Woodcocks** probably display in the upper and lower fields (7,8) in spring. Both **Yellow-billed** and **Black-billed Cuckoos** may nest along wooded edges and fence lines (7,8). **Warbling Vireos, Red-eyed Vireos, and Yellow-throated Vireos** may nest in the north canyon (6). **Bobolinks, Ring-necked Pheasants, and meadowlarks** inhabit the upper and lower fields (7,8).

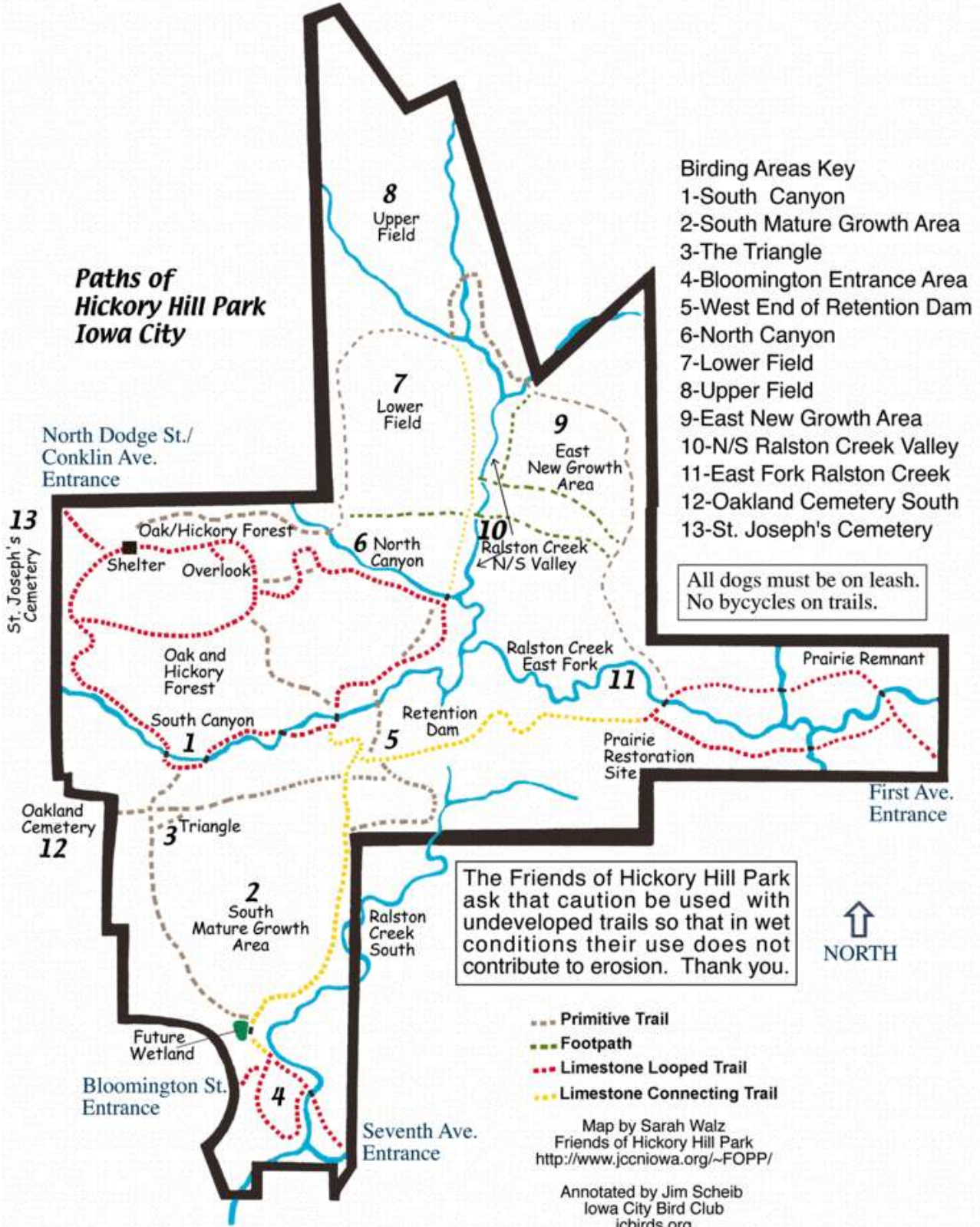
**Cooper's Hawks** nest in town and could nest in the park in tall trees. **Red-tailed Hawk** nests are possible in large trees. **Wood Ducks** have been seen in trees and along the creeks. **Barred Owls** are most likely in the south canyon area (1), the old growth area (2), and the N/S Ralston Creek Valley (10) near the new growth area (9). **Northern Cardinals, Gray Catbirds, Blue Jays, and House Wrens** are common nesters.

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### *Winter Visitors*

A variety of **sparrows** are present in late fall and through the winter in brushy habitats. **Northern Saw-whet Owls** have wintered in cedar trees in the east new growth area (9). The hemlocks in the southern part of Oakland Cemetery (12) can attract **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Pine Siskins, and rarely Red and White-winged Crossbills**. The pines in St. Joseph's Cemetery (13) attract **Purple Finches** and roosting accipiter species such as **Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks**.

### Paths of Hickory Hill Park Iowa City



## Book Reviews

### Rick Hollis

**Rare and Elusive Birds of North America.** William Burt. Universe, 2001. 208 pages with more than 50 illustrations. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

The meat of this book is the photographs, without which the book would not stand. The photographs are lush, glorious and wonderful. Most are taken at night and the birds positively leap off the pages. The birds are an odd collection of the author's favorite species, the ones that are hard to find and see – six rails, four nightjars, two herons, three warblers, one pipit, one flycatcher, two sparrows, and one wren – definitely an odd combination. Parts of this book have appeared elsewhere in magazines and in his earlier book, *Shadowbirds*.

The text that accompanies the photos are what Burt calls “stories” – stories of old-timers' experiences with birds quoted from Bent and Forbush, or stories from Burt's own experience while trying to find or photograph birds. Some of the stories date back to his youth. The story about the dormitory resident and the Whip-poor-will made me laugh.

Burt is at his best in his descriptions of natural places. Here is part of his description of the Atchafalaya Swamp:

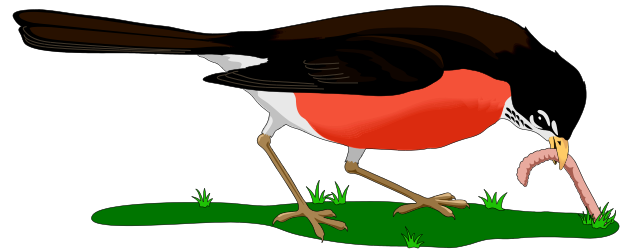
“I chose one and ventured in through the thickets after him, and soon found myself picking and prying through the single most unpleasant piece of woods – no, the single most unpleasant natural place of any kind I have ever seen... Poison ivy leafed out everywhere, not just on the ground, but upward on the hosting trunks of trees. It was a dense and ominous place, full of looping, winding, drooping roots and vines that often looked like snakes and maybe snakes that looked vines, for all I knew though mercifully I did not see them.”

He goes on to mention the real snakes and the blackberry brambles.

In terms of which section you should read to learn something new, I would suggest his chapter on the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. His

descriptions of photographic technique will not help anyone. The appendix on the natural history of the birds he enjoys are but bare minimal capsules, for persons who know less about birds than most readers of this journal. I believe they are aimed to introduce the birds' life histories to non-birders, and as such I think they should contain more easily available references than those cited by the author.

This is one to pick up. Wonder at the pictures. Read the text. Some parts you may skip over, some parts you may learn something from.



**Pete Dunne on Bird Watching: The How-to, Where-to, and When-to of Birding.** Pete Dunne. Houghton Mifflin, 2003. 334 pages.

This book was recently reviewed in *Birding*, and one of the comments in that review was that this would be a good book to use as the foundation for a course on birdwatching. That probably says it all. When I inherited Mike Newlon's birdwatching courses and carried on with them (at times supplemented by Margrieta Delle) we found books about bird identification, books about birds in Iowa, and even some books about where to bird in Iowa (before the internet, the DeLorme guide and the *Sportsman's Atlas*). But there were no real books – no decent books – about how to bird watch. There were a few, as birding became popular, but for the most part they were next to useless. You could talk for 30 minutes, give someone a copy of Peterson and they would be as well off as if they had used most of the other books. This is a fine book. It would do well as the foundation for a birdwatching course, or would be a fine introduction for someone dropping in from Mars who wanted to take up what we do for enjoyment.

## Rare Bird Alert Reports for Johnson County, Spring 2003

**Mike Dooley**

The spring RBA season in Johnson County produced twelve species that were the first seasonal reports for Iowa, or at least as posted over the IA-BIRD listserv. As well, shorebird watching on the Coralville Reservoir made a good recovery from the more recent sparse production, thanks mainly to the area off of James Ave. north of Swan Lake Rd. The following report is based solely on the Rare Bird Alert and does not include, for example, the Johnson County Spring Count.

Beginning our tour toward the western half of Hawkeye W.A., the only report from Round Pond for spring was of a PEREGRINE FALCON seen at the end of April. The waters east off Greencastle Ave. produced four banded TRUMPETER SWANS in mid-March, and in mid-May a LEAST TERN was identified. Four mid-April LARK SPARROWS along the Babcock Access road were Iowa's first report for the year.

Birds seen along Swan Lake Rd. included either a wintering or record-early migrant CHIPPING SPARROW on April 18th, as well as a RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, a species not much reported in Iowa this year. Swan Lake Woods produced two first state reports for the year, NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH on April 24th and AMERICAN REDSTART on May 2nd, and surprisingly the first Iowa BLUE GROSBEAK for the year came on May 14th along the walk to Sand Point. In the agricultural land south of Hawkeye W.A., two UPLAND SANDPIPERS and the first DICKCISSEL for the year were found in early April.

This spring the sands off James Ave. along the upper Coralville Reservoir did their part to bolster the area's recently stalled shorebirding reputation. Three AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVERS started things off toward the end of March. On April 13th an early WESTERN

SANDPIPER was identified, and another, or perhaps the same bird, appeared a week later. Twenty SEMIPALMATED PLOVERS showed up on April 27th, Iowa's first report for the year. The next day produced three BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS and a potential record third-earliest WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER. The first week of May found EARED GREBE, WESTERN GREBE, and six WILLETS visiting the site.

On the lower reservoir, the first Iowa DUNLIN for the season was among shorebirds on a spit near the Mid River Marina on April 11th. Farther east, the Sandy Beach area saw another seasonal first sighting, a FRANKLIN'S GULL on March 26th. A few days later twelve GREATER SCAUP were among several thousand ducks between Sandy Beach and Twin View Heights. Probably the best Johnson County find for the season came on April 21st, a molting first-winter LITTLE GULL which stayed for three days on the beach and over the water. Finally, the state's first WILLOW FLYCATCHER for the spring was singing at Twin View Heights in mid-May.

On the last day in April in the Lake Macbride area, an annual YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER reappeared at Cottage Reserve Woods, and a RED-NECKED GREBE was scoped on the west end of the north arm of the lake on May 10th.

North of North Liberty along Cumberland Ridge Rd., in the Jolly Roger area, a NORTHERN GOSHAWK was spotted on the first day of the spring season, and a NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD was a backyard visitor in the same neighborhood toward the end of April. Down the road from North Liberty, a LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL was found April 10th above the Coralville Reservoir dam, but subsequent attempts to relocate the gull fell short. In the first week of April, a LONG-TAILED DUCK settled in for a remarkable stay on a small pond behind a home along Dubuque St. The duck would continue into the last week of May, nearly two weeks past the Iowa record

spring date, and provided an excellent viewing experience for dozens of visitors. Meanwhile, the first-reported BROAD-WINGED HAWK for the year was seen in the same neighborhood on April 16th.

Hickory Hill Park in Iowa City had its usual productive spring season, beginning in mid March with sightings of CAROLINA WREN and WINTER WREN. A perched SHORT-EARED OWL was observed on April 20th, and a VEERY found on May 1st was Iowa's first arrival for the year. Hickory Hill in spring means warblers, and highlights from the peak May period included GOLDEN-WINGED, several CAPE MAYS, BLACK-THROATED BLUE, and CONNECTICUT. Elsewhere in Iowa City, both PILEATED WOODPECKER and CAROLINA WREN were regular at City Park.

Finally, in the outlying areas, the farmland in the southeast part of the county produced a number of excellent birds. Best was a small flock of SMITH'S LONGSPURS which stayed a few days in late April. In the immediate vicinity of the longspurs, GRAY PARTRIDGES and UPLAND SANDPIPERS were reported throughout that same last week in April.



## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

**April 17, Meeting.** Jim Durbin gave the club a presentation on the many things they have done with their 70ft. x 115 ft. Marion backyard to attract birds. Jim and his wife Joyce have lived at their Marion, IA home since '76. After years of additions and modifications only a short strip of lawn now remains. Jim says it takes longer to get out the mower than to actually use it.

The Durbins' improvements have resulted in a yard list of 133 species despite their location in a very typical urban neighborhood. These include Red-shouldered Hawk, Green Heron, Wood Duck, Woodcock, all the thrushes, and all the warblers except for Connecticut and Prothonotary.

The centerpiece of their backyard habitat is a 30 ft. long creek connecting a few small pools. The largest pool is about 30 inches in depth and a smaller pool is about half as deep. The deeper water provides cover for goldfish and potted aquatic plants like water lettuce, lilies, hyacinth, lotus, arrowhead and yellowflag. Jim says that you don't need a big pond to attract birds. They are attracted to running, splashing water and only need 1-11/2 inches to bathe. Jim uses two energy efficient electric pumps to keep the water circulating and a cattle-trough heater to keep the water open through the winter.

Birds also need food and cover. Jim has dug some of his trees from those growing wild in ditches. He always asks permission to dig though. Small trees like Gray Dogwood, Pagoda Dogwood, Wahoo, Serviceberry, Crabapple and Redbud are nice for smallish yards. All evergreens are good, but give the trees plenty of room. Jim likes hostas as a groundcover; bluer ones for shade and greener ones for sun. Jim will also dig up woodland flowers, but cautions against transplanting the less common ones. Jim doesn't have a "hang-up" over non-native plants. If they are good for birds, then he might plant them. He says it is

important to pay attention to the hardness zones when purchasing.

Jim even “plants” tree snags. He will find broken limbs and bury the end in the ground. This provides attractive perches for many birds and they usually last a few years before falling apart.

The Durbins plants a variety of plants as food sources. Wildflowers like Coneflower, Clematis, and Thistle produce seeds. Shrubs like Highbush Cranberry, other Viburnums, Elderberry, and Honeysuckle produce berries. Blooming plants attract insects, which attract feeding birds. Butterflybush and Bee Balm are good ones.

Jim recommends leaf mulch for his plants, because that is what they receive in their native woodland habitat. Three to four inches in the fall and more added in the spring. He doesn't mulch around those plants that he wishes to seed for the next season. Jim cautions against the use of weed and feed. The chemicals used in many gardens indiscriminately harm invertebrates that birds feed upon, stress desirable plants, and may prevent germination of desired seeds.

The Durbins also feed birds. They find that suet stuffed in logs foils the Starlings. They scatter millet under their hostas, as many birds prefer to feed on the ground. And Jim says that they keep their hummingbird feeders out of sight of one another to prevent domination by any single hummer.

Jim says that visitors and questions are always welcome. The Durbins' phone is 319-377-7194. Email is [durbinjames@mcleodusa.net](mailto:durbinjames@mcleodusa.net). Thanks Jim for an excellent presentation and for being an inspiration to area birder lovers.

Attendees: Jean and Ed Allgood, Jack Bagford, Dave Brenzel, Elizabeth Burdick-Romero, Chris Caster, Margrieta Delle, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, James Durbin, Kim Edge, Chris Edwards, Linda and Roger Fisher, Tony Franken, Jim Fuller, Mary Gilbert, Therese

Guedon, Rick Hollis, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Nancy and Richard Lynch, Cathy Mandarino, Diana Pesek, Ron Price, Jim Scheib  
– *Chris Caster*

#### **April 18 and April 25, Night Sounds Foray.**

The evening of April 18 started out windy and chilly and only got worse as the evening wore on. We made our way to Hawkeye Wildlife Area, where we saw a group of Canada Geese on the road at the north end of the Gun Club ponds. We stopped at the south end of the ponds to observe. The geese flew off, and within moments a red fox trotted across the road. He was followed very shortly by a small herd of deer. We spent the next hour huddled in the car, not seeing or hearing anything. So it was decided to repeat the trip the following Friday evening.

Friday, April 25 was a quieter evening. There was little or no wind and it was a clear night with the stars visible. Again we started at the Gun Club ponds on Greencastle Ave. and then proceeded west on Swan Lake Road to Williams Prairie. Chorus Frogs, Barred Owl, Great Horned Owl, Killdeer, Canada Geese, Red-winged Blackbirds, and displaying American Woodcock were all heard. We also saw a Great Blue Heron, Double-crested Cormorants, and Blue-winged Teal, as well as a muskrat.

Participants (April 18): Margrieta Delle, Karen Disbrow (leader), Therese Guedon.

Participants (April 25): Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow (leader), Cathy Mandarino, Gerald Pearson, Suzanne Sarlette.

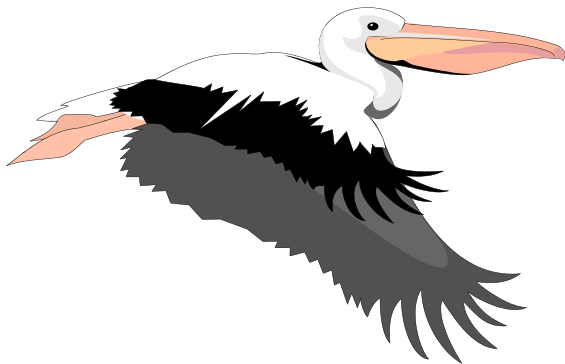
– *Karen Disbrow*

**April 26, Evening Potluck.** Bernie Knight hosted as very enjoyable potluck supper for club members at her place in Iowa City. After a good bit of socializing the upcoming Spring Count was discussed. Later the group watched a video on the 38 wood warblers found in the Eastern U.S. The program was extremely well done. All birds were filmed on their breeding territories, engaged in a variety of activities

including singing, foraging, nest building, and feeding of young. The accompanying narration provided a great deal of life history and conservation information as well. At the end of the video each warbler was also shown in its fall plumage. This video is a worthwhile purchase for any birder, but is particularly useful to anyone eager to master the identification of this large, diverse, and sometimes elusive subfamily of birds. Thanks Bernie for a wonderful evening.

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood, Chris Caster, Margrieta Delle, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Jim and Karole Fuller, Therese Guedon, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Cathy Mandarino, Ramona McGurk, John and Gail McLure, Bob and Joan Stearns, Dick and Gerry Tetrault

– *Chris Caster*



**April 27, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** We met on a clear, cool morning, temperature of 45 degrees. We headed north on 965 to the north side of Hawkeye Wildlife Area and turned west on Cou Falls Road to check the area by the blue and white shed. We could see, in the distance, white pelicans, Green-winged Teal, and a few yellowlegs.

We proceeded to the south side of Hawkeye and took a quick look at Swan Lake where a few ducks were present. Most of the cars were left then at the parking lot of Sand Point. Everybody squeezed into two vehicles for the trip to the end of James Avenue.

We walked down to the very extensive mudflats. Here, we were able to observe Pectoral Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs, and a few Greater Yellowlegs. There were pelicans and cormorants in the distance and Green-winged Teal foraged in the shallows. A refreshing breeze from the south was welcome as we moved along toward the west. A Savannah Sparrow scooted in front of us along the grassy edge.

We enjoyed close looks at Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Killdeer, and Semipalmated Plover. The Baird's Sandpiper was not, unfortunately, so close. We ended our pleasant walk at the parking lot at Sand Point.

Participants: Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Roger Heidt, James Huntington (leader), Dave Kyllingstad, Ed Lins, Cathy Mandarino, Diana Pesek.

Birds (52 species): Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Warbling Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch.

– *James Huntington*

**May 3, Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, West Branch, Cedar County.** Dan Peterson, Educational Specialist with the National Park Service invited birders to this outing, which consisted of a Continental breakfast, short discussion of birds likely to be found on the site, two hours of birding, and a wrap up of our findings. On this beautiful clear, calm day, we divided into four groups and birded the entire area, including the 77-acre tall-grass prairie and the riparian habitat along Wapsinonoc Creek. Dan is planning to develop a bird list for the site.

Participants: Ed and Jean Allgood, Jack and Anne Bagford, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Tom Kent, Dave Kyllingstad, John and Darlene Neff, Dan Peterson, Margaret Richardson, Sally Anne Seabury.

Birds (35 species): Turkey Vulture, Ring-necked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Warbling Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

— *Tom Kent*

**May 4, Lake Macbride State Park.** The weather wasn't real good on this last day of the free-camping weekend at the park. The sky was overcast and the cool wind was fairly constant. Most of the campers had already bugged out. Fortunately the rain held off long enough to walk for about 90 minutes. We found some birds in a few places. We had a nice look at a pair of Hairy Woodpeckers. And we encountered some gnatcatchers and titmice foraging together. A calling Barred Owl was

also a pleasant surprise. Just before the rain started, a walk down the bike trail yielded Great-crested Flycatcher, House Wren, American Redstart, and Northern Parula.

After the walk the Lynches invited us over to their house in the Cottage Reserve for coffee and rolls. From the porch we enjoyed looks at Purple Martins, Yellow Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks—very enjoyable. Thank you Dick and Nancy.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Karen Disbrow, Paul Klemme and daughter Elizabeth (campers), Richard and Nancy Lynch, Kathy Mandarino, Lee Ann Meder, Anne Spence, Angela Yancy.

Birds (42 species): Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Mallard, Osprey, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Barred Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Blue Jay, American Crow, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bank Swallow, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, European Starling, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Redstart, Chipping Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

— *Chris Caster*

**May 7 – 23, Warbler Walks in Hickory Hill Park.** For the past two years the Iowa City Bird Club has held spring warbler walks in Hickory Hill Park in Iowa City, led by James Huntington. The walks have been very successful both years. This year walks were held several days per week from May 7 to May 23. The weather during May was often unsettled, which kept new birds dropping into



the area. During the first week there was frequent early morning fog. In general, the birding was very good. Overall Nashville Warblers predominated, with Tennessee Warblers prevalent during the second week. There were only a couple of days on which Yellow-rumped Warblers predominated. Fridays turned out to be the best days for viewing the most species. The last day was exceptional and people were able to sit at the picnic pavilion and see 10-18 species of warblers in the nearby trees. Vireos and flycatchers were other notable birds, with the flycatchers coming in late May.

Throughout the month, between 2 and 20 birders made the effort to get up early and join James at the park. James said that getting up at 5 a.m. in order to be there and awake was really early but enjoyable because he was able to share his love and knowledge of warblers. This is a popular event which we plan to continue in future years. Next year we hope to provide regular updates of birds seen on our web site and on a message board at the park. So mark your calendars now to get up early in May 2004 to go warbling watching.

Warbler Species Seen (25): Blue-winged Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Palm Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Connecticut Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler, Canada Warbler.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**May 15, Meeting.** Mary Brown, Judy Felder and Richard S. Rhodes II, a.k.a. Sandy, presented on their efforts at prairie restoration in Iowa County. Together in '97, they purchased 480 acres of rolling countryside, which they named Indiangrass Hills. More recently, some

friends, the Buss's, purchased another 160 acres of contiguous land for addition to Indiangrass Hills. Currently, they openly share the land with compatible users: researchers, hunters, horseback riders, birders, mushroomers, etc. When their efforts at restoration have been completed, the group hopes to donate the land to a perpetual entity.

The group emphasized that what they wished to accomplish was prairie restoration versus reconstruction. Prairie reconstruction involves trying to establish prairie where prairie plants no longer exist. Restoration involves finding patches of prairie remnant and then managing the site to encourage its re-birth and growth.

Sandy described the land at Indiangrass Hills as a "rough farm". Most of the land has a corn suitability rating less than 30 and is too steep to plow farm. Much of the land had been heavily pastured, and native prairie plants were hard to find. But along fencerows, amongst multiflora rose brambles and in places where the cattle could not graze, a number of prairie species were found. Amazingly, the group found that many prairie plants persisted even on the heavily grazed areas; you just couldn't find them because they had been so heavily suppressed.

There was a time in Iowa's history when lightning strikes started brush fires that would sweep across the land unchecked, burning thousands of acres. The native Americans also set fire to the prairie, because they recognized that the buffalo were attracted to the new growth that resulted. Prairies need fire as part of their natural cycle. The fire sets back the growth of trees and shrubs. The heat stimulates the germination of the seeds of many prairie species. The ash returns nutrients to the soil. The blackened earth, exposed to the sun, warms up quickly, stimulating prairie plant growth. Nowadays the land in Iowa is so fragmented by agriculture and our network of roads that any naturally occurring blaze wouldn't go very far before it fizzled out. And our local fire

departments are usually out at the first sign of smoke to protect our homes and livestock.

The reconstruction of any prairie requires the use of fire. With a small group of volunteers the trio went to work. They cut brush to create 25-foot wide fuel breaks surrounding an area to be burned. Two separate crews start from the same spot on the downwind side of the burn unit. Moving away from each other, they set fire to the dormant vegetation around the unit's perimeter. The crews, wielding water hoses, rakes, and flappers (heavy rubber smothering mats on the end of broom handles), prevent the spread of the fire out of the unit. Eventually, the two crews encircle the unit and meet up on the other side to watch the fire burn through, which doesn't take long if the conditions are right. This is an efficient means of ridding the unit of woody growth and undesirable weeds. It is usually done in late fall, winter, or early spring. If it is attempted late in the spring it can be a very smoky affair due to the greening of the grasses being burned. Because large brush piles burn slowly, these are lit when there is snow cover, so that the fire cannot spread after the crew has returned home.

The group has also done a huge amount of weeding by hand, because herbicide also kills many native prairie plants, harms soil organisms and eventually drains into the groundwater, creeks and streams. Over 10,000 Musk Thistles, a plant hated by farmers, were removed with a spade. Canada Thistles have been even more challenging. Because they propagate by rhizomes (underground stems), they can't be killed by removal of the taproot. Much work is put into identifying Canada thistle patches. Once the Canada thistles have put a lot of energy into the growth of buds, the patches are mowed. This sets back the plants and the mowing also makes it easier to find the plants for spot application of herbicide. These patches do require constant monitoring for new growth.

The number of prairie species that have been encouraged has astounded the trio. During the first growing season during which there was no

grazing, but prior to any burning the group inventoried a total of 222 native species, 128 of which were prairie species. With burning of these plots, even more prairie species emerged each year. After 6 growing seasons with burning and removal of shading and invasive species, the plant inventory was pushed to 399 native species including 261 prairie species.

Most people interested in having a prairie want it growing within two years. To this end they will clear the land and sow seed. Often large amounts of herbicides are involved. While this might be a way to reconstruct a prairie that never existed, it may destroy forever any undiscovered tiny prairie remnants. The point that the trio works so hard to get across is that unless the ground has been heavily plowed or herbicided, often native prairie plants or their seeds are still present, but hard to find. The techniques the trio has employed are simple, but require patience. Burning these areas often stimulates the germination of prairie seeds that lay dormant in the soil. It sometimes takes a few years of nurturing for the prairie remnants to regain their hold. But the resulting prairie ecosystem is far more likely to be representative of what was found prior to European settlers than what would be had by sowing seed obtained elsewhere.

Iowa City birders first became interested in Indiangrass Hills when Henslow's Sparrows were reported a few years ago. It is ironic because the sparrows have only been found in the fields of non-native brome grass. It still remains to be seen what will happen to the wildlife and bird populations present there as a result of the prairie restoration. Indiangrass Hills has been nominated as an Iowa IBA and is the only area from Iowa County to be nominated. In addition to the Henslow's Sparrows, a number of birds on the IBA checklist have been found there: Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, American Woodcock, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell's Vireo, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Bobolink.

The trio welcomes birders to come out to visit the area any time. Their only request is that you report back to them regarding any sightings. They keep track of EVERYTHING! Email Judy Felder at [jjfigh@mchsi.com](mailto:jjfigh@mchsi.com). Directions to the area can be found at the bird club website: [www.icbirds.org/toIndianGrassHills.gif](http://www.icbirds.org/toIndianGrassHills.gif).

I have assured the trio that members of the Iowa City Bird Club will be out periodically to survey for breeding and wintering birds as part of the monitoring required by the Iowa IBA Program.

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood, Chris Caster, Jerry Denning, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Linda Fisher, James Huntington, Richard and Nancy Lynch, James Miller, Bill Scheible.

– *Chris Caster*



**May 24, Dudgeon Lake Area.** This area is located off Hwy 150 about a mile and a half north of Vinton in Benton County. A grassy dike provides easy access to river bottom timber. Red-shouldered Hawks have been documented nesters there for many years and we were fortunate to witness a pair soaring together. The area provides ideal habitat for Prothonotary Warblers, which we also discovered at multiple locations. Dudgeon is one of the best areas in east central Iowa for migrating warblers. Although the migration seemed to be winding down, there were still many Blackpoll Warblers about, and a singing Connecticut Warbler was seen after a short search that also produced Mourning and Canada

Warblers. The group was also excited to watch a very cooperative Olive-sided Flycatcher.

Area birders really should make it to Dudgeon sometime during May. The habitat is varied and there are always plenty of interesting birds to be found. In addition to the mentioned birds, Mississippi Kite has also been seen at Dudgeon in the past. It takes less than an hour to drive from Iowa City and you won't run into a lot of dogs or joggers. The walking is easy, but you might want to wear short boots in case of wet crossings and take along some bug repellent.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Dave Kyllingstad, Sam Overturf, Diane Pesek, Susan Primrose, Sheri Six, Bob and Joan Stearns, Carol Turner.

Birds (54 species): Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Kestrel, Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-pewee, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Least Flycatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Yellow-throated Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Tennessee Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, American Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Wilson's Warbler, Canada Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Caster*

***Summer field trip reports will appear in the December issue.***

## 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 [icbirds.org](http://icbirds.org).

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