
Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 23 Number 3

December 2003

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.

December 3, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. Christmas Bird Count Planning Meeting hosted by Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll north of Iowa City. If you need directions call Jim at 338-3561.

December 14, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count. This year's co-compilers are Bob Dick and Chris Edwards. If you would like to participate or be a feeder watcher but cannot attend the planning meeting, contact Bob at 337-4945 (home), 321-0706 (cell), or dickrw@earthlink.net. On count day we will meet at noon for lunch at the North Liberty Recreation Center, and at 5:30 p.m. for a dinner and compilation at the Pizza Ranch in North Liberty.

January 10, Saturday, 8 – 10:30 a.m. Feeder Watch Social. Come for coffee and rolls and see what hosts Jim and Karole Fuller have at their feeders on this winter morning. The Fullers live at 6 Longview Knoll north of Iowa City. For directions call 338-3561.

January 25, Sunday, 1:00 p.m. Owl Prowl. We'll spend the afternoon searching for roosting owls, such as Northern Saw-whet, Long-eared, Great Horned, or Barred Owls. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

February 7, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Amana Turkey Walk and Feast. Join us for an early morning hike through the woods followed by breakfast in the Amanas. Please call Jim Scheib at 337-5206 if you plan to attend.

February 19, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting. Jim Scheib will present on his birding trips to southeast Arizona – home of trogons, hummingbirds, and a diverse array of birds found nowhere else in the U.S.

February 21, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Burlington area for Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Winter Wren, waterfowl, and more with local guide Chuck Fuller. We will meet Chuck at the Port of Burlington at 8:00 a.m. and will return to Iowa City by 5:00 p.m. so bring a sack lunch or snack. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

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Schedule (continued)

March 6, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area or other local areas for waterfowl and other early spring migrants.

March 25, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting. The presenter has not yet been determined, but will be announced at the February meeting and to those for whom we have e-mail addresses.

March 28, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. Cone Marsh for waterfowl, longspurs, and other migrants. There's no better place to welcome back spring. Rick Hollis, 665-3141.

April 15, Thursday, 7:00 pm. Meeting. Jodeane Cancilla of the Macbride Raptor Project will present on the Project's raptor rehabilitation efforts and possibly show off a couple of its captive birds.

Other Dates of Note

December 6, Saturday, 10:00 am. Waterworks Park Prairie Seeding. Volunteers are needed to help with the seeding of the newly created Waterworks Park Prairie along the east bank of the Iowa River north of I-80. Seed, hot chocolate and snacks will be provided. All volunteers need to do is dress warm and lend a helping hand. Contact Sarah Walz with the Parks and Recreation Commission at (319) 466-0908 or sarah-walz@uiowa.edu for more information.

December 20, Saturday. Cedar Rapids Christmas Bird Count. Contact Jim Durbin, (319) 377-7194, durbinjames@mcleodusa.net.

January 3, Saturday. North Linn Christmas Bird Count. Contact Jim Durbin (see above).

January 17 – 18, Saturday – Sunday. Keokuk Bald Eagle Appreciation Days.

March 9, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. Prairie Preview XXI. Held in Montgomery Hall at the Johnson County Fairgrounds. The speaker will be Carl Kurtz on "The Process of Discovery". Carl will be signing books starting at 6:30, and speaking at 7:30. Exhibits will be open from 7:00 to 9:00.

News

The club is still accepting donations for a memorial to honor Margrieta Delle. More than \$200 was raised from the sale of her books, and \$100 in donations have been received. Ideas for the memorial include a kiosk at Hickory Hill Park, a bench, or a tree. The Friends of Hickory Hill Park have one completed kiosk with plans for the next one at the Bloomington St. entrance; an individual kiosk costs \$2000. A 6-foot Anamosa stone bench is \$198 plus \$25-\$30 for installation, and a memorial tree can be purchased for \$75-\$125. Please let me know if

you have another suggestion. We would like to complete the plans in time for the memorial to be in place early next summer. Please send any additional donations for this project to ICBC Treasurer Bernie Knight.

– Karen Disbrow

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Karen Disbrow is forming a committee to develop a team-taught bird watching course. This would entail one or two people teaching each topic. Some of these topics could include birding by sound; gull, warbler or hawk identification; how to use a scope and binoculars; the parts of the bird to enable better

bird identification; and rare birds in Iowa and where to look for rarities. There is an opportunity to teach birding at the nature camps next summer at Macbride Nature-Recreation Area to 8th and 9th graders. Opportunities to teach a workshop at either Kent Park or Herbert Hoover National Historic Site followed by a field trip the next weekend also exist. This is a great opportunity to share knowledge, bring in new birders to the hobby and expand the visibility of the ICBC. If interested please call Karen at 339-1017 or e-mail her at kdisbrow@mcleodusa.net.



RENEWAL NOTICE

Our annual \$10 membership dues are payable now for the new year. Your dues will pay for an entire year of *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch*. Check your mailing label for the most recent year for which you have paid. If your label says "03", please send \$10 for 2004. Please complete the membership renewal form on the inside back cover and send it with your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" 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.

In Memoriam: Jane Fuller

Jane Culbertson Fuller, 92, died October 16 at the Oaknoll Retirement Residence in Iowa City, where she had made her home the past 12 years. She was a longtime member of the IOU and had been a member of the Iowa City Bird Club. Born in Des Moines, she spent her growing up years in Wyoming, but returned to Iowa to attend Grinnell College. With a degree in mathematics and chemistry, she spent two years on the frontier of Wyoming, living in a log cabin and serving as principal and teaching all the science courses at Tensleep.

Following her marriage to Lowell Fuller, she spent the next 57 years in Burlington before moving to Iowa City. She was an elementary school teacher there for 17 years. One of her students, Jim Kelly, became an astronaut. Jane became interested in birding in the early 1950s, and that interest grew over the years. She was a co-founder of the Burlington Bird Club, serving as its president and as compiler of the Christmas Bird Count for many years. She had traveled the four corners of the state, as well as the nation, and internationally in Central and South America, and Europe in search of birds during her most active birding years. Jane's life list stood at 621, with a memorable number 600 being a Great Gray Owl seen in northern Minnesota. Her interest never waned, as she was still a participant in the CBC last year, and had been birding with her sons, Jim and Chuck, only a few weeks prior to her death. She was an early influence on two Burlington boys, Jerome Jackson, now a world-renowned ornithologist, and Peter Lowther, an ornithologist with the Field Museum in Chicago.

Jane has passed the birding torch to the next generation with sons, Jim Fuller of Iowa City and Chuck Fuller of Burlington. Remembrance services were held in Burlington October 21 and in Iowa City November 8. Memorials have been designated for the Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Iowa Important Bird Areas Update

Chris Edwards

Audubon Iowa's Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program continues to move forward. In October the IBA Technical Committee, chaired by Dr. James Dinsmore, met to evaluate data that had been submitted for 132 of the 182 habitats which had been nominated for IBA status. At this meeting, 40 nominated habitats were selected to become Iowa's first official IBAs. The first IBA dedication ceremony was held at the Hitchcock Nature Area in Pottawattamie County as part of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union Annual Fall Meeting on October 11th.

These 40 sites are well distributed, being located in 32 counties throughout Iowa. Three Johnson County sites were selected: Coralville Reservoir/Hawkeye Wildlife Area/Lake Macbride State Park, F.W. Kent Park, and Hickory Hill Park. Other Eastern Iowa sites selected include Dudgeon Lake Wildlife Area in Benton County, Indiangrass Hills in Iowa County, Muskrat Slough and Beam Woods in Jones County, Wickiup Hill-Cedar River Complex in Linn County, Cairo Woods Wildlife Area in Louisa County, and Otter Creek Marsh in Tama County. The bird club has visited many of these locations on field trips over the years, and club members were instrumental in nominating and submitting bird data for these sites.

For those of you who are new to the Iowa IBA Program, it is a citizen-led initiative dedicated to the conservation of Iowa birds and their habitats. The fundamental role of the program is to build partnerships between birders and the conservation organizations, private landowners, scientists, businesses, and county, state and federal agencies who can best address key bird habitat priorities. There will be three phases to the Iowa IBA Program: identify the most essential areas for birds; monitor these sites for changes to birds and habitat; and conserve these areas for long-term protection of birds and biodiversity.

IBAs are identified by the documented presence of Iowa's "37 IBA Criteria Species." These are the species that are experiencing the most serious population declines, and they are dependent on the essential habitat that IBAs provide. They include a diverse assemblage of nine endangered species, two threatened species, and 26 species of high conservation priority. The complete list follows here.

- Endangered Species: Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, King Rail, Piping Plover, Least Tern, Barn Owl, Short-eared Owl.
- Threatened Species: Long-eared Owl, Henslow's Sparrow.
- High Conservation Priority: American Bittern, Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Broad-winged Hawk, Greater Prairie-Chicken, Common Moorhen, American Woodcock, Forster's Tern, Black Tern, Black-billed Cuckoo, Chuck-will's-widow, Pileated Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, White-eyed Vireo, Bell's Vireo, Bewick's Wren, Veery, Wood Thrush, Cerulean Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink.

Sites are nominated and evaluated in one or more of the following five categories:

1. Sites important to endangered or threatened species in Iowa.
2. Sites important to species of high conservation priority in Iowa.

3. Sites that contain rare or unique habitat within the state, and that hold important species largely restricted to that distinctive habitat type.
4. Sites that regularly hold significant concentrations of one or more species.
5. Sites important for long-term research and/or monitoring that contribute substantially to ornithology, bird conservation, and/or education.

Recently the criteria for Category 1 and Category 2 were revised slightly to provide additional clarity. For Category 1, a threatened or endangered species must have been breeding at a site for two or more years out of the previous six (since 1998) with evidence of either confirmed or probable breeding according to Breeding Bird Survey procedures. For Category 2, at least three species (of the 26 species in this category) must have been present at a site for two or more years out of the previous six (since 1998) with evidence of either confirmed or probable breeding according to Breeding Bird Survey procedures.

There are still 150 nominated habitats that could qualify for IBA status, if sufficient data are obtained to validate the nominations. Any historical data back to 1998 which meets the revised Category 1 and Category 2 criteria above will help move nominations ahead in the site identification process. If you have any data for the 37 Category 1 or Category 2 criteria species at a nominated site, please consider submitting it through the IBA web site – the data entry process is quick and easy. If you don't have web access, contact a friend and have them submit it for you. Prizes donated by Eagle Optics, including a spotting scope and binoculars, will be awarded to the birders who submit observation data for the most, second most, and third most nominated habitats by the end of 2003. The goal is to have many more Iowa IBAs become part of the continental and western hemisphere network of essential habitats for our most seriously threatened species.

Nominated Eastern Iowa habitats for which more data is needed include the following:

- Cedar County: Cedar Valley Park.
- Louisa County: Cone Marsh, Klum Lake Wildlife Area, Indian Slough Wildlife Area, Toolesboro/Lake Odessa/Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge.
- Muscatine County: Cedar Bluffs Recreation Area, Wildcat Den State Park.
- Washington County: Brinton Timber.
- Johnson County: Red Bird Farms Wildlife Area, S & G Materials Sandpit.
- Linn County: Hitaga Sand Ridge Prairie Preserve, Pinicon Ridge Park, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area, Squaw Creek Park.

The nomination and designation of Important Bird Areas is just Phase I of the process. In the coming years we will have subsequent opportunities to become involved in other ways. Phase II of the program is on-site monitoring of bird populations and habitat components, and the development of education programs at IBAs. Phase III is the protection, restoration, enhancement, and improved management of IBAs on an as-needed case-by-case basis. As individuals and as a club, we will have opportunities to play key roles in this process and to support the birds and habitats that bring us so much enjoyment.

For more information about the Iowa Important Bird Area Project, visit the IBA web site at www.iowabirds.org/IBA, or contact Audubon Iowa IBA Coordinator Ric Zarwell at (563) 538-4991 or zarxzar@salamander.com.

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

June 8, Kent Park. Considering that yours truly left his binoculars at home for this trip, it turned out pretty well. Thanks to Chris Edwards' excellent instructions the previous day on IA-BIRD we were able to find two of our target birds with ease – the Yellow-breasted Chat and Orchard Oriole were as advertised around the settling pond at the north end of the lake at Kent Park.

We also stumbled on another good bird – Lark Sparrows outside the loop road near the Valley View Prairie parking lot. We did not find the Bell's Vireo, but maybe Bell's Vireos like drier weather – I do.

Birds (35 species): Green Heron, Turkey Vulture, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, House Wren, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, European Starling, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow-breasted Chat, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, House Finch, American Goldfinch.

Damp Birders (6): Brad Freidhof (co-leader), Meredith Gooding, Thérèse Guédon, Rick Hollis (co-leader), Cathy Mandarino, Anne Spence.

Dryer Birders (1½): Chris and little (but not least) Ben Caster – these two leaving early and not venturing onto the trails.

– Rick Hollis

June 22, Indiangrass Hills. Thanks very much to Judy Felder for hosting this trip. This native prairie in Iowa County is being brought back to

life through fire and brush removal. The prairie is always changing, and it is a very gorgeous spot to visit at any time of year. Indiangrass Hills is a proposed Iowa Important Birding Area. So if you do visit, be sure to report your sightings of IBA species.

Participants: Chris Caster, Andra Dell, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, John and Susan Drysdale, Tony Franken, Roger Heidt, James Huntington, Kay James, Dave Kyllingstad, Cathy Mandarino, John McLure, Andy and Wendy Peck, Diana Pesek, Ron Price, Anne Spence, Sarah Walz.

Birds (33 species): Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Killdeer, Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling Vireo, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Sedge Wren, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Brown-headed Cowbird, Common Grackle, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole, American Goldfinch.

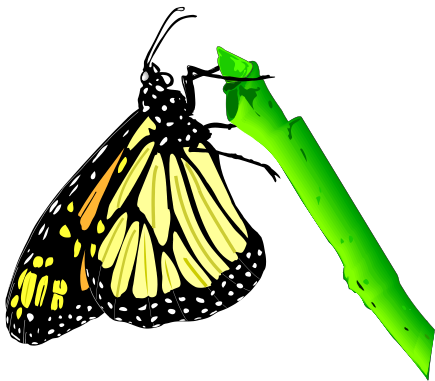
– Karen Disbrow

July 19, Butterfly Count. It was a beautiful day for a butterfly count, with sunny skies and comfortable temperatures. Bob and Dara Dick, Meredith Gooding and I spent the morning at Kent Park, visiting areas around the Conservation Education Center and Valley View Prairie. In the afternoon I continued on to Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Lake Macbride State Park, Macbride Nature-Recreation Area, and Solon Prairie. The number of species seen this year (34) was comparable to previous years, but the number of individuals (428) was the lowest in the five-year history of the count. We recorded Gray Copper, Coral Hairstreak, and Black Dash for the first time on the count. The state-threatened Byssus Skipper was seen in good numbers at Macbride Nature-Recreation

Area. Other species seen in above-average numbers were Great Spangled Fritillary, Pearl Crescent, Painted Lady, Monarch, and Silver-spotted Skipper. Expected species which were not seen this year included Giant Swallowtail, Dainty Sulphur, American Snout, Question Mark, and Fiery Skipper.

Butterflies (34 species): Black Swallowtail (8), Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (1), Cabbage White (102), Clouded Sulphur (3), Orange Sulphur (17), Little Yellow (3), Gray Copper (1), Bronze Copper (1), Coral Hairstreak (2), Eastern Tailed-Blue (3), Spring Azure (55), Great Spangled Fritillary (39), Meadow Fritillary (1), Pearl Crescent (13), Eastern Comma (2), Gray Comma (1), American Lady (2), Painted Lady (14), Red Admiral (21), Common Buckeye (1), Red-spotted Admiral (1), Viceroy (11), Tawny Emperor (2), Northern Pearly-eye (1), Common Wood-Nymph (22), Monarch (31), Silver-spotted Skipper (24), Common Sootywing (2), Least Skipper (2), Peck's Skipper (2), Delaware Skipper (1), Byssus Skipper (32), Black Dash (3), Dun Skipper (4).

– Chris Edwards



August 10, Hawkeye Wildlife Area. The evening before my field trip, I told Bob Dick that there would be a test the next day. He was sure I was joking. The next morning, when I handed out pens and a worksheet, he laughed. I gave everybody a diagram of a *Calidris* sandpiper. I explained that since we wouldn't be seeing many shorebirds, we would look at the diagram, and label the important feather tracts.

I had spent ten days scouting areas for shorebirds, often with Bob Dick's help, but had found few good spots. Cone Marsh, the sod farms, Hoosier Creek, James Avenue, Sand Point, Greencastle, and the north side of Hawkeye had all been checked. The water was just too high.

So after everybody had labeled tertials, greater coverts, median coverts, lesser coverts, upper scapulars, and lower scapulars on their copies, we departed. That is probably a piece of paper that one doesn't think one should throw away, but doesn't really know what to do with.

We headed to the Hawkeye Wildlife Area and to Greencastle Avenue. It was really a very nice day for August. It wasn't very humid nor very hot. We stopped first at the Gun Club Ponds, where a few days earlier, I had seen an immature night-heron. The pond was drying up fast, but there were still Solitary Sandpipers, Green Herons, and lots of frogs. Turkey Vultures had not yet left the trees. Right on schedule, the night-heron appeared. We discussed it for some time, but the long legs and long neck were a pretty good indication that it was a yellow-crowned.

We continued north on Greencastle to that point where the water trickles across the road. Least Sandpipers, Spotted Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, and Killdeers foraged here almost at our feet. We enjoyed the sight of a couple of different Soras feeding along the edge of the marsh.

We watched those birds for some little time, ran into Chris Caster, and told him of the night-heron. We headed back to the Gun Club Ponds for another look at the heron, then called it a day. We hadn't seen a lot, but a few nice birds. It was a nice day, and good to be out.

Participants: Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, James Huntington (leader), Dave Kyllingstad, Ramona McGurk, John McLure, Bill Scheible.

Birds (53 species): American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, Sora, Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Blue Jay, American Crow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, House Wren, Marsh Wren, American Robin, European Starling, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Dickcissel, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *James Huntington*

August 21, Annual Picnic at City Park. As usual there was a lot of good food, and (miracle of all miracles) the grills were hot and ready when the cooks arrived. Many thanks to Ann Bagford and Bernie Knight for helping with the tables this year. Ideas for future bird trips were discussed. The trips planned for this fall were announced. Ed reported seeing a kettle of nighthawks near I-80 hovering about 80-100 feet above the ground – an unusual sight.

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood, Chris Caster and Terry Linqvist with children Ben and Emma Caster, Ann and Jack Bagford, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Bernie Knight, Dave and Darlene Kyllingstad, Richard and Nancy Lynch, Ramona McGurk.

– *Karen Disbrow*

September 13, Birding Lake Macbride by Boat. After weeks without significant rainfall in eastern Iowa, the day for birding by boat also marked the end of the drought. After a great breakfast served up by Nancy Lynch, a pause in

the downpour encouraged us to leave our dry vantage overlooking the backyard feeders and take to the pontoon boat to search for birds. The pause was only transient and we spent a very wet morning cruising the shores of the lake. Lots of Great Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers, and Green Herons were out and about. The best bird was a Yellow-billed Cuckoo who provided a long look from its perch on the shore of the north arm of Lake Macbride. An Osprey atop a tree along the south arm of the lake was not distracted from its taloned fish by our presence, and we had a long look at close range that provided another treat on a very wet morning.

Participants: Jack and Ann Bagford, Michael and Alyssa Cohen, Karen Disbrow, Jonni Ellsworth, Therese Guedon, Bernie Knight, Richard and Nancy Lynch (hosts), John McLure, and Paddy Woodworth, a journalist from Dublin, Ireland visiting in the International Writers Program.

Birds (23 species): Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Canada Goose, Osprey, Spotted Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Mourning Dove, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Richard Lynch*

September 18, Meeting. Our very own Ed Folk gave us a run-down on his Arctic and Antarctic birding experiences. He has spent time at Point Barrow, Alaska and Iceland in the Arctic and has also made seven trips to the Larsen Ice Shelf in Antarctica.

Dr. Folk is emeritus faculty with the U of I's Department of Physiology. For seven years Ed journeyed to Antarctica with a research vessel for the purpose of studying biologic clocks in an area of nearly continuous daylight—but the birdlife was also of great interest. On his first trip to Antarctica, Ed and a colleague

encountered a penguin colony, which they found to have only a 33 percent nesting success. In succeeding years they also monitored this colony, but were pleased to find the penguins far more successful.

Ed spent a large part of his discussion illuminating the differences between the Arctic and the Antarctic. In the Arctic there is no landmass, just open ocean, which freezes over during the winter months. In the Antarctic, the continental landmass is fringed by massive shelves of ice year-round. These ice shelves can be hundreds of thousands of square miles in area and constitute an entire ecosystem in themselves. Recently, there has been concern over the shrinkage of the Antarctic ice shelves due to global warming. Many fear a rise in sea-levels world-wide that will flood our coastlines. According to Ed this is a fallacy. The great ice shelves are already floating in the ocean, so whatever effect they have on sea-levels has already been realized; melting the ice won't push it any higher.

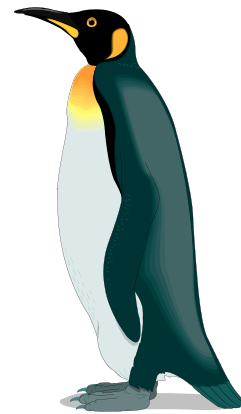
The real concern for the loss of the ice in Antarctica is the disruption of the ecosystem. The ice shelves are like an enormous fishing pier that extends hundreds of miles into the deep water of the surrounding sea. And as the ice retreats, not only will the penguins and seals be further from their deep water food sources, but the length of the coastline will shrink, resulting in less space for breeding.

Featured animals included Polar Bears, Weddell Seals, and Leopard Seals. Ed feels that Leopard Seals are the closest thing to a dragon living today—I can see that. Birds included Arctic Terns—great photo of a chick in Iceland, Horned Puffins, Thick-billed Murres, American Sheathbill, Adelie Penguin, Macaroni Penguin, Chin-strap Penguin, Gentoo Penguin, Emperor Penguin, Wandering Albatross, Skua and the dreaded Southern Giant Petrel.

Thanks Ed for a great presentation.

Attendees: Jean and Ed Allgood, Ann and Jack Bagford, Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Susan and John Drysdale, Chris Edwards, Linda and Roger Fisher, Ed Folk, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Nancy and Richard Lynch, Mary Noble, Ron Price, Sharon and Jim Scheib, Sue Svensson.

— *Chris Caster*



September 19, Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve. It was a beautiful day for a hawk watch, with temperatures in the 70s, a slight westerly breeze, and a few scattered clouds moving across the bright blue sky. The winds weren't strong enough to produce a big raptor flight, but there were enough birds moving past to keep things interesting. The morning started out cool and the first raptors seen were the local Ospreys, which continued to frequent the area and entertain visitors all day. By mid-morning the sun had warmed things up and a small kettle of Broad-winged Hawks and a larger kettle of Turkey Vultures were spotted. For the remainder of the day, birds moved past one or two at a time, sometimes close by and sometimes far away. A handful of accipiters tested our identification skills, and a fast-moving falcon rocketed past without providing a good look. We don't often see Northern Harriers on the hawk watch, but a beautiful immature bird flew right over us, and an immature Bald Eagle also put on a good show. Flocks of American White Pelicans soaring overhead were another crowd pleaser.

More than fifty people, both club members and visitors, stopped by the hawk-watching site. A

special highlight was the release of three birds by the Macbride Raptor Project staff. An immature Red-tailed Hawk and an immature Sharp-shinned Hawk were caught at the banding station near Macbride Nature-Recreation Area, banded, and then brought to our hawk watch site for release. An adult Red-tailed Hawk which had been rehabilitated at the Raptor Center was also released, then re-captured at the banding station a short time later and brought back for a second release! We hope he eventually found his bearings and is doing well. In addition to the hawk watching, a variety of interpretive programs were held throughout the day at the Raptor Center. Thanks to all the staff from the Macbride Raptor Project, University of Iowa Division of Recreational Services, and Kirkwood Community College who help make this event such as success every year.

Raptors (9 species, 50 individuals): Turkey Vulture (20), Osprey (2), Bald Eagle (1), Northern Harrier (1), Sharp-shinned Hawk (5), Cooper's Hawk (2), *accipiter* sp. (1), Broad-winged Hawk (14), Red-tailed Hawk (3), falcon sp. (1).

Other Bird Species (22 species): American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Nashville Warbler, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Edwards*

September 28th, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.

This was the outing the day after the special showing of *Winged Migration* at the Bijou. If you were fortunate enough to see the film you can imagine where our conversations continuously turned. At one point on the walk a large flock of pelicans majestically wheeled about not too far overhead. And my own

thoughts were full of what it would be like to be up there with them—I had a pretty good idea.

What struck me personally while watching *Winged Migration* was how hard the birds worked. As wonderfully flight-adapted birds are, they obviously still expend a great deal of energy fighting the air to get where they go. Some of the geese filmed were truly huffing and puffing—and it all looks so effortless from the ground.

But the group had a fairly effortless walk down the DNR service road that runs from James Ave. to the Sand Point parking lot with final stops at the Duck Pond and Swan Lake. In addition to the pelicans we also witnessed a number of bluebird and robin flocks pass over. Near the halfway point, the group stalled over a mystery bird, but Chris Edwards and Bob Dick concluded after careful study that it was an American Robin. Most interesting birds award goes to Diana Pesek who spied two Bobwhite lounging pond-side. Highlight of the trip was that we didn't record a single Rock Pigeon, House Sparrow, starling, grackle or crow—must not have been looking.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Tony Franken, Therese Guedon, Diana Pesek, Jim Scheib.

Birds (47 species): Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Wood Duck, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier, Northern Bobwhite, Wilson's Snipe, Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blue Jay, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-

breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Gray Catbird, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Field Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Caster*

October 5th, Cone Marsh. Why is it that the ducks always hang out at the back corner of the marsh? Because they can, I suppose. Anyway the water levels were extremely low and what few ducks were present were in hiding amongst the weeds. It actually made the birding more interesting because we really had to search to find additional species. The most interesting birds came when we walked a mudflat to view some juvenile Long-billed Dowitchers. Thanks James for the lesson on tertial feathers. That walk also produced a Stilt Sandpiper and a few very elusive LeConte's Sparrows. We were amazed at the number of Tree Swallows in the sky—thousands perhaps. My personal highlight was all the milkweed pods I found to bring home to my son. He just loves chasing those tufts around the yard.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Karen Disbrow, Bob and Dara Dick, Linda Donelson, Tony Franken, James Huntington, Therese Guedon, Bill Scheible. (Apologies for errors as I forgot to make a sign-up sheet.)

Birds (41 species): Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Wood Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Ring-necked Pheasant, American Coot, Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater Yellowlegs, Stilt Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Mourning Dove, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue Jay, Tree Swallow, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, White-

throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Caster*

October 16th, Meeting. Kent Nickell from Waterloo gave us a presentation on digiscoping. This involves taking pictures of birds with a digital camera using your spotting scope as a telephoto lens. Kent has only been digiscoping and birding for about five years, but has become quite accomplished at both. He has his own digiscoping website at

<http://www.greenbackedheron.com/home.cfm>.

Kent also posts to an international digiscopers listserv with Yahoo Groups and to our own IA-BIRD listserv. Recently he helped conduct a digiscoping workshop at the Fall IOU meeting.

Kent says that he came into digiscoping quite by accident. He is a pathologist and purchased a digital camera to use with his microscope. It just happened that it was a camera model that easily adapted to digiscoping—and he already had the scope. He had no prior background in photography, but learned a great deal on Yahoo Groups from others in the hobby.

The big advantage to digiscoping over film photography is price. Most birders already have a scope and a really good digital camera can be had for another \$600 to \$800 dollars. Kent takes most of his photos with his scope at 20x and the camera at a 4x zoom—this provides a 35mm equivalent of about 1765mm. To get the same kind of magnification in film photography you would have to invest many thousands of dollars. Digiscoping also allows one to instantly view the pictures taken and make adjustments through a wide variety of photographic parameters.

While digiscoping has given birders another way to enjoy birds, you won't find any of these photos in the better birding journals. Digiscoped prints still can't compete with traditional photography where publication quality is required. The resolution and depth of field are certainly inferior. But newer cameras

are coming out with higher and higher pixel number image capture, which provide greater image quality at larger print sizes. Kent uses a 3 megapixel Nikon Coolpix 995 camera and says that decent images can be had with that number, but more megapixels are certainly desirable.

The Nikon Coolpix series of cameras offers some unique features that are particularly well suited to digiscoping. They have an internal zoom, so that the camera body/scope eyepiece is maintained in a constant relation. They have a threaded objective lens, which facilitates attachment to the spotting scope. They have a body that swivel tilts so that you can move the LCD view screen to a comfortable position no matter the direction your scope is pointed.

Focusing the image takes a great deal of practice and patience. A common technique used is to set the camera to infinity and then focus using the scope while viewing the camera image in the LCD view screen. When the sun is directly behind the digiscoper the small LCD screen becomes very hard to use. Some digiscopers attach a hooding device over the LCD screen to reduce glare. The image on the screen is also quite small and so some digiscopers will attach some sort of magnifying device.

Although there are individuals that have had great success with handholding their cameras to their scope's eyepiece, the number one problem that anyone entering into digiscoping must address is simply how to attach the camera to the scope. Kent uses a device designed and manufactured by a Dr. Chiang in Malaysia to attach his camera to his scope's eyepiece. (This hobby is quite international). But every eyepiece and camera is a little different and many homemade solutions have been developed by digiscopers. This seems to be part of the fun of the hobby.

Other recommended equipment choices include a very sturdy tripod. It takes only a very small vibration to blur a photo at high magnification. A shutter release mechanism also helps to eliminate vibrations. And since the camera

zoom usually must be set at 2x or higher to eliminate vignetting from the image, most digiscopers prefer to use a lower power (15x-30x) eyepiece. Anything more powerful makes obtaining quality images difficult due to a wide variety of factors.

Kent says that certain birds make better subjects for digiscoping. As one might imagine, warblers are very difficult; shorebirds and waterfowl are much easier. But like traditional bird photography, digiscoping takes a great deal of patience and practice. Since giving his presentation Kent says that he has purchased a digital SLR Canon EOS 10D camera with a Canon L series 100-400mm IS (image stabilized) lens. It is a 6.3-megapixel camera and it enables him to get some nice photos of birds in flight. Since a scope isn't involved it technically isn't digiscoping, but as the price comes down on this sort of camera it is likely that far more birders will be taking up digital photography.

Once you have the captured image it has to be downloaded to a computer for storage and processing. Kent uses the Image Expert 2000 that shipped with his Dell computer to view and organize his many photos. He also uses Adobe Photoshop to perform some simple lightening or darkening of the photo. Photoshop can be used to perform many other kinds of photo-edits, but Kent hasn't made much use of these. Although digiscoping can be a great tool for the documentation of rare birds, the ability to manipulate the images certainly necessitates scrutiny. Like our life lists, bird photos are only as credible as the people who create them.

Thanks Kent for sharing this with us.

Attendees: Jean and Ed Allgood, Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Richard Lynch, Jim Miller, Kent Nickell, Diana Pesek, Viana Rockel, Linda and Robert Scarth, and Jim Scheib.

– Chris Caster

October 19, Wickiup Hill and Pleasant Creek. Twelve birders came out for a club outing to Wickiup Hill Natural Area and Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area in Linn County. The weather was gorgeous – a perfect fall day with abundant sunshine, light winds and warm temperatures. Highs reached the upper 70s.

At Wickiup we were looking for fall migrants, and we found sparrows in the tall grass and cattails. The sparrows were elusive – no surprise! – and frequently flew down without giving us good looks. However, we did get good looks eventually at Swamp, Fox, White-throated, and Song Sparrows.

Other Wickiup highlights were the male Purple Finches, found at three different sites. They were in lovely color and a nice treat for many of us. Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets were also located, and one Orange-crowned Warbler, plus numerous Yellow-rumped Warblers.

After walking the trails at Wickiup, the group headed on to Pleasant Creek, in search of the Surf Scoter that had been reported from there the previous day. Alas, it was not found on Sunday. We did find Ring-necked Ducks, Ruddy Ducks and a Pied-billed Grebe. Perhaps the most interesting bird at Pleasant Creek was an accipiter flyover. It generated much discussion as to whether it was a sharpie or a Cooper's – with the group split just about 50/50. So it is recorded as an unidentified accipiter.

The outing officially ended at Pleasant Creek, but five of us continued on down to Hawkeye Wildlife Area where we were joined by Bernie Knight to look for the Hudsonian Godwit. Strike two – we didn't find it either! But as James H. walked up Greencastle, he surprised a Cattle Egret that was hanging around near the road. The Cattle Egret flew out to a stump sticking up in the water, where it stood obligingly for all to see.

After scouting Greencastle for the shorebirds present, we went to Babcock Access Road to search out the LeConte's Sparrows seen there recently. This time we hit a home run! A LeConte's was very cooperative and stayed out in the open long enough for all to get excellent views. We birded HWA for a short while after that, then the group finally called it quits for the day around 2 p.m.

Participants: Chris Caster, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Tony Franken, Therese Guedon, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Diana Pesek (leader), Linda Rudolph, Jim Scheib and Tootsie (an adorable, well-behaved little fluffball, barely bigger than many of the birds we were watching!)

Birds at Wickiup Hill (35 species): Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Ring-necked Pheasant, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Red-tailed Hawk, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, House Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, European Starling, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Towhee, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch .

Birds at Pleasant Creek (10 species): Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, *accipiter* sp., Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull, Yellow-rumped Warbler.

Birds at Hawkeye Wildlife Area (16 species): Cattle Egret, Northern Harrier, American Coot, Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, Tree Swallow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, LeConte's

Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rusty Blackbird, Purple Finch.

– *Diana Pesek*

November 16, Coralville Reservoir. The trip began with the temperature close to 45 degrees and very foggy. At the Hy-Vee parking lot a flock of Cedar Waxwings was present. We proceeded to the West Overlook of the Coralville Reservoir and carefully approached a flock of a thousand or so Ring-billed Gulls, and a small number of Herring Gulls. We were rewarded with the beautiful sight and sound of many of the gulls lifting off into the fog. We searched in vain for unusual gulls.

At the south arm of Lake Macbride, a small group of Common Loons, Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye and Hooded Mergansers were visible through the fog. At the north arm sailboat ramp it was too foggy to see any waterfowl except a close by Common Loon. We drove to the north arm via Opie Avenue and spotted a Western Grebe, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Lesser Scaup, Common Loon and a Double-crested Cormorant in the lifting fog. A small flock of Ring-billed Gulls were also present.

On one of the jetties in the area James Huntington had previously seen Snow Buntings, however, we could not locate them today. We did find a Savannah Sparrow on a jetty and watched the bird work the grass very close to us. We also observed a Bald Eagle bothering a flying Great Blue Heron.

Several of the group then decided to go to Swan Lake at the Hawkeye Wildlife Area to see if the Dunlins and the juvenile Long-billed Dowitcher were still present. Found only the Dunlins. Three Wilson's Snipe were also at the lake. At James Avenue, north of Swan Lake Road, we viewed a White-crowned Sparrow, an Eurasian Tree Sparrow and numerous American Tree Sparrows. We did not look for waterfowl because the previous day's scouting trip failed to find any that were close enough to observe.

Participants: Barbara Beaumont, Bob Dick (leader), Tony Franken, Kurt Hamann, James Huntington, Dave Kyllingstad, Cathy Mandarino, John McLure, Diana Pesek, Jim Scheib, Bob and Joan Stearns.

Birds: (48 species) Common Loon, Western Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Dunlin, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, American Tree Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

– *Bob Dick*



♪ Bird Notes ♪

Rick Hollis

All sorts of fascinating natural history literature has crossed my desk since our last *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch* came out and it is time to share with you. Some of this is good news, some is not, some is just plain interesting – or at least it interests me.

Stepping Out

Since DNA fingerprinting techniques have enabled scientists to follow bird heredity as well as identify criminals, we have learned that the idea of monogamy amongst birds is not a very common practice. This led to careful observation and the findings that both males and females do quite a bit of ‘cheating’ on their spouses. In a fascinating study in Europe, scientists studied Blue Tits. They examined the genetic make up of the young (that is, who their parents were) and their survivability. They found that females that increased their extra-pair matings produced more young that survived the first year and that these young seemed to have higher future reproductive success.

Rare Birds Eating Rare Fish

German conservationists have a real problem. The Great Cormorant has been protected throughout Europe since the 1980s, when it was in trouble. It has now recovered. Fisherman always seem to think the cormorants are depleting their fish, and in this case they may actually be. Two species of fish in particular may be targets of the cormorant, Grayling and Pearl Fish, both of which have some protection due to their declining numbers. So you can see the dilemma: rare birds eating rare fish.

Introduced Crows

We are not the only continent where some fool introduced birds from somewhere else that are now causing problems for native species. At the end of the 19th century, the British Governor of Zanzibar ordered the Common Crow imported from India, to help dispose of the litter of in the streets. Now the crows have spread all along

the coast of East Africa, down as far as Cape Town, as well as working their way inland. Not surprisingly, they are a tremendous problem for some native species, including the African Paradise Flycatcher and many of the sunbirds. Attempts at crow control have failed due to the intelligence of the crows.

Cirl Buntings Recovering

British Birders and Conservationists are pleased that one of the UK’s rarest birds seems to be increasing. In 1989, a census of Cirl Buntings counted 118 pairs. This past year, the count was nearly 700 pairs. The RSBP and other organizations worked with farmers to reward them to restore weedy winter stubble fields, on which the Cirl Buntings depend.

Ivory Gulls Declining

Recent counts of Ivory Gulls have not been nearly so pleasant. The world population of Ivory Gulls seems to be crashing. Recent surveys of breeding locations were undertaken by persons knowledgeable in Ivory Gull breeding biology and in the locations where they have bred in the past. The survey also included other possible breeding and feeding locations. Very few gulls were seen. The conclusion is that the population has declined 90% in the past twenty years. One can only speculate on the reasons: warming climate and declining sea ice, chemical contaminants, and diamond mining near historical Ivory Gull colony sites are several possible causes.

Backwards Logic?

The Bush administration is proposing policy changes that would open the door for Americans to trade in live animals, skins, trophies, etc. of endangered species from foreign countries. The idea is that this will give the countries an incentive to protect these animals. Seems dumb to me – it could open the door to continuing the excesses of the past, which are barely under control now.

Bird Memory and Migration

Scientists compared the long-term memories of two species of warblers – one that migrates, the Garden Warbler, and one that does not, the Sardinian Warbler. They took hand-raised birds and exposed them to two rooms – one with food, one without – for about eight hours. After various delays they placed the birds back in the rooms. The hypothesis is that ‘smarter’ birds – birds with better spatial memories – would spend more time in the rooms where the food had been. The non-migratory Sardinian Warbler only ‘remembered’ where the food had been for about two weeks. On the other hand, Garden Warblers were found to remember the room with food, and spend more time in that room, up to a year after they had been exposed to it. The authors suggest that the duration of spatial memory may be related to migration.

Hello, I Must Be Going

The Carrizal Seedeater, a species discovered in July 2001, was known only from the spiky bamboo habitat of Carrizal Island in the Caroni River of southeast Venezuela. Since its discovery the island has been razed to make way for a hydroelectric dam. The same habitat exists elsewhere in the area, and presumably the birds exist elsewhere, but to date no others have been found.

Another Bird-Dinosaur Link

When the first big mass dinosaur extinction occurred, some groups of dinosaurs survived. One group was the Saurischians. It is thought that the atmosphere then contained the amount of oxygen equivalent to what is now found at an altitude of 3700 meters. Birds can breathe in low oxygen atmospheres, by their special way of breathing. They breathe air into their lungs and extract some oxygen there. The air then continues through air sacs in the bones where even more oxygen is extracted, before it is exhaled. It has been suggested that Saurischians could breathe in the same fashion, since their bones contained holes like modern birds.

Showing Off is Costly, Part I

Now there is evidence that not only do brighter, showier individual birds live shorter lives, but their entire species may pay as well. In a recent study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Paul Doherty and colleagues concluded that bird populations with flashier males are at higher risk of extinction. Using 21 years of Breeding Bird Surveys, and categorizing species as to whether the males and females have different-colored plumage (153 species – in their cases the male is always the gaudier), or species for which male and female plumage looks identical (at least 185 species), that is, to the human eye. They found that local populations of species with males that differ from females are 23% more likely to become extinct than are those of the species with identical plumage. The authors offer speculations on why this might occur.

Showing Off is Costly, Part II: an Explanation

One argument about bright colors equaling better fitness has been that brighter birds (at least those with red or orange beaks or soft parts) have diets high in carotenoids, which are thought to boost the immune system. A recent paper Blount and colleagues in *Science* studied this question. They used Zebra Finches to see whether immune function was limited by carotenoids (6 week experimental diet). They measured results in several ways: 1) Controlled observation of beak color – carotenoid-supplemented males had redder bills. 2) The all-important test of attractiveness to females – 9 out of 10 females preferred the males receiving the carotenoid supplements. 3) Measurements of blood samples – the supplemented males had higher immune responses.

A second set of experiments done by Faivre experimentally taxed the immune system of European Blackbirds by injecting them with sheep blood. Within three weeks, the injected birds displayed bills with duller colors. When you are a blackbird male, your bill is darn near all you have going for you besides your display, your song and your territory, to win a mate.

These two articles, taken together suggest that female choice, based on male coloration truly makes ‘sense’ from a biological standpoint.

Healthy Birdfeeding Tips

There is a nice section on the *Birdwatcher’s Digest* web site on Bird Feeding Dos and Don’ts. I highly recommend it to all of us. I know I do not clean my feeders as I should. In particular:

- When you fill your feeders, shake the old seed to the bottom. Remove any clumps of wet seeds.
- If you use hulled sunflowers, which I dearly love as they do not leave hulls on the ground, be careful because it spoils easily in wet weather.
- Periodically disinfect your feeders and your birdbaths with mild bleach solution (1/4 cup household bleach in 2 gallons water). Scrub and let it soak.

<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com>

Quick Book Review #1

Birds. Robert Bateman, foreword by Peter Matthiessen, text by Kathryn Dean. 176 pages. Most of our readers will be familiar with Bateman’s paintings from calendars and other books. This stunning book gives us 220 new paintings, and what was fascinating from my perspective is that each picture is accompanied by Bateman’s narrative of his adventures or reminiscences relating to the painting. This first person connection between the artist-naturalist and his paintings is as interesting as his paintings are stunning.

Quick Book Review #2

Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival. Bernd Heinrich. Ecco, 2003. 347 pages. This book is not about birds, although there are chapters about birds. If you have wondered how critters get through winters without L. L. Bean jackets and pac-boots, check this one out.

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