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# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 28 Number 3

December 2008

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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.

**December 8, Monday, 7:00 p.m. Christmas Bird Count Planning Meeting** at the home of Jim and Karole Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, north of Iowa City. Call Bob Dick at 337-4945 for more information.

**December 14, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count.** See page 3 for more information.

**January 4, Sunday, 8:00 – 10:30 a.m. Bird Feeder Watch Social** hosted by Jim & Karole Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, north of Iowa City. Come for coffee and rolls and watch the winter birds visiting the feeders. For directions call 338-3561.

**January 18, Sunday 1:00 p.m. Owl Prowl.** We'll spend the afternoon searching for roosting owls, such as Northern Saw-whet, Great Horned, and Barred Owls. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**February 7, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Amana Turkey Walk and Feast.** Join us for an early morning hike through the woods to search for Wild Turkeys and Saw-whet Owls, followed by breakfast at the Amanas. Please call Barb Beaumont at 626-6227 if you plan to attend.

**February 18, Wednesday, 7:00 pm. Meeting.** Birds of Costa Rica. Richard Lynch will share photos and experiences of a recent trip.

**February 22, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Quad Cities** for gulls and other water birds on the Mississippi River. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**March 7, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Burlington Area** for the Spring migration up the Mississippi Flyway including ducks, geese, pelicans, and more with local guides Chuck Fuller & John Rutenbeck. This will be an all-day trip with a stop for lunch. **Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot on S. Riverside Dr.** Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**March 24, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. Beginning Birdwatcher Course: Basics of Birding I** at the Conservation Education Center at Kent Park. Advanced registration is requested but is free to club members – call Brad Freidhof at 645-1011 to register. See page 8 for a complete Introduction to Birding course schedule.

**March 26, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Hickory Hill Park: Today and Tomorrow. Sara Walz, Friends of Hickory Hill Park, will update us on the exciting projects and plans for the park.

Continued on next page →

## Schedule – continued

**March 28, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Cone Marsh** in Louisa County for Sandhill Cranes, ducks, geese, and other early spring arrivals. **Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot on S. Riverside Dr.** *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.* Chris Edwards, 430-4732.

## Other Dates of Note

**March 28, Saturday, 9:15 a.m. 4th Annual Purple Martin Seminar and Workshop** at the CAM Iowa Clothing Center, 1005 Nutmeg Ave., about 3 miles NE of Kalona. For more information call Jim Walters at 319-466-1134 or Evan Gingerich at 319-656-3629.

### From the President Chris Caster

As most of you already know I am stepping down as president. The family and business require more time and so I need to begin cutting back in other areas. I have greatly enjoyed serving in this role due to the wonderful support from so many members. Thanks to everyone for helping.

Thanks greatly to Karen Disbrow for agreeing to take over my duties. There are many members who could do this job, but Karen was the one to step forward. She is already too busy, but she has many positive qualities and cares deeply about the club, so I know she'll do a great job. However she does not wish to do it endlessly and hopes to pass it on to another in three years or so.

Nancy Lynch has also agreed to take over the duties of refreshment coordinator from Bernie Knight. It has been suggested that we might provide Nancy with a budget to reimburse our refreshment volunteers. Thanks Nancy for helping. We all appreciate it, especially Bernie. Please consider volunteering to help with the refreshments at a meeting next year.

Bernie will continue as treasurer, Jim Scheib as webmaster, Chris Edwards as newsletter editor, and Karen will still be the field trip coordinator. Chris E. and Bob Dick will continue to run the

Christmas Bird Count and I will still coordinate the Spring Migration Count.

These club officers, along with past presidents Ed Allgood and Rick Hollis, have made up our leadership committee in recent years. Karen hopes to broaden this group by the addition of two additional members. Bruce Gardner agreed to be one of those, but we are still hoping for another member to step forward.

At the October meeting we discussed club finances and concluded that our \$15 annual membership dues are about right. Rick Hollis put together an annual estimate of expenses divided by annual subscriptions and arrived at a figure just under fifteen dollars. I personally came to the same conclusion by comparing our bank balance at the same time during the past few years and noted that it didn't change much—revenues nearly equaled expenses.

We do have a sizable bank balance, currently about \$1900, which might be excessive for a group such as ours. Some suggested that \$500 would be a more reasonable balance to carry from year to year. Spending the excess won't be hard, but any large donations should meet membership approval. At the October meeting a motion was approved to donate \$100 each in the names of Dick Schwab, our September presenter, and Lon Drake, our April presenter, to the Johnson County Heritage Trust.

## From the President-Elect Karen Disbrow

We are starting 2009 with a great outing at Jim and Karole Fuller's for the Bird Feeder Watch Social. And once again I am going to attempt to find as many owls as possible on the Owl Prowl in late January – hopefully the weather will cooperate this year. February brings the Amana Turkey Walk and Feast and a trip to the Quad Cities for gulls. March brings a trip to Burlington for the Spring migration – if you haven't birded the Mississippi River in March this is a great outing with Chuck Fuller and John Rutenbeck.

We are again teaching the birdwatching course at Kent Park this spring. Rick and Jim are always updating their information, and members can attend at no cost, so come spend an evening with us. Rick is also offering a birdwatching for kids class and field trip in late April – there is no cost but it is limited to 10 participants. Be sure to tell any friends who have children who are interested in birds about this.

The Breeding Bird Atlas had a good start this past year. Due to the flood we were not able to do much with Johnson County blocks. I would like to schedule outings from May through early July in these blocks. Be thinking where and when you would like to lead one of these – have no fear, I will be calling!

In addition, there will be IOU-organized Blockbusting Parties held across the state this summer. I would like to schedule one in our area in late June. We hope to have the entire list of Blockbusting Parties available for the April newsletter. I hope to have a planning meeting about the field trips in the BBA blocks in early February. If anyone is interested in helping, please contact me.

I am looking forward to a marvelous year with many new birds!

## Christmas Bird Count December 14

This year's Iowa City Christmas Bird Count will be held Sunday, December 14, unless extreme weather conditions require moving the count to a later date. Co-compilers are Bob Dick and Chris Edwards. If you wish to participate as a field observer or a feeder watcher, or if you have questions, please call Bob between 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. at 337-4945 or 321-0706 (cell), or email at [bobd555@earthlink.net](mailto:bobd555@earthlink.net).

The pre-count planning meeting will be Monday, December 8, at 7 p.m. at the home of Jim and Karole Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll NE, located off Dubuque St. north of Iowa City. Call Jim at 338-3561 if you need directions. You do not need to attend the planning meeting to participate in the CBC. Your group leader will have information for you on count day.

On count day, we will meet at noon for a mid-day compilation and lunch in Meeting Room C at the North Liberty Community Center, 520 W. Cherry St. in North Liberty. This is the same location as last year. Bring your own lunch.

Dinner and an updated compilation will be at The Brown Bottle Café, 125 Zeller St., North Liberty, at 6:00 p.m.. Our private room is available beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Please note that the count area is a 15-mile diameter circle with the center located at Highway 965 and County Road F-28 (Penn St.) in North Liberty. This includes all of North Liberty and Coralville, but not all of Iowa City. If you plan to participate as a feeder watcher and are not sure if you are in the count area, please contact Bob. Also, if you know others who may desire to participate as a feeder watcher please encourage them and have them call Bob.

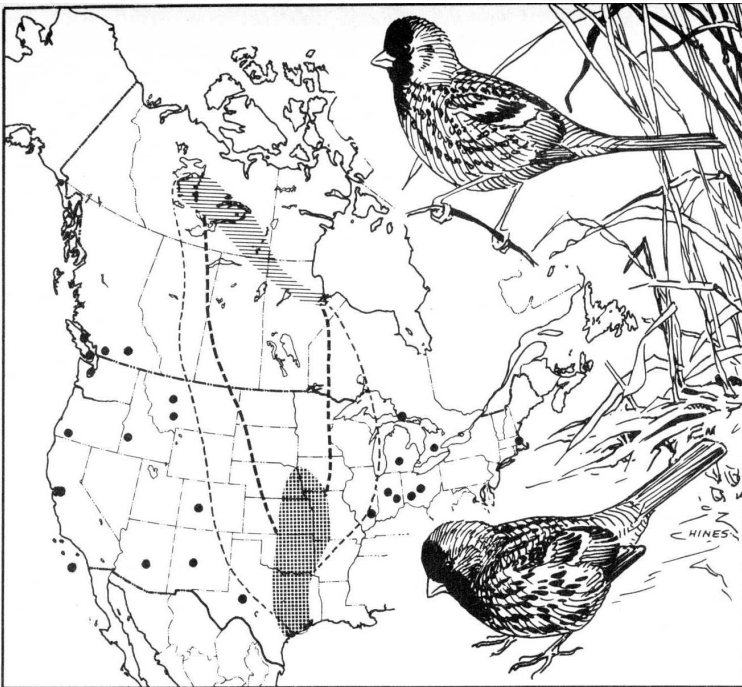
Please visit the ICBC web site at [www.icbirds.org](http://www.icbirds.org) for more information that Jim Scheib has provided.

## Robert W. Hines, Wildlife Illustrator

### Chris Edwards

All the artwork in this issue of *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch* is by artist Robert W. Hines. If the style looks familiar, that's because Hines drew the Harris's Sparrow which has graced our newsletter masthead since the Summer 1990 issue.

I'd always been curious about the origin of our Harris's Sparrow illustration. I thought perhaps it was drawn by a former club member or a local artist. Last spring I was paging through the book *Bird Study* by Andrew J. Berger, which I purchased in the silent auction at the Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring Meeting, and there on page 107 was the original illustration from which our very own "Harris" was taken. The full illustration features two Harris's Sparrows, along with a range map depicting the breeding range, winter range, and migratory route of the species. (The complete illustration is shown below.) A note revealed that the illustration was by Robert Hines and that it had originally appeared in the publication *Migration of Birds, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Circular 16*, by Frederick C. Lincoln, in 1950.



This piqued my interest, and a quick internet search turned up an online version of *Circular 16* on the USFWS web site. Unfortunately it was the recent 1998 version without the original Robert Hines illustrations. I then checked eBay and found a nice copy of the 1950 version for \$2.00, and a few days later it arrived in my mailbox. This 102-page booklet provides a good overview of North American bird migration, based on the latest scientific research of the day. It features two dozen pen-and-ink illustrations by Hines, some of which are reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter.

Robert W. Hines (1912-1994) was a prolific wildlife artist who produced a huge volume of work during a long career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He started drawing at a very early age. He grew up in Ohio where he enjoyed hiking, fishing, and camping in the woods and along the banks of the nearby Sandusky River. He was an Eagle Scout and later became a nature instructor for three Boy Scout camps and counselor for most of the nature merit badges. He learned the art of taxidermy by correspondence.

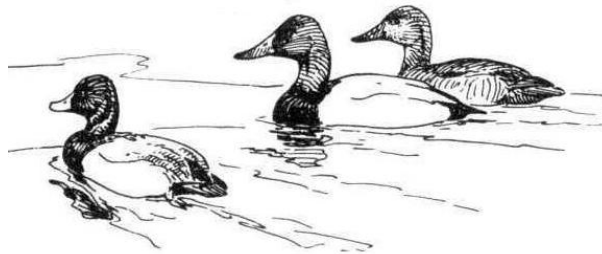
During the depression he worked various jobs until an illness forced him to slow down, and he turned to his former avocations of drawing and painting. In 1939 he became Staff Artist for the Ohio Division of Conservation in Columbus. In 1948 he was hired as Artist-Illustrator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, DC, where his first supervisor was Rachel Carson.

Hines wrote and illustrated *Ducks at a Distance*, which was published by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. During his long career he illustrated 52 books including *Wildlife in America* by Peter Mattheissen; *Edge of the Sea* by Rachel Carson; *North American Waterfowl* by Albert Day; *Alaska's*

*Animals and Fishes* by Frank Dufresne; and *Waterfowl Tomorrow* and *Birds in Our Lives*, both Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife publications. Hines also illustrated three Boy Scout Merit Badge Pamphlets. His work appeared in numerous magazines including *The New Yorker*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Outdoor Life*, as well as conservation magazines in every state.

Hines was one of two men who helped inaugurate the Wildlife Conservation Postage Stamp Series, and designed the first four stamps in the series. He also served as consultant and administrator for the Annual Duck Stamp Art Competition. He painted three huge wildlife scenes, oil on canvas, which now hang as murals in the Interior Building in Washington.

So how did Robert Hines' Harris's Sparrow illustration end up on the masthead of *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch*? Apparently it was just an attractive piece of public domain clip-art that caught the eye of editor Carol Thompson in 1990. Other birds which held this position during the early years of *Eastern Iowa Birdwatch* included a Hudsonian Godwit during Carl Bendorf's early tenure (1981-1983); and a Common Merganser and a Surf Scoter during Carol Thompson's editorship (1984-1991). But none have matched the longevity of Harris, whose place of honor, at least for the present, is secure.



## Tips for Gull Watching

Chris Caster

Although a few Ring-billed and Herring Gulls may be present in eastern Iowa through the summer, they do not breed here. Usually in August small groups will appear in our area, and their numbers will continue to grow through the fall as the weather turns colder and lakes and rivers to the north freeze over. This is the best time to see a "rare" gull in Iowa as the large flocks often contain small numbers of Thayer's, Glaucous, Lesser Black-backed, Iceland, and Great Black-backed Gulls, in about that order of decreasing frequency. They are most likely to be seen around the locks and dams on the Mississippi River, but may be found wherever there is open water. Landfills are another location that these opportunistic feeders may be found. These birds may move south of our area during the winter, but can again be seen as they return north, generally in late February. This is the time of year I most enjoy looking for gulls.

Wintering gulls are generally found loafing in large roosts on the ice or flying about below dams. The ice pond next to L&D 14 north of Bettendorf and the ice on the west side of Credit Island south of Davenport are great locations to view roosting gulls. There may be thousands of birds present and picking out the "rare" birds requires much patience. Scopes are essential, as is dressing very warmly. It always seems about 20 degrees colder to me when I'm gull watching—it isn't for everyone. But it is very rewarding, because if you are patient, you generally will find an interesting gull and there is often opportunity to get a "good look".

However sometimes the gulls are all bunched up together or sleeping and I don't have the patience to wait them out. This is when I turn my binoculars on the gulls that might be flying about. I really enjoy

watching gulls in flight. They have a certain grace that I find captivating. It is also a better way to see the birds and it is ADD compatible if you require that sort of thing. Identifying gulls in flight is often difficult, primarily because they are constantly moving. Really however the movement is a good thing, because it allows us to examine the bird from different angles. The trick is to train your eyes to pick out the essential field mark. This requires preparation.

Most of us when starting out don't make a serious attempt to identify the immature birds—they are just too confusing. We also find the adults to be similar enough that unless we see a gull standing and can examine its leg color we just don't feel comfortable with it. Thus most of us give up on gulls almost before we start. Here is a set of recommendations that should help you be more successful.

Start with a good field guide. I recommend *The Sibley Guide to Birds* as the essential basic guide for anyone who considers him or herself a birder, whatever their level. I think the National Geographic's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* is also quite good, but not as useful for basic identification of our usual species as Sibley's. I have not personally been a fan of photographic field guides, although I think the method has been used to great effect in specialty guides. One of these is *Gulls of the Americas* by Howell and Dunn, which I think to be outstanding, and a "must" for anyone really interested in gulls.

The first thing to learn is how to recognize the important feather groups. In flying gulls these are the primaries, secondaries, greater coverts, back, rump, and tail. In standing gulls these are the scapulars, greater coverts, primaries, and tertials. The secondaries are rarely visible in the folded wing and likewise the tertials are of limited usefulness during flight. Also develop an awareness of differences in bill and head shape. Go out in the fall when the weather is decent and practice "seeing" these different features on the gulls around the Coralville Dam or Lake Macbride.

Learn the basic changes that occur in gull plumages as they mature. I recommend studying first the Ring-billed Gull. It is our most common large gull and attains adult plumage in its third year. First-winter birds are highly patterned. Their dark black tail band contrasts strongly with the white rump and tail base. The dark bar along the secondaries and dark outer primaries contrast strongly with the light greater wing coverts and inner primaries. They molt their brown juvenile scapulars and back feathers before winter and acquire a light gray mantle. Their head, undersides, and underwings are relatively light and their bill is bicolored with a black tip. By their second winter, Ring-bills look very nearly like an adult. The entire upperwing will be light gray except for the dark outer primaries. The bill and leg color will be a greenish-yellow and often the eye will be a yellow color like the adult. There will probably still be a narrow band of black in the tail though. In the third winter the tail should be entirely white and the black in the bill reduced to a broad, but well-defined ring. The outermost one or two primaries may have an oval "mirror" of white within the black.

Next study the changes that occur in Herring Gulls. They are our second most common large gull and attain adult plumage in their fourth year. The first-winter birds will be the darkest gulls you will likely see. They are uniformly dark brown all over, although their head and breast feathers may become whitish by mid-winter due to bleaching and wear. They have dark brown tail feathers, outer primaries, and secondaries. The inner primaries are however a lighter brown and this gives the effect of having a trapezoidal panel within the flight feathers of the upperwing. This is a useful field mark that persists into the second winter. The second-winter Herring will have molted many back feathers to a light gray. They will have a light rump and now show more contrast between the inner and outer primaries. The bill will now be distinctly bicolored, with pinkish base and a black tip. The third-winter birds will have a light-gray upperwing with black primaries, yellow coloration to the bill and a yellow eye like the adult. However they will still have some black in the tail feathers and a large amount of black pigment at the

tip of the bill. In the fourth winter the bird has an all white tail, white mirrors in the primaries and a yellow bill with a red gonyal spot.

Remember to examine multiple aspects of the birds. If you see what looks to be a black ring to the bill, don't always assume it is a Ring-billed Gull. Examine the length and shape of the bill, the shape of the head or the leg color. Make comparisons with the other gulls. Identifying a group of birds is always easier than trying to identify an individual bird, because groups average out the variability seen between individuals.

Gulls are as variable as any group of birds and this is due to a multitude of factors. Our large gulls have a basic plumage and one alternate plumage. The basic plumage is freshest in mid-fall and coincides with what most of us call winter plumage. It is the culmination of the pre-basic molt in which all the bird's feathers are molted and replaced, beginning in the spring with the median coverts and inner primaries, continuing in the summer with the secondaries and tail feathers, and concluding in the fall when the outer primaries have finished growing. The alternate plumage is freshest in mid-spring and coincides with what most of us call breeding plumage. The pre-alternate molt actually begins in the fall before the pre-basic molt is complete, and is usually limited to contour feathers of the head, neck, back and breast. It may not be quite finished when the next year's pre-basic molt has begun. Essentially these birds are molting year-round, although they may suspend molt during times of increased energy expenditure such as during breeding or migration or during periods of food scarcity, such as mid-winter.

Individual birds often molt and replace feathers at slightly different times. Hormonal or nutritional factors during those periods will affect the appearance of feathers groups between individual birds. It is hard to know where our wintering gulls have spent the rest of the year. Many probably came from the Great Lakes, but they may have arrived from Hudson Bay or even farther locations. Different local populations with differing fledging times and different environmental factors are likely to produce some variation. Feathers bleach and become worn. All this variability is confusing. Certainly not all individual birds can be comfortably pinned down to species or age for that matter. But there are patterns within the variability, and with some study and practice our understanding and enjoyment of this wonderful group of birds is sure to increase.

Next study the relative size differences in our gulls. This will be particularly useful as you begin to look for uncommon gulls. Ring-bills and Herring Gulls are particularly useful as a point of size comparison. Bonaparte's, Sabine's, and Franklin's Gull are all smaller than Ring-billed. Laughing Gull, Mew Gull and Black-legged Kittiwake are about the same size as Ring-billed. California, Iceland, Thayer's, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls are intermediate between Ring-billed and Herring. Glaucous and Greater Black-backed Gulls are larger than Herring. Remember though that these differences are relative. Gulls are variable in this regard as well and differences between larger males and smaller females can be significant.

Birding with others is especially useful in learning gulls. Unlike smaller birds that dive out of sight, gulls are particularly suited to group birding. And so I believe they are a group particularly well suited to building a set of skills that carry over into all facets of birding. I hope that you too can learn to enjoy gulls.



## Introduction to Birding Course Tuesdays March 24 – April 21 at Kent Park



The Iowa City Bird Club and the Johnson County Conservation Department are offering a 6-week **Introduction to Birding Course at the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park**. There will be six Tuesday evening sessions along with six weekend field trips to area birding hot spots.

**Tuesday evening sessions** are \$5 for adults and free for children accompanied by an adult. Iowa City Bird Club members receive free admission (a one-year membership is \$15 per household or \$10 for students). Participants may attend all five sessions or pick one or more to attend. Classes can hold 30, and advanced registration is requested – please call Brad Freidhof at (319) 645-1011 by noon of the Tuesday session. Handouts and refreshments will be provided. Come to class early and bird the loop path near the CEC.

**Weekend field trips** are free. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Bring binoculars to all field trips; if you don't have a pair let us know in advance and loaners can be arranged. Spotting scopes are helpful for viewing shorebirds and waterfowl; if you have one bring it. Club members will have several scopes available on those field trips requiring one. All field trips will depart from the Dodge Street Hy-Vee in Iowa City unless otherwise noted; meet in the SW corner of the parking lot. For more information on field trips, call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

**Tuesday, March 24, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING I** by Rick Hollis. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment that every birdwatcher needs, or might someday need.

**Saturday, March 28, 8 a.m. Field Trip to CONE MARSH.** Located about 25 miles SE of Iowa City, Cone Marsh is an excellent place to view migrating ducks, geese, and other water birds. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. **Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot.**

**Tuesday, March 31, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II** by Rick Hollis. Continuation of first session topics.

**Saturday, April 4, 8 a.m. Field Trip to KENT PARK** near Tiffin. We will explore the trails in Kent Park looking for migrating songbirds and resident woodland birds. **Meet at the CEC in Kent Park.**

**Tuesday, April 7, 7 p.m. WHERE TO BIRD IN JOHNSON COUNTY** by Rick Hollis. Well known, lesser known and secret places to watch birds and study nature in and around Johnson County.

**Saturday, April 11, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HAWKEYE WILDLIFE AREA** near North Liberty. We expect to see ducks, geese, American White Pelicans, and other early spring migrants. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one.

**Tuesday, April 14, 7 p.m. BACKYARD AND FEEDER BIRDS** by James Scheib. This session will cover the common birds found in our area's backyards during the year, and what types of feeders and food to use to attract them.

**Sunday, April 19, 8 a.m. Field Trip to MACBRIDE NATURE-RECREATION AREA.** Visit the Raptor Center, observe birds up close from the bird blind, and hike the nearby trails.

**Tuesday, April 21, 7 p.m. WARBLER IDENTIFICATION & SHOREBIRD REVIEW** by Karen Disbrow. Warblers are coming! Warblers are among our most colorful birds. Compare and contrast similar warblers.

**Sunday, April 26, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HICKORY HILL PARK.** This park is a great place to view warblers and other migrating songbirds.



## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

**July 26, Butterfly Count.** The weather for our tenth annual butterfly count was typical for late July in Iowa – mostly sunny, mid-80s, humid, and little wind. Our group was small in numbers, but in terms of counting butterflies we were a two-man wrecking crew. The 2711 individual butterflies seen smashed the old record of 1526, and new record high counts were established for eight species. Species diversity was slightly below average with 30.

We had a productive morning at Kent Park. We stopped briefly at Hawkeye Wildlife Area but found few butterflies because of the recent flooding. In the afternoon we visited Macbride Nature-Recreation Area, Lake Macbride State Park, and Hickory Hill Park. I finished up at Turkey Creek Preserve on my way home.

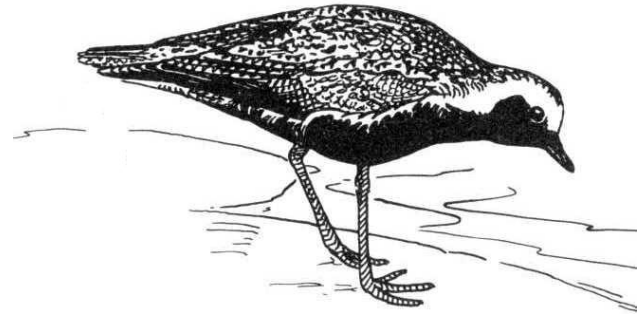
‘Summer’ Spring Azures were numerous everywhere we went, and Ken probably got tired of hearing my voice counting them out – “29, 30, 31...” Late in the afternoon we came across a huge alfalfa field that was covered with sulphurs and whites – I conservatively estimated 1,200 but I think there were probably a lot more. We had a good count of Monarchs throughout the day. The most unusual butterfly was a Gray Hairstreak in Hickory Hill Park.

Participants: Chris Edwards (leader), Ken Hunt.

Butterflies (30 species, 2711 individuals): Black Swallowtail 23, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail 9, Cabbage White 467, Clouded Sulphur 1162, Orange Sulphur 138, Bronze Copper 7, Gray Hairstreak 1, Eastern Tailed-Blue 27, ‘Summer’ Spring Azure 581, American Snout 1, Great Spangled Fritillary 30, Meadow Fritillary 9, Pearl Crescent 11, Eastern Comma 1, Gray Comma 1, American Lady 1, Painted Lady 25, Red Admiral 13, Common Buckeye 10, Red-spotted Purple 7, Viceroy 4, Tawny Emperor 3, Common Wood-Nymph 33, Monarch 83, Silver-spotted Skipper 18, Least

Skipper 23, Fiery Skipper 1, Peck’s Skipper 7, Byssus Skipper 9, Dun Skipper 6.

– Chris Edwards



**September 8, Iowa City Waterworks Park.** The three of us had a ball despite the cloudy, cool weather.

Participants: Jonni Ellsworth (leader), Tony Franken, Ken Hunt.

Birds (42 species): Canada Goose, Gadwall, Mallard, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Common Tern, Forster’s Tern, Mourning Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Barn Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Cedar Waxwing, Orange-crowned Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– Jonni Ellsworth

**September 19, Meeting.** Dick Schwab, Board President of the Johnson County Heritage Trust, gave a presentation of his group’s activities. This meeting was moved from Thursday to Friday evening due to conflicts with the Grant Wood AEA schedule. It also came on the eve

of the JCHT's annual "Under a Cider Moon" celebration and silent auction fundraiser, so many thanks is owed Dick for his willingness to present this night.

If you are not familiar with the JCHT it was founded in 1978 for the purpose of preserving lands that public agencies might not be able to afford. It is a non-profit, conservation land trust committed to the preservation and enjoyment of natural areas primarily in Johnson County. It was instrumental in the protection of Ryerson's Woods and its transfer to the Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department. The JCHT also cooperates with the Johnson County Conservation Board, the Iowa Nature Conservancy, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the Iowa Environmental Council.

The JCHT has a volunteer board, but recently hired one part-time staffer, Tammy Richardson. You may have seen her at the annual Prairie Preview the group sponsors at Montgomery Hall on the Fairgrounds each March. She is kept very busy as the group does proactive fundraising, not only because land purchase costs are high, but also because the properties require management. Currently the JCHT manages six properties in the county.

Belgum Grove is a 40-acre pasture crossed by Dirty Face Creek four miles west of Hills. It contained a small apple orchard and wetland. The Belgums donated it in 1998, but another \$70,000 was needed to convert the property for storm water retention and restored prairie.

Big Grove is a 40-acre woodland preserve surrounded by 250 acres of Corps land near the Coralville Reservoir northeast of the Sugar Bottom Recreation Area. The JCHT also owns conservation easements on nearly eighty acres of surrounding private lands. Acquired in 2004, it is a mixture of gorgeous old growth oaks and hickories and regenerating woodlands. Dick also constructed a covered bridge on part of the trail which is a wonder given its size and how little of its surroundings was disturbed in the

construction. Most would think it quite old. I personally have found it quite handy during a rain shower more than once. The JCHT continues to do invasive species removal at Big Grove. Burning, mowing and Round-up use continue with the large ridge-top meadow and removal of less desirable trees from two ridges extending east and southwest from the meadow. Big Grove is adjacent to one of our Corps land surveys and I have found it a great location for Ovenbird, Wood Thrush, and Scarlet Tanager. Veery was recorded on one ICBC outing. I've also found singing Blue-winged Warblers near the meadow.

Hora Woods is 20 acres of mature oak-hickory woods, rich in ferns and wildflowers 4 miles northwest of West Branch. This very invasive-free area was acquired in 1986 and features a wet area and a north-facing slope with ferns. Despite the lack of invasives this area requires management. Shade tolerant maples and basswood live in the understory until one of the large oaks, walnuts or hickories die, then they rise up to take its place. Whereas oak leaves curl on the ground, making for dry fuel, maple leaves lie flat, creating a wet-mat that suppresses fire. This is one of the aspects of maples that allow them to take over.

Shimek Ravine is 13 acres of oak-hickory forest just west of Shimek School in Iowa City. In 1992 nearby residents purchased the land and donated it to the trust to protect it from development. It has proved to be a difficult area to manage due to the difficulty in getting approval for urban burns.

Strub Prairie was acquired in 2007. It is only 1.5 acres, but it is a remnant prairie containing 117 species of flowering plants, 82% of which are native. It is located at the northeast corner of Polk Ave. and Hwy. 382 west of Solon.

Turkey Creek Preserve is 105 acres of woods and former pasture, including five acres of reconstructed prairie, donated in 1981. It is located on the west side of Sugar Bottom Road

about 1.5 miles northwest of the intersection with Newport Road.

Thank you Dick for your efforts to make our county a better place.

Attendees: John Bovey, Norlin Boyd, Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Linda Fisher, Bruce Gardner, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, Ken Hunt, Pat Kieffer, Richard and Nancy Lynch, Delores and Larry Meister, Damian Pieper, Jim Scheib, Blossom Shaw, Wetherill Winder.

– *Chris Caster*



**September 20, Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve.** We had a rather low turnout this year, but those who showed up enjoyed a really nice flight of Broad-winged Hawks between 10 a.m. and noon, with one kettle of 100 birds and another kettle of 200. A good number of Broad-wings cruised by at low altitude right over our heads. We also spotted a Northern Harrier, which is very unusual for our count, as well as a typical assortment of other raptors. Nancy Lynch arranged for Warren from Senior Center Television to shoot some footage and interview several participants for a segment to be aired on local access television.

Participants: Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Therese Guedon, Julie Hoyer,

Ken Hunt, Lauren and Doina Johnson, Ken Lowder, Nancy Lynch, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble, Bill Scheible.

Raptors (7 species): Turkey Vulture 32, Osprey 1, Bald Eagle 2, Northern Harrier 1, Cooper's Hawk 2, *accipiter* sp. 3, Broad-winged Hawk 468, Red-tailed Hawk 1.

Other birds (23 species): American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Spotted Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Robin, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Indigo Bunting, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Edwards*

**October 4, Lake Macbride.** It started as another ICBC cruise on Lake Macbride on a gorgeous Fall morning. It became a Poseidon Adventure. For the first 30 minutes of the trip, eleven birders packed onto a nine-passenger pontoon boat cruised the shore line enjoying the birds. Then we turned the corner and entered the north arm of Lake Macbride where we were greeted by a modest head wind and some swells. One moment we were looking at a Belted Kingfisher; the next moment the bow of the pontoon boat dove underwater, the boat leaned heavily to port, we took on about a foot of water, and everyone scrambled for their life jackets. For a moment the pontoon boat began to mimic a diving duck – the boat appeared to be sinking. Fortunately, some quick redistribution of birders and putting the engine in neutral saved the day. Everyone ended up with wet shoes and feet, after a transient elevation of blood adrenalin levels. After docking at the launch ramp on the north arm, most of the group decided to walk the trail through the woods back to the Lynch home for drying out and a delicious brunch. We have renamed the boat *Merganser*.

The unplanned excitement curtailed the birding, extended the brunch, and resulted in the lowest species count (14) for this annual outing. Next year we will get a better head count and arrange for a second pontoon boat if needed to accommodate the turnout.

Participants: Ed and Jean Allgood, Karen Disbrow, Jonni Ellsworth, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, Jane Knoedel, Kristen Lawton, Dick and Nancy Lynch (hosts), Mary Noble, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Dick and Marsha Shaffer.

Birds (14 species): Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Ring-billed Gull, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, American Crow, Brown Creeper, kinglet sp., American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– Dick Lynch



### October 12, NE Johnson County Preserves.

This trip was to five under-appreciated gems in northern and eastern Johnson County. Every place we visited was north of I-80 and east of the Iowa River. As the sparrow flies they range from 10 miles north of Iowa City to 5.5 miles east-northeast of town. To get to all of them took 60-70 road miles. We did not visit any place for very long, but spent enough time at each to get an idea of what they are like.

We started at two small postage-stamp prairie preserves, Solon Prairie (3 acres, Johnson County Conservation Board) and Strub Prairie (formerly Propane Prairie; 1.5 acres, Johnson County Heritage Trust). With just walking on the perimeter paths at both prairies, we saw a number of interesting things. Red-winged Blackbirds were still singing at Solon, and the first warbler of the day, Palm Warbler, was working over some saplings at Strub.

The next two places we visited are larger JCHT preserves that touch the Corps of Engineers lands bordering the Coralville Reservoir. Big Grove Preserve (40 acres) is one of the remaining portions of the “Big Grove” described by the first land surveyors in Johnson County. We did not get into the part of this preserve with the more mature trees, still we spent time trying to get good looks at a Winter Wren that was playing mouse in some piles of cut branches. A short distance away, we visited Turkey Creek Preserve (110 acres). Although Turkey Creek is mostly woods, we spent our time on the edge of some prairies and some creeks. Many Cedar Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warblers, American Robins, and a Hermit Thrush were seen.

We finished at Hora Woods (20 acres, JCHT), a small woodland. Among other things, walnuts and hickories kept falling on us. We caught the day’s second Hermit Thrush there.

Participants: Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Roger and Linda Fisher, Rick Hollis (leader), Pat Kieffer, Selina Lin, Mary Noble, Wetherill Winder. Plus a flying visit by Bruce Gardner.

Solon Prairie: Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, House Finch, American Goldfinch.

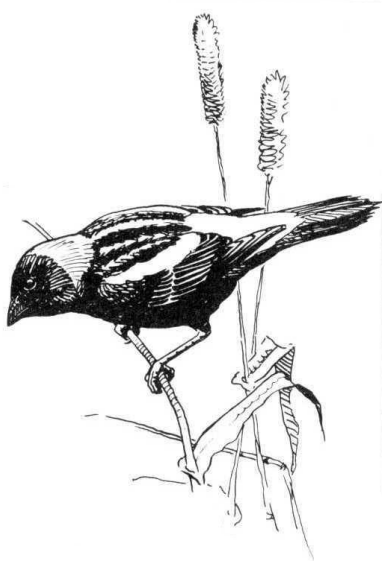
Strub Prairie: Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, House Wren, Palm Warbler, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch.

Big Woods: American White Pelican, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Eastern Towhee.

Turkey Creek: Turkey Vulture, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, American Goldfinch.

Hora Woods: Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Killdeer, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush, American Robin.

– Rick Hollis



**October 16, Meeting.** Jim Scheib presented on backyard photography. This is a program he has given to non-birder groups and it featured a number of animal photos. The ravine behind the Scheibs' is home to many birds and animals and they make use of the feeders, whether it be the two groundhogs, the young turkey, or the perching Red-tail—all were on the deck feeder. It has proved to be Jim's own personal school of photography. Jim has taught himself well as evidenced by his own personal favorite, a photo of a Yellow-throated Warbler against a beautiful green woodland backdrop taken this spring.

Jim's #1 piece of advice is to get the best camera you can afford. Point and shoot cameras (the lens is permanently attached) with a good zoom work well only to a point. Some claim that 5 mega-pixels are plenty, but Jim says this isn't true, especially after cropping and processing. Image stabilization is a must. This can be in the camera or in the lens. Regardless of where it is, it is expensive. Jim prefers to pay for this just once, therefore he has it in his camera body. This lowers the cost of his lenses. This is one of the reasons he opted for a Sony camera—Nikon and Canon put the stabilization in their lenses. Get a good telephoto lens, but remember zoom lenses have a cost in less light gathering capability and less image sharpness. For point-and-shoot cameras get a teleconverter if it is available. This is an economical way to increase your magnification. Get a solid tripod that resists shaking, although tripods are only useful in predictable situations.

Jim finds that handheld is the way to go because of the flexibility. Of course, you still have to be ready—a half second can matter. Jim makes sure the windows near his feeders are clean, his batteries are always charged, there is space on his memory chip, his camera is handy in sleep mode, the lens cover is off and the camera settings are pre-set in programmed mode. Being ready also means learning how to use the camera. You have to teach yourself by using it. You have to try new settings and features. Photography involves trade offs and you need to learn to manage these in different situations. Sharp images are difficult to achieve in objects that move, like birds. Therefore increased depth of field, the amount of the picture in sharp focus, is also more difficult to achieve. Increased depth of field requires a small camera aperture (high F-stop) and a slow shutter speed. High zoom reduces the depth of field, reduces shutter speed and requires more light. Low light conditions make it harder for the camera to auto focus, slows the shutter speed and increases the noise in the image. Jim uses auto settings, focus meter set to spot, continuous shooting, continuous focus and exposure brackets. Even so he takes a lot of bad photos to get one good

one. This is why the digital revolution made the hobby accessible—you don't have to pay for bad photos.

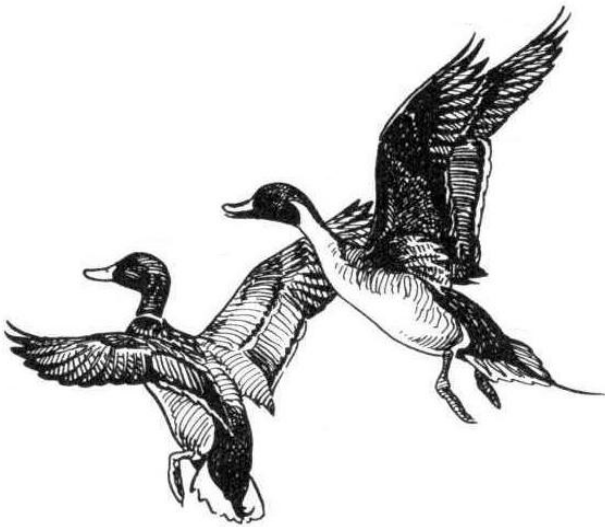
Jim's first camera was a Sony DSC H1 with a built in 12x zoom and image stabilization. He added a 1.7x teleconverter for 20x zoom. He has recently upgraded to a Sony Alpha 700 with 12.25 mega pixels and uses a Tamron 200-500mm zoom lens.

One interesting finding was that some birds are bothered by the camera's laser auto focus. Jim had to switch to manual focus in order to photograph an Orchard Oriole coming to his feeder. Surprising to some might be the difficulty that Jim had photographing a Tufted Titmouse at his feeder. These birds rarely spend more than a split-second before selecting a seed and flying off with it.

Thanks again Jim for all the helpful advice and a great presentation.

Attendees: Jeanne Bonde, John Bovey, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Linda Fisher, Bruce Gardner, Rick Hollis, Lorraine Kent, Pat Kieffer, Dave Kyllingstad, Richard Lynch, Viana Rockel, Sue Sarlette, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Wetherill Winder.

– *Chris Caster*



**November 1, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** It was a mild November day and a perfect morning to be out birding. The heavy fog lifted early, the temperature was in the mid-50s, and there was little wind. Three of us explored Hawkeye Wildlife Area for migrating sparrows and other birds. We stayed in the areas where no hunting was allowed, since this was the middle of duck and pheasant hunting season. We started at Swan Lake where we saw Pied-billed Grebes, American Coots, and a Great Blue Heron (and later a Belted Kingfisher).

Then we explored the Swan Lake Woods area, where we found migrating sparrows including newly arrived American Tree Sparrows, both kinglets and Brown Creepers. Numerous Mallards flew overhead. Later we checked James Ave. hoping to find some flocks of blackbirds that might contain some Rusties, but the blackbirds weren't around in large numbers. We did see many small flocks of American Robins and also a number of Cedar Waxwings.

We finished the day by going to Scales Point to scan the upper part of the reservoir for migrating ducks. But there was only one Common Loon on the water – no ducks or other waterfowl. All in all, a fairly quiet day but enjoyable to be out birding in such mild weather for the beginning of November.

Participants: Drew Dillman, Ken Hunt, Diana Pesek (leader).

Birds (37 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwing, American Robin, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-

crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

- Diana Pesek

**November 16, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area.** Only five stalwart members showed up for the outing to Pleasant Creek Lake near Palo. Our group produced low numbers but some good birds.

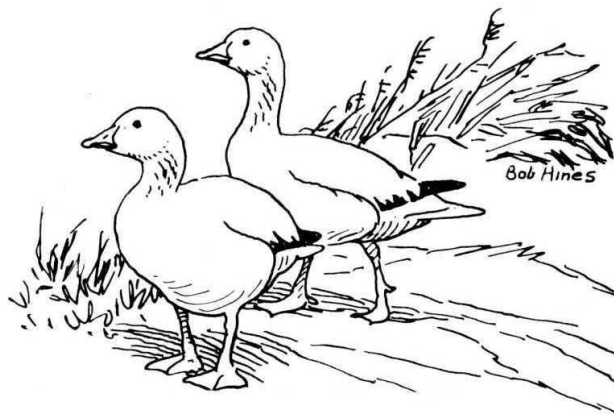
Participants: Tony Franken, Ken Hunt, Ken Lowder (leader), Bill Scheible, Pete Wickham.

Birds (32 species): Canada Goose, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, Northern Bobwhite, Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Bald Eagle, Cooper’s Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Long-eared Owl, Blue Jay, American Crow, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Dark-eyed Junco, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, House Sparrow.

- Ken Lowder

### Renewal Reminder

It’s time to send in your membership dues for 2009. Our annual membership dues remain \$15 per household or \$10 for students. Your mailing label shows the most recent year you have paid for. 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 St., Iowa City, IA 52246. Thank you!



### IOWA CITY BIRD CLUB MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Please send this form with your annual membership dues to Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City, IA 52246. Annual dues are \$15 per household or \$10 for students. Members receive a 10% discount on bird seed at Bird’s Eye View in Coralville.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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## Iowa City Bird Club

*Eastern Iowa Birdwatch* is published three times per year, in April, September, and December. Members are encouraged to send submissions to the editor, Chris Edwards, 4490 Daniels Cir. NE, Solon, IA 52333, or [credwards@aol.com](mailto:credwards@aol.com). You may also contact Chris at (319) 430-4732.

**Annual membership dues** are \$15 per household or \$10 for students, payable by January 1st for the coming year. Check your mailing label for the year you have paid through. Make checks payable to Eastern Iowa Birdwatch and mail to our treasurer, Bernie Knight, 425 Lee St., Iowa City, IA 52246.

**For general bird club information, or to lead or suggest a field trip**, contact our president and field trip coordinator, Karen Disbrow at (319) 339-1017 or [k\\_disbrow@yahoo.com](mailto:k_disbrow@yahoo.com).

**Our club web site** is maintained by Jim Scheib and is located at [www.icbirds.org](http://www.icbirds.org). You may contact Jim at (319) 337-5206 or [jim@tenlongview.net](mailto:jim@tenlongview.net).

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