
Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

April 2024 • Volume 44 Number 1

Schedule

Field Trips are free and open to the public. Trips may be changed or cancelled due to inclement weather or other circumstances. Please check our website calendar for updates: <https://iowacitybirdclub.org/events/>. Updates will also be emailed to club members and posted on our Facebook page. **Meetings** are held on Zoom and/or in-person. A Zoom link will be posted on our website calendar for each meeting. For more information or questions email icbc-help@googlegroups.com.

April 18, Thursday, 7 p.m. Meeting – In-Person/Zoom. Dick Sayles, well-known Iowa birder, will give a presentation about birding down under in Australia.

April 20, Saturday, 8 a.m. – Noon. Waterworks Prairie Park. Visit this Iowa City park with great trails for prairie and wetland species. We'll look for new arrivals like Tree Swallow, Purple Martin, Sora, and Brown Thrasher. Walking will be on hard-surface trails. Meet leader Linda Quinn at the parking lot of Waterworks Prairie Park. Beginning Birder Trip, but all are welcome.

April 21, Sunday, 8 a.m. – Noon. Two Horse Farm, 2257 Sugar Bottom Road NE, Solon. This is a new Johnson County Conservation property that features restored prairie and oak-hickory forest with abundant edge habitat. Johnson County Conservation Naturalist Chelsea Cozad will guide us through the property and talk about its unique history. Target birds are early spring migrants like Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Expect extensive hiking on mowed paths that may be wet. **Pre-registration is required due to limited parking.** Options: register for ICBC carpool with Linda Quinn at quinnhenry@msn.com; or register with JCCB at:

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Johnson/Park/JOHNSON-COUNTY-EDUCATION-PROGRAMS/Events/24314/Morning-Migration-Hike.aspx>.

April 27, Saturday, 8 a.m. – Noon. Hickory Hill Park. This Iowa City park is an eastern Iowa hotspot for spring migrant warblers and other songbirds. Meet leader Mark Madsen at the Hickory Hill Park parking lot at 800 Conklin Lane. Expect extensive hiking on trails that could be wet or muddy. Bring bug spray. Beginner Birder Trip, but all are welcome.

April 29 – May 24, Weekdays, 6:30-8:00 a.m. Hickory Hill Park Warbler Walks. Start your weekdays in the park watching warblers and other spring migrants with our rotating crew of expert leaders. Meet in the park at the north parking lot at 800 Conklin Lane, off N. Dodge Street.

May 11, Saturday. Johnson County Spring Migration Count. We will bird in small groups to count as many birds as possible throughout Johnson County. Species and individual birds are tallied – last year 160 species were recorded. Gather for a noon sack lunch at the North Liberty Community Center. Afternoon birding is encouraged, but optional. To participate in a group, email leader Chris Caster in advance of count day at cjcaster@q.com. For species data, forms, photos, and more information visit <https://iowacitybirdclub.org/spring-count/>.

Schedule (continued)

May 16, Thursday, 7 p.m. Meeting – In-Person/Zoom. Karen Disbrow, Iowa City Bird Club Events Coordinator, will give a presentation about Sandhill Cranes, including a discussion of subspecies, their life cycle, and their amazing migration through Nebraska.

May 18, Saturday, 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. Draco Hill in Cedar County. Visit this private nature farm for a bird walk and tour. Draco Hill includes pasture, orchards, food gardens, woodlands, and a prairie remnant on the Cedar River. Meet owner Suzan Erem, who will guide us along the trails. ICBC leader Karen Disbrow will help us identify migrating songbirds like warblers, thrushes, and vireos as well as resident birds. To carpool meet Karen at 8:00 in the parking lot of The Highlander Hotel, 2525 Highlander Place, Iowa City. Or meet at 8:30 at Draco Hill, 1398 Franklin Avenue, West Branch. For map and more, visit <https://dracohill.org/>.

May 18, Saturday. Building Better Birders Workshop. This free all-day workshop from Johnson County Conservation requires pre-registration at the link below. The morning bird walk, bird banding demonstration, and presentations take place at the Kent Park Conservation Education Center, followed by a guided birding hike at Cedar River Crossing at the end of the day. Come for as many or as few sessions as you would like. <https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Johnson/Park/JOHNSON-COUNTY-EDUCATION-PROGRAMS/Events/24065/Building-Better-Birders-Workshop.aspx>.

May 25, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Big Sand Mound Nature Preserve in Louisa County. This preserve is rarely open to the public, but we have special permission to visit and survey wildlife species. Targets include breeding birds like Blue Grosbeak, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Northern Mockingbird, and reptiles like Box Turtles, Racers, Hognose Snakes, and Racerunner Lizards. With 510 acres owned by two companies, the preserve includes open prairies, sand barrens, shallow ponds, and woodlands. Expect some strenuous walking over the sandy and/or forested, gently rolling terrain. Our tour guides are Mark Brown from ICBC and Adam Rudisill from Bayer Company. To carpool, meet Mark at 6:30 in the parking lot of The Highlander Hotel, 2525 Highlander Place, Iowa City. Or meet on-site at 7:30 in the preserve parking lot at the Bayer Rec Building. From this pin [41.34828995156906, -91.10013814445354](https://www.google.com/maps/@41.34828995156906,-91.10013814445354) follow the road east then south then east to the Rec Building and parking lot. Preserve info: <https://www.midamericanenergy.com/articles/big-sand-mound>.

June 9, Sunday, 7:30 a.m. – Noon. Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area for breeding birds at Gadwall and Mallard Ponds. Join leader Linda Rudolph on a hike to look for Lark and Henslow's Sparrows, cuckoos, Blue Grosbeak, Yellow-breasted Chat, orioles, and Sandhill Crane. Meet at the HWMA parking lot on Swan Lake Road, across from Swan Lake (GPS coordinates 41.776081, 91.675009). Expect a 1.5-mile hike on trails that may have wet grass and insects. Bring a hat and water.

June 30, Sunday, 4 p.m. Iowa City Bird Club Potluck Picnic at Lake Macbride. Located at Sailboat Shelter #1 at the north end of Sail Boat Road NE, Solon. Restrooms are nearby. Enjoy the company of old and new birding friends with picnic foods and a beautiful park ambience. Bring a dish to share, your own drink, and table service. An optional bird walk will begin about 6:00 p.m.

July 20, Saturday. Iowa City Butterfly Count. As part of the North American Butterfly Association's Fourth of July Butterfly Count program, we'll visit Kent Park, Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Lake Macbride, and other areas to tally as many butterflies as we can. Register with Chris Edwards by July 17 at 319-430-4732 or credwards@aol.com.

Schedule (continued)

July 25, Thursday, 6:30 – 9 p.m. Chimney Swift Big Sit in Kalona Bring your lawn chair and join our gathering to watch the Chimney Swifts descend into a roost site in Kalona. We expect 200-400 swifts and we'll attempt an accurate count. To carpool, meet at 6:30 at the north end of the Menards parking lot, 2605 Naples Avenue SW, Iowa City. From there we'll caravan to the Evan Gingerich farm to see two swift nesting towers built on his property. Next we'll travel two miles into Kalona and set up our chairs near the swifts' roost site. While we wait, Karen Disbrow will give a presentation about these interesting birds. About 30 minutes before sunset (around 8:00), we'll count the swifts as they fly into their roost.

August 18, Sunday, 8 a.m. – Noon. Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area for shorebirds and other early fall migrants. Meet leader Chris Caster at the HWMA parking lot on Swan Lake Road, across from Swan Lake (GPS coordinates 41.776081, 91.675009). We will carpool our way around Hawkeye. Expect moderate hiking at some viewing areas. Dress for the weather and wet and muddy trails. Bring a spotting scope if you have one.

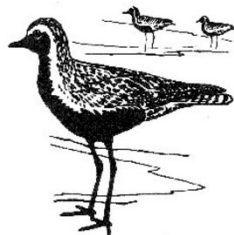
August 25, Sunday, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Pelican Festival at Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area, on the north side near the DNR headquarters at 2564 Amana Road NW, Swisher. A family-friendly event to learn about our local migrant American White Pelicans. Get close-up looks at pelicans and other birds through our spotting scopes. Attend outdoor presentations on pelicans, raptors, and more. There will be exhibits by many conservation organizations and face painting for the kids.

August 31 – September 2, Saturday – Monday. Cy-Hawk Big Day Challenge. It's Hawkeyes vs. Cyclones, Iowa City Bird Club vs. Ames Big Bluestem Audubon Society! The club that finds the most species over the three-day Labor Day Weekend wins this friendly competition. Bird anytime during the weekend and report your daily species list to our coordinator. More details will be provided closer to the event.

Other Dates of Note

April 19, May 17, June 3, Fridays, 8 a.m. – Sunset. Port Louisa Wildlife Refuge in Louisa County. *Flyway Fridays at the Refuge* opens the entire refuge once per month this spring. Visitors will be able to view the habitats and wildlife of the refuge from the comfort of their own vehicle on the 5.5-mile auto tour loop. The entire refuge can also be explored on foot. Normally the refuge is open to the public in limited areas detailed here <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/port-louisa/visit-us>.

May 3 – 5, Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring Meeting in Clinton, Iowa. There will be fields trips Saturday and Sunday mornings. Saturday will also feature afternoon presentations and an evening banquet and keynote speaker. For registration and details visit <https://iowabirds.org/IOU/Meetings/>.



2023 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count

Chris Edwards

The 73rd annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held Sunday, December 17, 2023. The count area is a 15-mile diameter circle centered on Hwy. 965 and Penn Street in North Liberty, encompassing North Liberty, Coralville, Solon, Tiffin, and portions of Iowa City, as well as Lake Macbride and most of the Coralville Reservoir. Temperatures on count day were above average at 35-37° F, with overcast skies and W/NW winds of 10-16 mph. Rivers and streams and still bodies of water were open, and there was no snow cover.

Results

This year we found 74 species, above the ten-year count average of 69 species, and the fourth straight year with 72 or more species. The species count has been trending up in large part due to the number of lingering waterfowl in the area – this year 14 species were seen. The record high for the count is 81 species found in 2012. This year we tallied 113,528 individual birds, smashing the previous record of 32,612 seen just two years ago, thanks to an estimated 100,000 Red-winged Blackbirds.

No rarities were found this year, but a number of unusual species were seen, including Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal (ninth all-time record), American Coot, American White Pelican (seventh all-time record), Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Merlin (tenth all-time record), Hermit Thrush, and meadowlark species. The only expected species missed was Common Merganser.

Species recorded in significantly above-average numbers were Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Ring-billed Gull, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Pine Siskin, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Common Grackle.

Many participants commented that the birding seemed slow this year. The numbers do bear this out for about a dozen species that are usually fairly conspicuous but were found in below-average numbers this year: Canada Goose, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, American Crow, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, and Northern Cardinal.

One remarkable occurrence this year was the immense gathering of Red-winged Blackbirds coming to roost in the miscanthus fields near the University of Iowa Hawkeye Commuter Lot between 4:00-5:00 p.m. We conservatively estimated 100,000 birds, but an accurate count was impossible because they arrived in huge flocks from all directions, landed in the nearby trees, and swirled around for many minutes before disappearing into the tall grass just before dark. Other field parties reported a total of 1,355 Red-winged Blackbirds seen elsewhere throughout the day, but presumably they all made their way to the miscanthus fields at dusk and were included in the 100,000 estimate.

Some interesting trends:

- Ring-necked Pheasants and Wild Turkeys continue to be detected in very low numbers, and no Northern Bobwhites were found.

- Eurasian Collared-Doves have become difficult to find on the count after being more common from 2010-2020.
- American White Pelicans have been found in three of the last four years after being recorded for the first time in 2006.
- Multiple Red-shouldered Hawks were found for the first time since the mid-1960s, when they were more common. They were recorded nearly annually until 1966, with high counts of six birds in 1955 and 1963. Then, possibly due to DDT exposure, they were not seen again until 2012.
- Eastern Screech-Owls have been found three years in a row, and Northern Saw-whet Owls four years in a row, after a multi-year absence for both species. If only we could say the same for Short-eared and Long-eared Owls; both species were recorded nearly annually until the early 1980s, then began a long decline. Short-eared has been found twice and Long-eared only once in the last 17 years.
- Merlins have been found in three of the last four years, and nine of the last seventeen years. Prior to that they were recorded only once in the first 56 years of the count.
- Yellow-rumped Warbler has been missed four straight years, after it was nearly annual during the previous 15 years.

Count Effort

This year there were 43 field participants in 15 parties, including five first-time participants. They spent 75 total party-hours in the field, which is right at the 10-year average. Field participants were Elizabeth Aubrey, Kyle Belcher, Becky Benson, Nick Benson, Tom Bootsmiller, Fawn Bowden, Cass Bowen, Jayden Bowen, Mary Bowler, Brian Broderick, Mark Brown, Chris Caster, Gerry Denning, Sandy Eads, Chris Edwards, Julie Englander, Jim Fuller, Karole Fuller, Rick Hollis, Sarah Lawinger, Jonathan Lewallen, KT Long, Nancy Lynch, Mark Madsen, Salem McClelland, Jamie McCoy, Jason McCurdy, Ramona McGurk, Bob McKay, Jenny Hollis Miller, Julius Miller, Mary Noble, Jason Paulios, Eli Perencevich, Marko Perencevich, Linda Quinn, Deb Rolfes, Mark Rolfes, Linda Rudolph, Maria Story, Jean Wiese, Jim Wiese, and Eliza Willis.

Four parties spent a total of four hours owl watching, slightly above the ten-year average.

There were 14 feeder watchers in 9 locations, which is below the ten-year average of 11 locations. Feeder watchers were Kaci Carolan and Ed Kuhrt, Julie Englander, Janet and Rick Hollis, Ken Lowder, Bill Madden, Kathy Martensen, Bonnie Mattaliano, Jenny Hollis Miller and Julius Miller, Pauline Obmascher, and Jim and Terri Stoner.

This year we met at the Coralville Library for a noon meal and compilation. We did not meet for an evening meal. We collected \$106 in donations for the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count program.

Nationally, this year marked the 124th consecutive Christmas Bird Count. The results of all counts from 1900 to the present are available at www.audubon.org/bird/cbc. A table showing the results of every Iowa City count from 1951 to the present is available at www.iowacitybirdclub.org.

Thanks to everyone who participated!

SPECIES LIST

Cackling Goose 2	Cooper's Hawk 8	White-breasted Nuthatch 101
Canada Goose 1211	Bald Eagle 104	Brown Creeper 6
Wood Duck 2	Red-shouldered Hawk 2	Carolina Wren 3
Northern Shoveler 85	Red-tailed Hawk 46	European Starling 5313
Gadwall 69	Rough-legged Hawk 1	Eastern Bluebird 49
Mallard 926	Eastern Screech-Owl 2	Hermit Thrush 1
Northern Pintail 1	Great Horned Owl 4	American Robin 258
Green-winged Teal 5	Barred Owl 7	House Sparrow 633
Canvasback 2	Northern Saw-whet Owl 1	Eurasian Tree Sparrow 62
Lesser Scaup 16	Belted Kingfisher 3	House Finch 144
Bufflehead 7	Red-headed Woodpecker 20	Purple Finch 8
Common Goldeneye 7	Red-bellied Woodpecker 111	Pine Siskin 63
Hooded Merganser 8	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 4	American Goldfinch 112
Ruddy Duck 8	Downy Woodpecker 115	American Tree Sparrow 101
Wild Turkey 20	Hairy Woodpecker 31	Dark-eyed Junco 389
Ring-necked Pheasant 5	Northern Flicker 69	White-crowned Sparrow 12
Rock Pigeon 68	Pileated Woodpecker 7	White-throated Sparrow 32
Eurasian Collared-Dove 2	American Kestrel 16	Song Sparrow 6
Mourning Dove 79	Merlin 1	Swamp Sparrow 1
American Coot 8	Blue Jay 127	Meadowlark species 1
Ring-billed Gull 612	American Crow 191	Red-winged Blackbird 100000
Herring Gull 2	Black-capped Chickadee 227	Brown-headed Cowbird 75
American White Pelican 1	Tufted Titmouse 71	Common Grackle 1508
Northern Harrier 2	Cedar Waxwing 143	Northern Cardinal 183
Sharp-shinned Hawk 5	Red-breasted Nuthatch 3	

Announcements

Nest Box Monitors Needed: The Songbird Project is seeking some additional monitors for its Purple Martin colonies and Eastern Bluebird trails in Johnson County. The colonies and trails are usually monitored weekly from mid-April to mid-August. Complete training and backup (for illness or vacations) is provided. This is a great way to get outside, get some exercise, and help bird species in need of assistance. For more information contact Jim Walters at jcmwalt@infionline.net or (319) 466-1134.

Iowa City Bird Club Merchandise is available online from Corporate Casuals. You can purchase shirts, hats, bags, and much more with our club's name and logo. Link on our website here <https://iowacitybirdclub.org/merchandise/>.

Spotting Scope Checkout: The club has two spotting scopes available for two-week checkout by members. Birders new to scope use can

practice a new level of birding—scopes are especially helpful for viewing waterfowl and shorebirds. To request a loaner scope, contact us at icbc-help@googlegroups.com.

Renewal Reminder: If you haven't renewed your dues yet for 2024, please do so now! Our annual membership dues per household are \$15 for a print subscription or \$10 for a digital subscription. Your dues help support our publications, events, and volunteer activities. Members receive a 10% discount on birdseed and suet at Dodge St. Ace Hardware and Forever Green Garden Center. Check your mailing label for the year you have paid through, or contact Treasurer Gerry Denning at geraldDenning50@gmail.com for your status. Please complete the membership renewal form on the inside back cover and send it with your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" to Gerry Denning, 1146 Oakes Dr., Iowa City, IA 52245. Or go to our website and use your PayPal account to pay. We thank you for your support!



Introduction to Birding Course March 19 – April 23, 2024 Environmental Education Center 2401 Scott Blvd. SE, Iowa City



The Iowa City Bird Club is offering a 6-week Introduction to Birding Course at the Environmental Education Center. 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 for a print subscription or \$10 for a digital subscription. Participants may attend all sessions or pick one or more to attend. Classes can hold 20, and advanced registration is requested – please call or text (319) 430-0315 by noon of the Tuesday session. Handouts and refreshments will be provided.

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. If you have a spotting scope, you are welcome to bring it. Club members will have several spotting scopes available to share on those field trips requiring one. Trips may be changed or cancelled due to inclement weather or other circumstances. Please check our website calendar for updates: <https://iowacitybirdclub.org/events/>. Updates will also be emailed to club members and posted on our Facebook page.

For more information, contact Karen Disbrow of the Iowa City Bird Club at (319) 430-0315.

Tuesday, March 19, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING I. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment every birder needs, or might someday need.

Saturday, March 23, 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, Sandhill Cranes, and other water birds. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one. Meet at the Fareway parking lot, 2765 Commerce Dr.

Tuesday, March 26, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II, including e-Bird, apps, and birdsong ID.

Saturday, March 30, 8 a.m. Field Trip to KENT PARK. We will explore the trails in this park looking for migrating songbirds and resident woodland birds. Meet at the Kent Park Conservation Education Center.

Tuesday, April 2, 7 p.m. WHERE TO BIRD IN JOHNSON COUNTY. Well-known, lesser-known, and secret places to watch birds and study nature in and around Johnson County.

Saturday, April 6, 8 a.m. Field Trip to LAKE MACBRIDE for water birds and other early spring migrants. We'll stop at various points around the lake. Meet at the Solon Recreation and Nature Area, at the far west end of the parking lot near the restrooms and splash pad.

Tuesday, April 9, 7 p.m. BACKYARD AND FEEDER BIRDS. This session will cover the common birds found in our backyards during the year, and what types of feeders and food to use to attract them.

Saturday, April 13, 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. Meet at the Swan Lake parking lot.

Tuesday, April 16, 7 p.m. BIRDS OF TERRY TRUEBLOOD AND WATERWORKS PARK IN IOWA CITY. Learn the variety of birds that are found throughout the year at these nearby parks.

Saturday, April 20, 8 a.m. Field Trip to WATERWORKS PRAIRIE PARK. Visit this Iowa City Park with great trails for woodland, prairie, and wetland species. Meet at Waterworks Prairie Park.

Tuesday, April 23, 7 p.m. WARBLER IDENTIFICATION & REVIEW. Warblers are among our most colorful birds, but identification can be a challenge. Compare and contrast similar species.

Saturday, April 27, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HICKORY HILL PARK. This park is an eastern Iowa hot spot for viewing migrant warblers and other songbirds. Meet at Hickory Hill Park, at the parking lot at the end of Conklin Lane, off N Dodge St.

New Transmission Line Proposed Through HWMA

An upcoming case before the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) highlights the difficult tradeoffs between upgrades to the nation's electrical system and the protection of wildlife areas and communities. The case involves a proposed high-voltage transmission line near Swan Lake Road, through Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area (HWMA) in northern Johnson County. The line, to be built by ITC Midwest, will carry electricity for Alliant and Linn Rural Electric Cooperative between Hills and Fairfax, Iowa. A map (link below) shows the line running from a substation near James Avenue and 240th Street west to Greencastle Avenue, and then north across the HWMA and Iowa River.

Local landowners opposed to the line cite multiple concerns, including safety, lack of coordination with future development in the area, and disruption to farming, recreation, and wildlife. The US Army Corps of Engineers and Iowa Department of Natural Resources initially opposed the Swan Lake project because it would have constructed a new line across the HWMA, rather than using an existing corridor. In the revised configuration, ITC now proposes to enlarge the capacity of lines within the existing corridor by replacing the existing transmission towers with larger towers. This is a significantly better option for wildlife. Final USACE approval for the line depends upon NEPA review later this year.

Conflicts over the siting of transmission lines will only intensify as the clean energy transition ramps up. This spring, conservation groups are suing ITC Midwest and other transmission companies to prevent power lines through the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge. Two things could help avoid conflict in the future: (1) IUB oversight on the siting of electrical substations to avoid habitat areas, and (2) generating solar energy and storing electricity close to where it is used to reduce the need for large new grid construction. Micro-grids can

provide a redundancy that the power system requires without long-distance transmission.

Public comments on this project closed March 29. Map of proposed ITC Midwest line: <https://www.fairfax-swanlake.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Fairfax-Swan-Lake-Johnson-Overview.pdf>

– Cheryl Miller

Iowa City Bird Club Google Group



The Iowa City Bird Club has a group email on Google Groups at Iowa-city-bird-club@googlegroups.com. Are you on our list? You'll receive reminders about club field trips, events and meetings. It's a perk for all dues-paying members. Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: How do I join ICBC Google Group?

A: When you join ICBC with initial membership dues, your email address will be added to our Google Group. Look for a notification from Iowa-city-bird-club@googlegroups.com. Not in your inbox? Check your junk box. Sometimes it takes another try on our end so please let us know. Contact our Treasurer Gerry Denning at geraldDenning50@gmail.com.

Q: Do I have to create a Google account?

A: No, you can receive and read posts without a Google account. However, if your email is not linked to another Google Group, you will be sent an "invitation" email, to which you must reply "accept". More info about linking to Google Groups is found here (at the bottom of the page): <https://support.google.com/groups/answer/1067205?hl=en>

Q: I've haven't been getting your emails.

A: Our apologies! Google Group has glitches we're trying to work around. Please contact Gerry at the above address.

Q: Is this group like IA-BIRD?

A: No, it is not chat-discussion format like IA-BIRD. Our setting is email notification only, so you cannot reply all.

Q: Can I reply to your email with a question?

A: Yes, on the message click *Reply to Author*. Your reply goes only to the message author, not the entire group.

Q: I've changed my email address. How do I notify you?

A: Give a shout to Gerry at the above address.

– Linda Quinn



A Birder's Life

Heather Shires

Editor's note: Dr. Tom Shires of Iowa City passed away on January 20, 2024. Dr. Shires was an avid birder for most of his life and was a member of the Iowa City Bird Club in its early years. His daughter Heather Shires contributed the following remembrance.

Tom Shires, my father, fell in love with birds at the early age of ten. As a Boy Scout, rather than being excited about learning Morse code or signal flags, he wanted mostly to learn about birds for the “bird badge.”

His love of bird watching only grew over time, as he became a young man and then a father. On videos of us all as small children, Mom can be heard saying, “Tom, take pictures of the kids, not

the birds!” We all had a big laugh at his straying camera work when we watched in later years.

He could awe us by pointing to a speck in the sky and naming the bird. He could make a bird call that had the birds answering back. And he could always answer any possible question we had about birds.

But the best bird story I have about Dad is when he and Mom came to visit my family when we lived in Japan. We had taken them to the Gytoku Wild Bird Observatory, on the outskirts of Tokyo, and Dad was happily watching birds at the large viewing window. When he had a question, he turned to the Japanese man next to him—and, surprisingly, the man spoke in perfect English *and* was extremely knowledgeable about the birds. They started conversing, with Dad getting more and more excited, his voice loud (for Japan) and his hands gesturing. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, a group of men in black came out and surrounded my father and the other man. A lady next to me asked, “Do you know who that is?” No, I didn’t. “That’s the Emperor’s brother,” she responded.

Sure enough, the guy looked very much like the Emperor. The Prince apologized to my dad, saying he had very much enjoyed their conversation, as the men shuttled Dad to the door. All of us followed behind in surprise, but Dad was not fazed—he was just so happy to have met a fellow birder in Japan, never mind that he was a Japanese prince!

On another trip to Japan, my parents and I were walking the trail between Lake Inba Numa, in Chiba, and some rice fields. They had come to visit their one-year-old first grandchild. As usual, Dad kept stopping to look at and sometimes videotape the birds. “Tom, take pictures of Tobi,” Mom said—and he did, for a while.

The word “Tobi” means “to fly” in Japanese. Tobi, his brother Ben, and his cousin Sydney are all grown now, flying out in the world. But they will always remember their wonderful Grandad and, oh, how he loved the birds!

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

January 7, Bird Feeder Watch and Social.

This year our annual Bird Feeder Watch and Social was held at Judith and Drew Dillman's home on Normandy Drive overlooking the Iowa River. What a lovely view from their second-story windows! Bird feeders on their deck afforded close-up looks at a nice array of birds, and the river overlook showed well with birds in the air. Bald Eagles flying by looked especially grand! The opportunity to socialize in person was just as fun as watching the feeders, I must say. And we all enjoyed the coffee and many treats that people shared.

Guests included many longtime club members who welcomed a few first-timers. We ended the morning with a short walk along Drew's "local patch." With temperatures just above freezing, it did not feel too bad until we turned into the wind. Drew pointed out a great variety of tree species, some of which he had planted. Along the walk we added several bird species, and watched a Bald Eagle pair perched near their nest. Drew had promised we'd see bluebirds, and just as the trip was ending, a small flock flew in. Bird magic?! Drew encouraged us to enjoy the same walk in the spring to see migrating warblers, breeding Baltimore Orioles, and trilling frogs.

Participants: Dean Abel, Connie Aldridge, Barbara Beaumont, Phyllis Black, Barry Buschelman, Gerry Denning, Dawn Dillman, Drew and Judith Dillman (hosts), Karen Disbrow, Julie Englander, Jim and Karole Fuller, Therese Guedon, Kurt Hamann, Peter Hansen, Barb Haring, Jonathan Lewallen, Susan Manz, Ramona McGurk, Rashmi Mueller, Constance Peterson, Linda Quinn, Jane Shuttleworth, David Stewart, Elyana Wohl.

Birds (20 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Bald Eagle, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-

breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, House Finch, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal.

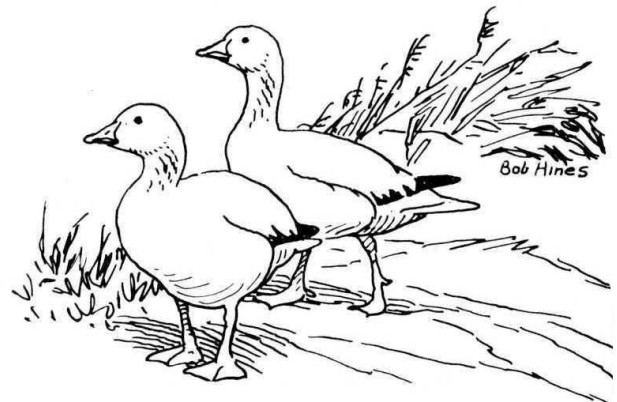
– Linda Quinn

February 15, Meeting. Our February meeting was an all-Zoom meeting. Ben Rowold presented "Monitoring Kent Park Bluebirds: Learning the Hard Way." Ben's presentation was a delightful compilation of anecdotes of the adventures he has had over the many seasons he has been monitoring bluebird boxes in Kent Park. There were some expected problems that interfere with successful fledging of young, as well as some unexpected problems that cropped up over the years. He explains his problem-solving and his improved success over the years since he started. There was lively discussion following Ben's presentation from Cheryl Miller who monitors boxes at Terry Trueblood and from David Curry who monitors boxes at Macbride. You can watch the meeting on our website if you missed this great presentation.

Linda Quinn gave an update on upcoming birding events, and Sandy Eads provided details of the upcoming Introduction to Birding Course. The meeting finished with a discussion of the possible installation of high-powered transmission lines on Swan Lake Road in or near Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area.

Fourteen computers were logged into the meeting.

– Sandy Eads



February 18, Quad Cities & Mississippi River.

We headed over to the Mississippi River in five vehicles with a short pitstop at the Walcott exit. Our first birding stop was to visit Lock and Dam 14 from the Iowa side. Red-winged Blackbirds were already singing along the access road. As you probably remember the winter was quite mild in February. Nearly all the water was ice-free. Fortunately, there was a thin layer of ice in the pond northwest of the dam and a modest gull roost had assembled there. However, it was not long before we realized there were only Ring-billed and Herring Gulls present. A look from the observation deck at the gulls flying below the dam yielded the same.

Over on the Illinois side we began north of the I-80 bridge. Normally there are many diving ducks in the channel, but this year we found none. And heading north along the private river road we only found a few Hooded Mergansers and Ring-necked Ducks napping on the island riverbank.

Lock and Dam 14 was more interesting from the Illinois side. There was some ice, but very few gulls were present and they held nothing new. We did find a Mute Swan nearby though and then spotted another one across the river on the Iowa side. There was a raft of diving ducks above the dam and so we walked out for a closer look. Probably about 400 Lesser Scaup were seen, but in with them were a small number of Canvasbacks, Redheads, and even some Greater Scaup. The light was good and often the greenish sheen on their heads was visible. But the wind was quite cold and so strong that it often made it difficult to steady the scopes. Some of the group headed back to the vehicles for a warm-up, but most of us defied good sense as birders often do. Eventually the group seemed satisfied enough with its observations to return to the vehicles.

We headed south on the Illinois side, making three stops along the Butterworth Parkway in Moline. Diana Pesek made a cameo appearance at our second stop. Apparently, she was at a dog seminar nearby and just 'knew' we'd be along the riverfront. Good to visit with you Diana. There weren't many birds though, but we did find a few

Common Mergansers and Common Goldeneyes before crossing over the new I-74 bridge headed for Hardees in Bettendorf.

After downing a few char-broiled burgers we made a crow-line for Lock and Dam 15. A good number of Herring Gulls were flying about, and Rock Pigeons, but little else. Interestingly, we rarely see Ring-billed at L&D 15. Uninterestingly, the Peregrine Falcon we hoped for did not show. We got bored enough there that we started discussing the plumage differences between 1st- and 2nd-winter Herring Gulls. That's when I realized we should head south to Credit Island. Unfortunately, there weren't a great many birds at Credit Island either. A number of Mallards and even more Bald Eagles were about all the excitement we could find. Fortunately, Jamie got a good photo of the raptor flyover so that the possible Peregrine or Goshawk or Gyrfalcon even, could be identified correctly as a Cooper's Hawk.

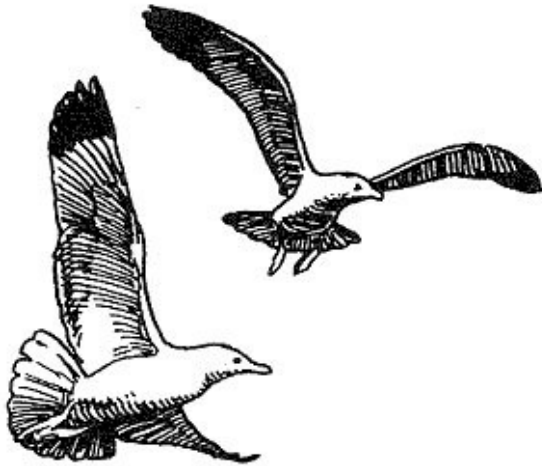
The hemlocks at Fairmount Cemetery were quiet as well. And we waited a while before the chickadees would come out. Things were also real quiet at the feeder station atop the hill. But the reason for that was soon apparent as a diminutive Sharp-shinned Hawk revealed itself. This bird did not fly far and it was soon relocated where it gave excellent looks for as long as we wished. Many photos were taken. Soon the activity returned to the feeders and many Eurasian Tree Sparrows were enjoyed by all.

Participants: Besa Bwalya, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster (leader), Jerry Denning, Jonathan Lewallen, Mark Madsen, Jamie McCoy, Abner Miller, Deb and Mark Rolfes, Jean and Jim Wiese.

Birds (35 species): Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Mallard, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Rock Pigeon, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, American White Pelican, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker,

Downy Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, House Finch, American Goldfinch, White-throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Cardinal.

– *Chris Caster*



March 9, Burlington Area and Mississippi River. The day started out sunny but chilly, with a temperature of 26° F and 15-20 mph winds. We had a total of 23 birders in eight vehicles, with participants coming from Iowa City, Coralville, North Liberty, Kalona, Frytown, Cedar Rapids, Fairfield, Bloomfield, Creston, and Burlington! We met leader Chuck Fuller at 8 a.m. at the Port of Burlington (N40.811953, W91.099181). One Peregrine Falcon was seen there on the Mississippi River bridge support where they nest. From there we went to the marina area just north of the Port, where we saw the first of many Ring-billed Gulls.

From there we travelled to Aspen Grove Cemetery (N40.830604, W91.119382) to look for passerines. The Merlin that previously resided there has not been seen since October 2022. From there we went on to the concrete storm sewer at Dankwardt Park (N40.783720, W91.101910) to look for Winter Wrens. We got lucky and one posed for us for several minutes. We also had a Gray Catbird which apparently overwintered there, as Chuck had it on the

Christmas Bird Count in December and again in January. Several Turkey Vultures were also seen at this spot which is well-known for first-of-year spotting for that species.

Next we drove to Sullivan Slough (N40.727291, W91.119962) where a Pileated Woodpecker burst out and many saw this awesome bird! We also saw the occupied Bald Eagle nest there.

At Spring Lake and Black Hawk Bottoms (N40.715452, W91.138930) we had our first variety of waterfowl, including Gadwall and Green-winged Teal, plus Pied billed Grebe. There was another pair of Bald Eagles at a nest. Green Bay Bottoms Road (N40.716278, W91.215174) and the 355th Avenue marsh (N40.65350, W91.22995) were big disappointments, as the Greater White-fronted Geese seen the previous day had departed, and the wind was really bad.

At the Fort Madison riverfront (N40.629410, W91.305290) the wind forced the gulls to a cove at the far end of the marina, where we saw Ringed-bills and a few Herring Gulls. We stopped for lunch in Fort Madison, and then spotted Eurasian Collared-Doves at the dairy.

Ortho Access on the Mississippi River (N40.604801, W91.383184) had more ducks that we had seen previously. At Heron Bend North (N40.60284, W91.41697) we found American White Pelicans. At Trumpeter Marsh we found one Trumpeter Swan and many duck species. At Heron Bend South (N40.573400, W91.425620) we finally found a Great Blue Heron. At the Montrose riverfront (N40.533845, W91.414397) we saw a flock of 500+ Snow Geese. A highlight was witnessing an adult Bald Eagle attempting to take a Snow Goose four times, failing each time. We left Montrose and headed for home about 3:30 p.m., with the temperature in the 40s and 35 mph winds.

Many Thanks to Sarah Bissell for providing the GPS coordinates and reporting the Gray Catbird to the IA-BIRD listserv.

Participants: Lakshmi Balasubramanian, Sarah Bissell, Phyllis Black, Leonard Bontrager, Jenny Connick, Gerry Denning, Karen Disbrow (co-leader), Trish Ditsworth, Sandy Eads, Chuck Fuller (leader), Felicia Fuller, Evan Gingerich, Maryann Kauffman, Craig Kropf, Jonathan Lewallen, Carole Llennerico, Mark Madsen, Jamie McCoy, Abner Miller, Darrell Ropp, Nancy Thompson, Bhavia Wagner, Jean and Jim Wiese.

Birds (55 species): Snow Goose, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, American Coot, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, Gray Catbird, European Starling, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, House Sparrow, House Finch, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Northern Cardinal.

– Karen Disbrow

March 21, Meeting. Our speaker was Erika Billerbeck, Conservation Officer with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. She shared anecdotes from her book *Wildland Sentinel: Field Notes from an Iowa Conservation Officer*. She greatly expanded our view of what it's like to be an Iowa DNR Conservation Officer!

Following the presentation, Linda Quinn gave an update on the many upcoming birding events. We got an update on power poles proposed in HWMA. A new proposal is to add lines to existing structures. There will be a hearing.

There is the dilemma of needing more capacity and how to add that capacity without hurting the wildlife area.

Gerry Denning gave a brief Treasurer's report. Our current balance is \$3,534.29.

There were 15 people in attendance at the Conservation Education Center and 12 computers with 14 people attending on Zoom.

– Sandy Eads

March 23, Cone Marsh. The morning was sunny but chilly, with a brisk wind. Despite the cold, a group of 16 attendees, including birders from Fairfield and Burlington, came ready to find some birds. By request, we made a quick stop enroute to look for the Great Horned Owls in Lone Tree. Sure enough, one was peering out of the well-known tree cavity. We watched from our cars to avoid spooking the bird, but it didn't stay long before flying out, affording close looks at the enormous size of this beautiful bird.

At Cone Marsh, highlights included several sightings of Sandhill Cranes, including one pair who appeared to be working on nest construction. Two Bald Eagle nests were occupied as well. The most numerous species were Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese, and a group of about 40 Ross's Geese was also present. Pairs of Trumpeter Swans were seen in probable nesting spots. Water levels were low and great for shorebirds, and Wilson's Snipe and Pectoral Sandpipers were seen hugging the shorelines to escape the wind.

Another group of four birders, led by club member Abner Miller, had arrived earlier by horse and buggy from Kalona. They birded separately from our auto caravan, but we did meet briefly partway through the trip to discuss what birds each group had seen. They spent considerable time hiking around the marsh and found some additional species which are included in the trip list below. In total, 55 species were found by our two groups.

Participants: Becky Benson, Sarah Bissell, Leonard Bontrager, Fawn Bowden (leader), Greg and Jenny Conner, Karen Disbrow, Mark and Sandy Eads, Evan Gingerich, Jonathan Lewallen, Marianne Mason, Abner Miller, Justin Miller, Karl Miller, Linda Quinn, Jacob Starr, Maria Story, Nick Timmer, Bhavia Wagner.

Birds (55 species): Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Canada Goose, Trumpeter Swan, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Mourning Dove, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Pectoral Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Purple Martin, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling, American Robin, House Finch, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal.

– *Fawn Bowden*

March 28, Woodcock Walk at Waterworks Prairie Park. This pop-up field trip was announced on the morning of the event. At 7:15 p.m., 21 people gathered at Waterworks Prairie Park in Iowa City to see the annual American Woodcock display. The weather gave us ideal viewing conditions, with a 48-degree temperature, calm wind, and clear skies. We stood on the walking path just west of the parking lot. There was lots of conversation as the sun set and soon everyone quieted down.

At around 7:41 p.m. we heard the first “peent” call. Soon a woodcock shot up just a short distance away and made a quick flight before dropping back down. There were several other

shortish flights, and two woodcocks practically strafed us as they shot right over our heads and landed in the field to the north. Then the real display began with an estimated five American Woodcocks doing the full display. It was quiet enough that we could hear their tinkling flights overhead, “chucking” as they descended and even an occasional kind of chortling call. It was a great experience and a good reminder that spring and nature are all around us if we stop to listen and watch.

In addition to the woodcocks, Linda Quinn kept an eBird list of the other birds that were seen or heard.

Birds (10 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, American Woodcock, Ring-billed Gull, Bald Eagle, Tufted Titmouse, American Robin, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Northern Cardinal.

Participants: Lois Albrecht, Barbara Beaumont, Kaci Carolan, Sarah Coleman, Gerry Denning, Mark and Sandy Eads, Julie Englander, Tracy Johnson, Ed Kuhrt, Andrew Lovan, Marianne Mason, Mark Miller, Rachel Potter, Linda Quinn, Ben Rowold, Linda Rudolph (leader), Nick Timmer, Jim Walters, Jean and Jim Wiese.

– *Linda Rudolph*



March 30, Kent Park. Twenty-three birders hit the trails of F.W. Kent Park on this beautiful, sunny late March morning. Our group included several participants from the Introduction to Birding Course, so the pressure was on to find some good bird species for them. As it turned out, they did just as well finding birds as the more experienced members of the group. Props to them!

The bird list for this outing totaled 35 species, a very respectable number for a relatively short walk this early in the spring. Beginning at the Conservation Education Center, we first visited the bird blind, then walked a loop of about 1.5 miles covering pond/wetland habitat, wooded areas, and some open fields.

We had a nice mix of year-round resident birds, lingering winter visitors, migrants passing through our area, and newly arrived summer breeding birds. The species of the latter group were Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, and Eastern Meadowlark. Other highlights included singing Fox Sparrows, numerous Golden-Crowned Kinglets, a Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker, and a Brown Creeper.

Notable non-avian sightings were a beaver, a muskrat, and a Red Admiral butterfly.

Participants: Dan and Gina Bartleson, Becky Benson, Mary Bowler (co-leader), Brian

Broderick (co-leader), Laura Brouwer, David Connolly, Gerry Denning, Sandy Eads, Lisa and Shellie Krotz, Jonathan Lewallen, Susan Manz, Marianne Mason, Mark Miller, Andrea and David Novak, Martha Nussbaum, Linda Quinn, Aksel Rogers, Jacob Starr, Nick Timmer, Harriet Woodford.

Birds (35 species): Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Ring-necked Pheasant, Mourning Dove, American Coot, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Northern Cardinal.

– Brian Broderick and Mary Bowler

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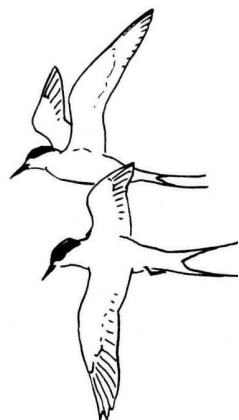
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To lead or suggest a field trip, contact Field Trip Coordinator Linda Quinn at 319-330-3328 or quinnhenry@msn.com.

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