



# Big Bluestem Flyer

Big Bluestem Audubon Society Newsletter

*The mission of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society is to enjoy the observation and study of birds and natural ecosystems, contribute to their preservation and restoration, and engage in educational activities to benefit humanity, and to gain a broader understanding and deeper appreciation of the world we live in.*

Volume 35 Number 2

November/December 1999

## Featured Speakers—November 18 meeting: *Dr. James Pease, "Nature Mapping: Mapping Iowa's Biodiversity"*

This is a new effort to involve a broad cross section of the public in helping to map Iowa's vertebrate animals. Come learn how the program works, how you can become involved, and why it's important to our future. Dr. Jim Pease is on the faculty at ISU's Department of Animal Ecology and works with one of his graduate students, Jason O'Brien, in bringing this program to Iowans.



## BBAS Holiday for the Birds—December 16 meeting

This is the annual Audubon Holiday for people and birds. John Snyder will moderate the evening which begins at 7:00 p.m. The BBAS Bird Holiday will be held at the Story County Conservation Center in McFarland Park. Bring 5-10 slides, a treat to share, and a contribution of money or seed for the Center's feeders. We'll make plans for the Ames, Boone, and Saylorville Christmas Bird Counts which follow in the next two weeks. Check the "Coming Field Trips: . . ." for the exact dates. If you need directions to the Story County Conservation Center, please call John or any of the BBAS board members. See you there!!

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS) meetings are held monthly, September-May (except March) on the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m., Room 2532 Veterinary Medicine Building, Iowa State University. If you need directions, please call any of the BBAS officers or committee chairs. See you there!

*If you would like to meet and dine with the speakers and the BBAS board before the monthly meeting, there is a limited number of reservations available. Please call John Snyder at 232-8824 to confirm space and location.*

### Coming Field Trips: November & December

*Jon Bahrenfus, Field Trip Chair*

#### November

13—Yellow Banks Park and Runnells, Polk County. View migrating song birds and waterfowl along the Des Moines River and at Red Rock Lake. Trip leaders: Mark Widrechner (515-233-1532).

20—Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri or DeSoto Bend NWR, Iowa. This trip will depend on water levels and numbers of geese. Call trip leader Kay Niyo (515-233-8803).

*(Continued on page 9)*

#### In this Issue:

- Page 2
  - View From the . . .
- Page 3
  - Conservation Corner
- Page 4
  - Notes From the Field
- Page 6
  - Bird's Eye View . . .
- Page 7
  - Bird Drop-Ins
- Page 10
  - Notes from the State Office

**Bird Term of the Month: *Frugivorous***—birds that feed primarily on fruit, e.g., Cedar Waxwings.



## View from the Altamont Moraine

*Kay Niyo, President*

I hope you have been able to enjoy some of the Big Bluestem programs and field trips this fall. We invite you to join us and to share your own birding experiences, whether they are about special visitors in your yards, local birding areas, or fabulous birding trips you have taken.

I have been "bitten" by the hawk-watching bug this fall and have traveled to Duluth and Corpus Christi to view many species of migrating raptors and to view with a sense of awe the amazing avian migratory phenomenon. A few BBAS individuals drove to Duluth on September 17-19 to enjoy the annual Hawk Ridge Weekend. It was a wondrous experience watching thousands of raptors pass overhead as we sat in lawn chairs atop the ridge overlooking Lake Superior. It is a beautiful site and even novices can quickly sharpen their ID skills as Sharp-shinned Hawks, Merlins, Cooper's Hawks, American Kestrels, Goshawks, Peregrine Falcons, Ospreys, Eagles, and many other species fly quite low overhead. You soon learn the personalities of the various species, which means that nearly every Merlin takes a swipe at the realistic Great Horned Owl on the pole, as do many of the immature Sharp-shins! Anticipating lots of Broad-winged Hawks migrating through on that weekend, we were relieved when a cold front finally brought the first large kettles Sunday noon. Over 2,000 had been counted when we had to tear ourselves away mid-afternoon for the 6-hour drive home. What a beautiful sight to see hundreds of Broad-wings kettling by using the thermals of rising warm air to circle higher and higher and then begin to stream out in long "highways" of soaring beauties backlit by the puffy white clouds! We had lots of time to visit with Frank Nicoletti who has been the official Hawk Ridge counter for the past nine years. He can ID them with a glance! He also is a great teacher and enjoys sharing tips to help identify the various species. Attesting to our small world, I met a person from Boston the next weekend in Corpus Christi who had been taught how to ID raptors by Frank many years ago on the East Coast! As in many areas of interest or expertise, there is a small network of people who meet hither and yon pursuing their passions!

Judy Shearer (former BBAS member now in Vicksburg, MS) and I met the following weekend in Corpus Christi to spend September 25-29 at the Corpus Christi Hawk Watch in Hazel Bazemore Park. We had communicated by e-mail and were warmly greeted by official counters Joel and Vicki Simon and Patti and Bill Beasley. Last year they had a record 992,950 raptors, 970,025 of those being Broad-winged Hawks! The majority of the Broad-wings pass through the last week of September! Unfortunately, this year the weather complicated

migration patterns, but we were thrilled to see many kettles of up to 24,000 Broad-wings. After helping spot and count all day, we birded other areas until dark and added many species to our life lists. We enjoyed sitting under the canopy and becoming acquainted with many wonderful local birders as well as some from Boston, Maryland, New York City, and San Francisco.

If you have been thinking about a fun trip and a chance to meet some great people, consider a trip to one of the many hawk watch sites (they welcome volunteers and many are staffed until November 30), other migratory sites, or birding festivals in this country and others. I have listed below a few Web sites where you can find more information about some of the many opportunities to explore the amazing world of birds! Take time to bird in Iowa too! We Iowans are seeing more and more public land planted to prairie and it provides beautiful habitat. Get out and enjoy and then share your stories with us!

### Web Sites for Birding Trip Ideas

Hawk Migration Association of North American:  
[www.hmana.org](http://www.hmana.org)

Hawk Ridge, PA: [www.hawkmountain.org/directry.html](http://www.hawkmountain.org/directry.html)

Veracruz, Mexico: [www.hawkmountain.org/veracruz98.html](http://www.hawkmountain.org/veracruz98.html)

HawkWatch International: [www.hawkwatch.org](http://www.hawkwatch.org). Lots of sites in the West need volunteers.

*(Continued page 3)*

### **Big Bluestem Audubon Society Officers and Committees**

#### **Officers:**

- President: Kay Niyo 233-8803 [kniyo@aol.com](mailto:kniyo@aol.com)
- Vice-President: Karl Jungbluth 432-5057 [weatherbird@opencominc.com](mailto:weatherbird@opencominc.com)
- Secretary: Mary Doud 296-2178 [mfdoud@ames.net](mailto:mfdoud@ames.net)
- Treasurer: Donna Flanagan 482-4008 [ddflana@iastate.edu](mailto:ddflana@iastate.edu)

#### **Board Members:**

- Carol Berrier 965-8242
- Mike Freiberg 233-8213 [tragon70@hotmail.com](mailto:tragon70@hotmail.com)
- Kevin Healy 233-5914 [khealy@ames.net](mailto:khealy@ames.net)
- Stuart Huntington 296-0248 [xjhuntin@exnet.iastate.edu](mailto:xjhuntin@exnet.iastate.edu)
- John Pohlman 232-6816

#### **Committee Chairs:**

- Archivist: Hank Zalatel 382-5427 [madowl@nevia.net](mailto:madowl@nevia.net)
- Bird-a-thon Co-chairs: Karl and Carmen Jungbluth
- Conservation Chair: Linda Bystrak 597-3926 [pcpartner.net](mailto:pcpartner.net)
- Education Co-Chairs: Carol and Galin Berrier
- Field Trip Chair: Jon Bahrenfus 432-3396
- Membership Chair: Mark Widriechner 233-1532 [mpwskd@aol.com](mailto:mpwskd@aol.com)
- Program Chair: John Snyder 232-8824 [JESnyder@ix.netcom.com](mailto:JESnyder@ix.netcom.com)
- Publicity Chair: Mary Doud 296-2178
- Publications & Electronic Media Chair: Rebecca Shivvers 292-0691 [shivvers@amewslab.gov](mailto:shivvers@amewslab.gov)
- Special Publications Chair: Joyce Bahrenfus 432-3396
- Service & Special Projects Co-Chairs: Karl and Carmen Jungbluth

#### **BBAS Web Site:**

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~shivvers/bluestem.html>

#### **National Audubon Society Web Site:**

<http://www.audubon.org>

#### **Iowa Audubon State Director:**

Paul Zeph [pzeph@audubon.org](mailto:pzeph@audubon.org)

**Iowa Bird Sightings Hotline—1-319-338-9881**

Continued from page 2—The View from the . . .

Duluth, MN Hawk Watch: [www.biosci.umn.edu/~mou/ridge.html](http://www.biosci.umn.edu/~mou/ridge.html)

Corpus Christi Hawk Watch: [www.electrotex.com/aoc/](http://www.electrotex.com/aoc/)

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Smith Point, TX:  
[www.nol.net/~criley](http://www.nol.net/~criley)

Hawk watch results: <http://birdsourc.tc.cornell.edu/HawkWatchResults/>

Rio Grande Valley 6th Annual Birding Festival, Harlingen, TX, Nov. 10-14, 1999: [tbortness@harlingen.com](mailto:tbortness@harlingen.com), 1-800-531-7346

American Birding Association Regional Conference, Corpus Christi, TX, January 27-31, 2000:  
[www.americanbirding.org](http://www.americanbirding.org)

Cape May Autumn Weekend '99, November 5-7, 1999, Cape May, NJ: [www.njaudubon.org](http://www.njaudubon.org)

Festival of the Cranes, Bosque del Apache NWR, NM: November 21-23, 1999: [www.nmt.edu/mainpage/festival/](http://www.nmt.edu/mainpage/festival/)



## Conservation Corner

Linda Bystrak,  
Conservation Chair

### Iowa to Receive Over \$13 Million for Wetlands

Thanks to the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, approximately \$22.8 million in federal grants will be available this fall. Thirty separate wetland habitat projects in North America and Mexico will be the beneficiaries of this money. Thirteen million dollars of the money will be used in the U.S. and will be matched by \$58 million contributed by hundreds of partner organizations and individuals.

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission is using this Act to fund fifteen wetland conservation projects in the U.S. More than 186,000 acres of wetlands will be acquired, restored, or enhanced.

Iowa is recipient of \$600,000 of the NAWCA grants. Partner organizations will add another \$12.6 million in matching funds. The money will provide habitat to waterfowl nesting and migrating in the Mississippi Flyway. Approximately 7,600 acres of new land will be purchased in Iowa. According to the FWS news release, the project will "restore prairie pothole basins and associated uplands in north central Iowa."

### Review of Factory Farm Permits by EPA

EPA was accepting public and agency comments on factory farm management guidelines until October 25, 1999. Their final draft of recommendations will be given to state governments to use to enforce the Clean Water Act. National Audubon sent recommendations for its members to use, and those suggestions were passed on to the BBS membership in the form of a letter at the October 21 meeting. They included:

- EPA must stick to its pledge to require permits for ALL factory farms.
- Existing manure storage facilities, for both dry and liquid manure, must be covered and lined in order to protect ground water and surface water resources and to reduce air emissions. The use of lagoons for manure storage should be phased out.
- Land application rates for manure from concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) must be based on what the crops on that site can actually use. The rates must be calculated using a system that ensures consistency across the country. Aerial spraying of waste should be banned.
- Factory farms must not be sited in or near environmentally vulnerable areas such as floodplains, impaired waters, etc.
- Water quality monitoring at permitted facilities must be required to ensure that our rivers, lakes, and coastal waters are protected.

Let us hope that enough U.S. citizens sent these recommendations to EPA so they will receive serious consideration and implementation. Thanks to all those BBAS Audubon members who took home those letters on October 21 and mailed them!

### Donate \$\$\$ to Your Big Bluestem Audubon Society through Purchases at Wild Birds Unlimited of Ames

Wild Birds Unlimited of Ames will donate 10% of your purchase of specified birdseed, birding, and nature related products to Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS). Different products will be specified in each issue of this newsletter. Present the coupon below at the time of your purchase and a donation will be given to BBAS. Donations will fund the various habitat restoration and educational projects undertaken by BBAS.

Wild Birds Unlimited®



213 DUFF AVE.  
AMES, IA 50010  
(515) 956-3145

Your Backyard Birdfeeding Specialist®

Donate 10% of your purchase of  
**SEED & SUET PRODUCTS**  
To Big Bluestem Audubon Society

Coupon must be presented at time of purchase  
May not be combined with any other offer  
Not valid on specially priced merchandise

Monday - Friday 9:30am - 5:30pm  
Saturday 9am - 5pm  
Sunday Noon - 4pm

Offer Expires: 12/31/99

We Bring People and Nature Together®

BIRDSEED • FEEDERS • HOUSES • BIRDBATHS  
HARDWARE • BINOCs • BOOKS • NATURE GIFTS



## Notes From the Field

Jon Bahrenfus, Field Trip Chair

### Errington Marsh, Polk County

On September 4, 16 people attended the field trip led by Hank Zaletel to Errington Marsh and Saylorville Reservoir. The weather was pleasant with sunny skies and temperatures in the 60s and 70s. Fifty-eight species of birds were seen.

High water at Errington Marsh near Ankeny prevented us from seeing many shorebirds. A Wilson's Phalarope was the best sighting. All of the swallow species were seen here.

Usually we stop at the Polk City Wildlife Area to look for shorebirds, but this year's high water precluded a visit.

Next stop was Sandpiper Beach at Saylorville where close views were seen of the uncommon Buff-breasted and Baird's Sandpipers.

At Jester Park Campground #4, thousands of White Pelicans were seen at quite close range on Saylorville Reservoir. Many shorebirds were present but they were at a considerable distance and difficult to identify.

Some of the birds seen include Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Harrier, Gray Partridge, Semipalmated Plover, Caspian Tern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Purple Martin, and Bobolink.

### Grammar Grove Wildlife Area, Marshall County

On September 25, Carol Berrier and 12 smart birders lolled in lawn chairs, exclaiming over the beautiful day, the migrating monarchs, and, of course, the avian sightings. The early birds (9 a.m. is early?), spotted 5 species of warblers, 2 of kinglets, 3 of vireos, and 2 of nuthatches. In fact, 34 species were observed that day. Beth and Mark Proescholdt whetted our appetites for hawks by giving us helpful identification "Over the river—an Osprey—beautiful!" "Low over the trees—a Sharpie!" "Through the gap—a Cooper's." Then the Broad-wings trickled through with 3 or more in view at a time. Those of us with lunches and time on our hands were rewarded with 72 Broad-winged Hawks, 27 Sharp-shinned, 15 Cooper's, 7 Red-tailed, and 2 Osprey. Thanks, Beth and Mark, for sharing your birding skills, sharp eyes, and gracious companionship!

### Doolittle Prairie, Story County

On October 2, Saturday morning dawned bright and sort of cold. Too cold for the faint hearted, lily-livered stalwarts (hah!) of Big Bluestem. A total of three members, led by Kevin Healy, set out for Doolittle Prairie. One turned back after thirty minutes: too cold! We saw Song, Swamp, Harris, and Lincoln sparrows before adjourning to McFarland Park for a bit of hawk watching. There we had good looks at a low-flying Cooper's Hawk and a soaring Red-tailed Hawk.

Fortunately, the weather has warmed again. I hope Big Bluestem will be better able to face the rigors of winter after a more gradual introduction to challenging weather. Otherwise, our club may be reduced to introduction by watching the Animal Channel and Stokes' videos until spring migration.

## OUT AND ABOUT IN GREENE COUNTY—SNAKE CREEK MARSH

Paul Bystrak

Snake Creek Marsh is a 400-acre public hunting area located for 1.5 miles along the east side of County Road P46 in eastern Greene County. It is famous as one of the best places to find the elusive Yellow Rail in fall migration, but is also a good place for sparrows in migration. There is a small pond near the north end of the property and some windbreaks of shrubs and trees in some other places, but most of the property is open, consisting of either marsh or grasslands. A gravel road, 260<sup>th</sup> Street, forms the northern boundary. The highest point of the site is a public parking area at the east edge of the property on 260<sup>th</sup>. From there you can scope the pond, located about one-quarter mile south of the lot or hike into the plantings of Big and Little Bluestem, Indiangrass and Switchgrass surrounding it. There are several parking lots along P46 also, which will give you access to some of the windbreaks and the restored grasslands along the west side of the marsh. These are good for brush-loving birds. 270<sup>th</sup> Street crosses the property and forms a dike on the north side of the street. In addition to the chance at Yellow Rail, this dike is a good spot to find Soras and Virginia Rails. There is a parking area at the eastern edge of the property on 270<sup>th</sup>, also. Park there and hike north along the fence line for some good sparrow viewing. Recent trips have yielded LeConte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Vesper Sparrows, and Harris' Sparrow, as well as the more common species. In addition, both Marsh Wrens and Sedge Wrens were found. A blaze orange vest, common sense, and caution are recommended when entering the area during hunting season, as it is regularly hunted.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Boone go west on Rt 30 about 16 miles. Turn south on CR P46, a paved road. The property starts about 4 miles south of Rt 30, and runs along the east side of P46 for 1.5 miles.

## Book Review

Kay Niyo

Kenn Kaufman. *Kingbird Highway*. 1997. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York. 318 pp. Hardcover. Available at the Iowa State University Library.

Kenn Kaufman, currently editor of *Field Notes for the American Bird Association*, authored this fascinating story of his early years in the 1970s spent hitchhiking and birding North America. He attained over 600 birds for the year in 1973 at a cost of less than \$1,000 for all his living and travel expenses! It is an amazing story of a growing network of dedicated and brilliant young birders during that period. He offers insight into the thrill of the quest for new bird species and various individuals' motivations to devote energy and time to that end. He provides information on key areas by state and region for observing unusual bird species. For those old enough to recall the 1970s, it is a poignant reminder that life certainly was simpler and safer then and allowed a teenager to thumb his way around the United States with few risks compared to the 1990s.

## Donate Dollars to Your Big Bluestem Audubon Society by Buying Bird Products at Brekke's Town & Country Store

Brekke's Town & Country Store generously offers Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS) a donation when bird seed and other bird products are purchased. Present this coupon with your purchase and a donation will be given to BBAS. Donations will fund habitat restoration; wilderness education; and *Audubon Adventures*, a bi-monthly elementary classroom teaching program used in central Iowa schools.

### Brekke's Town & Country Store, Inc.

1 1/2 miles east of I-35 on new U.S. 30 and 1/4 mile north

Hours: 8-6 M-F, 8-4 Sat. (515) 232-7906

Purchase	Donation
up to \$15	\$1.50
\$15 and over	\$3.00
\$35 and over	\$5.00
over \$70	\$7.50

Offer good until December 31, 1999

## Kevin Healy's Notes from Birdathon—May 8, 1999

I'm like a second grader on Christmas morning. I planned to pick up Wolf, my partner at 0400, but I get up early. Coffee is especially good right now, while I gather my gear and load the car. I fill the gas tank at Northern Lights about 0440 and pull into Wolf's driveway at 0500. He is waiting for me. We put his spotting scope in the car and take off.

We spend ninety minutes driving around Ames, playing an Eastern Screech Owl tape and listening for answers. I am struck by what a noisy world we live in. An electric motor at Ames High kicks on every few seconds. The Union Pacific runs trains past Brookside Park at all hours. The whine of traffic from I-35 is a constant phenomenon at McFarland Park. We get a Great Horned Owl to answer near Peterson Pit about 0530, consider ourselves lucky and head for Doolittle Prairie.

Parked in front of Doolittle Prairie I put on my new 5-buckle overshoes, bought Thursday night at CT Town and Country store (used to be Big Bear). I haven't had a pair of 5-buckles since I was eight and they are great. You feel like you can go anywhere. I soon discover that you can go almost anywhere and consequently my feet get a little wet. This is my first time at Doolittle at dawn. It is beautiful. Over twenty minutes later, the light comes up and the noise level rises dramatically, but here it is all birds. We hear yellowlegs first but the most distinctive

song is that of the Sora, a small rail about the size of a robin. Their chuckling song is heard everywhere. Our prettiest bird is a Yellow Warbler, heard before we see it singing in a hedge on the north end of the property. Despite searching, we don't see the pair of Loggerhead Shrikes I have found the last two times I visited.

At 0730 we head back to my house. Driving down the gravel roads we slow for every bird sitting on a wire or fence post. This will not do. I tell Wolf that, while we're traveling from site-to-site, the important birds will fly out where they can be seen. Thirty seconds later a Red-headed Woodpecker lands at the top of a telephone pole as we fly by. Omniscience is a burden, but I bear it gratefully. Pulling into my driveway, we see a male Indigo Bunting and a pair of American Goldfinches.

Tramping around the neighborhood yields several sparrows, including White-crowned and Clay-colored, both new for Tullamore Glen. We also see the Grasshopper Sparrows and hear them singing. Maybe they will nest out back again this year, something of a rarity in Story County. Rosanne joins us and we are on our way out to the car when we hear a new song, unusual yet vaguely familiar. We find a warbler in our front yard and, after checking our field guides and watching for about ten minutes conclude that it is a singing male Prairie Warbler. This is a pretty good deal, since they are accidental in Iowa.

We pile in the car and head for Ames to pick up Wolf's daughter, Anna Marie. She's in first grade and is doing the Birdathon as a class project. We notice a Cooper's Hawk flying over Grand Avenue as we cross the city limits. Another good bird which we later see from Wolf's back yard. Driving to Colo Ponds is uneventful. Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant; repeats for us but new for Anna Marie.

Colo Ponds is non-contiguous parcels of wetlands bought by Ducks Unlimited and centered on the Lincoln Highway east of Colo. Our first stop gets us a Sedge Wren, heard from the road, and a pair of Snow Geese which Wolf and I had seen earlier. One of them walks with a limp and we think they are a mated pair, one of which cannot travel. They might survive the summer if the water holds up and they can find food without conflicting with the Canada Geese nesting nearby.

A White-faced Ibis had been seen for several days before at Colo Ponds but we don't find it. We find a Common Snipe from the road, walking through the weeds. This is a nice bird and reassuring that we are in fact paying attention, not just missing the Ibis. As we rolled down one of the gravel roads, a brown bird with white on its tail flies across from right to left. It lands on the fence row, behind us. Meanwhile I call out, brake, stop and back up, keeping the bird in view as it flies along the fence row and into a stubble field. Rosanne, sitting behind me, has the bird, too. It is a pale brown sparrow with a distinct white eye-ring, white outer tail feathers and a rufous patch on the shoulder: A Vesper Sparrow.

We head for Kettelson Marsh, DNR land just across I-35 from the National Animal Disease Lab. We find a Wilson's Phalarope on a pond about 150 yards from the road and Rosanne flushes an American Bittern near the pond on the southwest corner of the property. This is a good find because the American Bittern is so well camouflaged that you can't find them in a patch of weeds. Jim Dinsmore, ornithologist from ISU, comes over to tell us of some sightings at Hallett's Quarry and West Peterson Pit. We give him the Phalarope and head out.

The Snowy Egret looks dejected, scrunched up next to a float on the west shore of the swimming pond at Peterson Pit. This poor bird is way out of bounds and may not have much of a future. The Pacific

(Continued on page 7)



## Bird's-Eye View— Nature Observations From the Bluebird Bed & Breakfast

*Carmen and Karl Jungbluth*

*September 1, 1999*—The orioles of summer are still here, but the thinning leaves of the forest understory hint that summer is on the wane. Fall plumage warblers have also been moving through the yard—six species in all this week. Today, I spotted a pair of Black-throated Green Warblers in the elms. And, the Chestnut-sided Warblers were happy to show off their pale white and lime green fall wardrobe.

At dinner, four Ruby-throated Hummingbirds put on an acrobatic show. The dominant male is fiercely guarding "his" feeder. If another hummer comes close, he chases it off with a burst of speed, buzzing, and chatter. Still, we had plenty of time to observe all of the hummingbirds as they perched and visited the flowers nearby. From this, we could tell that we had at least 4 individuals, including the male. One female or immature has an unmarked whitish throat, the other has a bib of dotted verticle lines. The fourth, a rather unkempt looking young male, showed a jewel of only two or three ruby-red feathers at the base of his throat!

*October 1, 1999*— This gray day dawned with a chilly northeast wind and the sounds of a Great-horned Owl. I saw it lift off from an electric pole as I headed for work. Later in the day, the wind was whipping through the colorful leaves and drying grasses, which made it tough to spot late warblers and sparrows. Still, a few Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen along with a couple of our fall favorites, the Yellow-shafted Flickers. A handful of Dark-eyed Juncos signaled the season as they feasted on a bumper crop of crabgrass seeds in the lawn.

## Breaking News—Birdathon

This just in from the Birdathon Coordinator at National Audubon Society's headquarters in New York. Our 1999 Big Bluestem Birdathon will soon be recognized as one of the "Most Improved" in the Nation! And, our promotion in local newspapers has won us Honorable Mention for the second straight year. Add to that, one of the Highest Chapter Species Counts in the central United States and you can see why we had so much fun! Let's make Birdathon 2000 even better. Make plans to join us on May 6, 2000.

And, thanks again to our 1999 Birdathon participants and sponsors.

Contact Karl and Carmen Jungbluth, Birdathon Coordinators at [weatherbird@opencominc.com](mailto:weatherbird@opencominc.com) or (515-432-5057) for more information.

## Cyber Birding—Surf'n the Net with Paul and Kevin

*By Paul Bystrak and Kevin Healy*



Website name: Hawk Migration Association of North America Homepage

URL (the code you enter to direct your browser): <http://www.hmana.org>

This is the internet home of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), a network of people who enjoy the systematic counting of migrating hawks for the fun of it and for the contribution it may make to their conservation. This page is the starting point and contains no bird information of its own. It contains a number of links to other pages which give information about HMANA. I find the following most useful.

**LISTSERV:** A link which takes you to archived reports from North American hawk watches, organized by location and date. You can also subscribe to BIRDHAWK and get up-to-the-minute reports. "Best of BIRDHAWK" isn't very good: a thread (netspeak for a tedious email conversation carried to or beyond the limits of human endurance) regarding the legitimacy of counting Turkey Vultures at a hawk watch.

**WATCHES:** A very useful page containing links to pages describing watches in North America. Organized by state or province.

**FORMS:** HMANA has a nifty form to use when tabulating your observations. You can download the form, print it, and make copies for yourself and your friends.

## Board Happenings

*Mary Doud, Secretary*

On October 6, Board members met at Kay Niyo's house. The following are excerpts from the minutes.

There is a need for a standard poster/display board to promote our activities at different events. CAST may donate an oak display unit to BBAS. This year BBAS will be funding schools instead of individual teachers. Nancy Kurlee has sent correspondence to teachers, asking them to share materials, acknowledge BBAS' part in providing the materials, and give us feedback. We currently have 14 schools funded.

The \$700 donated to the Y-camp from the Birdathon funds was used to purchase binoculars. Memorial funds for Phyllis Carr were designated for BBAS. Phyllis was a past active member. We have received approximately \$100 from the funds.

A request has been sent to the city for approval of a sign for Mortenson Mounds.

*If you would like to help on any committee, contact the chairperson, or if you have any concerns, issues, or information you would like brought before the board, please give it to any board member at least one week before the next meeting so it will get on the agenda. Thanks.*

Continued from page 5—Kevin Healy's notes from Birdathon . . . and Common Loons on Hallett's Quarry seem better off. The Pacific Loon is diving, foraging and the Common Loon is resting on the surface. I get one chance to see them through the same 40x view, a nice opportunity to contrast markings and bill size.

We stop at our house to let Rosanne off. I go inside and while talking to a man about a dog, the phone rings. It is Hank Zalatel, coordinator for the Story County spring bird count. He tells me about the loons and the Snowy Egret. I fill him in on the Prairie Warbler and, at his behest, get on line to file this information on the IA.BIRD list server. When I finally get back outside, Rosanne and Wolf have found a first-year male Scarlet Tanager in the backyard.

Wolf and I scout around McFarland Park, but don't see much: a Solitary Vireo and a Green Heron. We don't see the Belted Kingfisher which often hunts around the pond north of the building. There are Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Eastern Towhees at the feeders east of the building. We also see a pair of Downy Woodpeckers copulating: a little adult entertainment on a Saturday afternoon.

We see a Turkey Vulture while driving over to the Ledges. The rain and mist are gone and it looks like the clouds may lift. The Barred Owl is not visible in the nest box on the Lost Lake Trail. We hear what we both agree sounds like a Blue-winged Warbler but, despite looking for ten minutes, can't see it. Neither of us hears them often enough to be happy writing that one down. Wolf spies a Magnolia Warbler but, try as I might, I can't find the bugger so that's another one I miss. Standing on a flat rock overlooking the Des Moines River, a Forster's Tern flies by. I watch it through binoculars, conscious of the drop-off 18" in front of me. The sun has come out and buteos are soaring. Through binoculars, I see what is probably a Peregrine Falcon about a half mile away: steel gray above, uniformly pale below, wings more pointed than a Red-tailed Hawk, long tail with a broad base. I have all the field marks but haven't actually seen that many peregrines so I don't write it down.

We drive the very recently opened canyon drive and out to the lower park. The water across the road is very high and I get my brakes wet. I'm driving a 1991 Toyota Camry which is very good for birding: power windows and sunroof for max visibility, short turning radius for quick second looks, front-wheel drive to pull you through deep water, no airbags (so a minor bump won't ruin your whole day) and at 118,000 miles, it's amortized. I see three Double-crested Cormorants flying down the river as we head north out of the park. Wolf doesn't get them so I back up, crossing the bridge, but the birds disappear around the bend before he sees them. I should mention the Camry's major failing (common to all front-wheel drive cars): a regrettable tendency to oversteer in reverse, especially if you exceed about twenty miles per hour.

We stand at ninety species. A quick detour to Karl Jungbluth's house gets us a Tufted Titmouse. Then on to Harrier Marsh, south of Ogden. This is a complex of wetlands similar to Colo Ponds. By now the sun is out and weather very pleasant. Wolf sees a Common Moorhen from the car, but I don't see the bird. We scope out several shore birds and ducks, but the Black-necked Stilts and Hudsonian Godwit seen earlier in the week are not found. Karl Jungbluth and Paul Giudetti come over. Karl was here at dawn and had seventy species by 0800 (we stood at forty-one). I decide I would rather have new birds through the day rather than an initial rush followed by doldrums. Wolf and I head back to Ames about 1930.

## Bird Drop-Ins

**September 13**—Paul Bystrak and Kay Niyo stopped at Runnells on the way to and from the IOU meeting Friday and Sunday. Highlights include more than 5,000 White Pelicans, 317 Great Blue Herons, 195 Great Egrets, about 30 Caspian Terns, 4 Red-necked Phalaropes, Lesser Yellowlegs, Sanderling, Semipalmated, Least, Baird's Pectoral, and at least 24 Stilt Sandpipers. Below Swan, 2 Peregrines tried for a shorebird meal, but missed.

**September 20**—Karl and Carmen Jungbluth had a Nighthawk resting on an elm branch in their yard for an hour early this evening. This potentially frosty weather might get it/keep it moving south! One hummingbird was seen this morning, but we did not see it later today. All day today, soaring pelicans were visible from the weather office near Saylorville Reservoir. Pretty impressive.

**September 25**—Maridel Jackson reported the Brown Pelican was still holding his position off the campground #4 at Jester County Park. There were several Godwits and the Red Necked Phalarope was still there, as were hundreds of Franklin's Gulls, 100+ Great Blue Herons, a few Great Egrets. Turkey Vultures were looking for breakfast (but weren't doing too well). Maridel reported that she was still seeing her hummingbird and two Red-breasted Nuthatches feeding on a regular basis.

**September 26**—Will Fields went to Harrier Marsh shortly before it started to rain and get dark. He reported a few hundred Redwinged Blackbirds in the cattails, a few common Grackles and European Starlings mixed in with them. He also saw Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe and one Sora on the pond south side of the road, west of the parking area. Other birds include a Common Yellowthroat, Dowitchers, Stilt Sandpipers, and *Calidris* Sandpipers.

**October 3**—Mike Overton reported these sightings from the Snake Creek Marsh in Greene County. Notable species observed were Merlin, Sora, Virginia Rail, LeConte's Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, and a Lark Sparrow.



## Sharp-tailed Grouse Return to Iowa

We extend a sincere thank you to Roger Hill, professional photographer from Roland, Iowa, who donated to BBAS a beautiful photograph of the first native Sharp-tailed Grouse documented on a lek in Iowa since the 1800s. It is one of two photographs produced in May 1999 and signed by Roger.

Ed Weiner, DNR Biologist at Onawa, Iowa, said they released Sharp-tailed Grouse in the Loess Hills in 1995 and 1996. Until this spring, when they discovered a nest and a lek, they did not know if the release had been successful. Eight unbanded grouse were observed and photographed by Roger Hill on the lek this past spring. They believe there is a second lek nearby.

BBAS donated funds raised from this beautiful photograph to Ed Weiner of the DNR to assist with the reestablishment program for Sharp-tailed Grouse, which were inhabitants of the Loess Hills area prior to settlement.

**Do you want to have this much fun in  
2000? Put May 6 on your calendar!**

## Conservation Web Site

by Dave Davis, EPA

Note: This new webpage provides an excellent overview of the national programs being developed for bird conservation efforts. Pay special attention to the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). This initiative will essentially tie together all bird conservation efforts into a single plan.

I am very pleased to announce that EPA now has a new Internet web site on bird conservation. It can be found at <<http://www.epa.gov/owow/birds>>. I hope that you will take a few minutes to "surf" the site and familiarize yourself with its contents.

My purpose in establishing this web site was not to create a comprehensive site on birds or bird conservation—there are many others that fill that role, maintained by organizations for which birds are a central focus. Instead, I hoped to create a link between the millions of people who visit EPA's homepage (1.5 million per day at last count) and the critical and fascinating issues of bird conservation. I believe that most of those people who visit EPA's homepage have as their primary interests public health and mainstream chemical pollution control issues rather than wildlife and natural resources. I believe further, however, that a significant percentage of these citizens are nonetheless interested in nature and birds, and if guided a bit through a site like this might become more interested in and even active in bird conservation. With such a high visit rate, even a small percentage of "converts" could make a big difference.

My secondary objective is to help the bird conservation community gain a better appreciation of EPA's role in the conservation of birds, wildlife, and habitat. In my work with many people in the bird conservation community over the past 8 or so years, I have been repeatedly struck by how little these people "well-educated conservation professionals" know about EPA and our programs. Beyond the few programs that appear frequently in the popular press like superfund and the air program, most know surprisingly little and generally have the impression that EPA has no involvement or interest in natural communities and wildlife. By raising their awareness of EPA, I believe that it will have the two-way benefit of offering them additional tools for use in bird/wildlife conservation and EPA a larger base of supporters. While most of these folks, of course, won't come looking for an EPA bird site, thanks to the magic of hyperlinks and search engines, they will end up here anyway.

My final objective is to provide some information and assistance to those people who actually do come first to EPA looking for information about birds. Among the public, as opposed to conservation professionals, there really are people who are not familiar with government organization and assume that EPA is in the business of protecting birds and wildlife. This is especially prevalent among schoolchildren and other students, teachers, librarians, and such folks who increasingly use EPA's homepage as a major source of information for school projects or other non-professional research.

These objectives are inherent in the basic layout of the site: a section on bird conservation initiatives aimed at potential recruits from the environmentally-interested public and at children; a section on EPA's programs for the bird conservation community; and a section of what the individual can do aimed at the general public and EPA staff. Given the overall purpose of this site, I tried to keep it fairly simple and uncluttered. It is only two layers deep before links take the visitor outside of the site itself—and for the most part outside of EPA. I also tried to keep the number of links down to a manageable

number and tried to pick those that provided the most general information (though many of them lead to much more technical information if the visitor chooses to follow secondary links). In short, I did not wish to create the definitive site on bird conservation; rather I tried to create the introductory site for bird conservation as a topic and a site that related that topic to EPA's programs and activities.

Like any web site, this one is incomplete and probably imperfect. I expect that some of its visitors will find errors, that others will suggest better links, and that new information will emerge that I will need to incorporate. Your suggestions, of course, are most welcome, and a "hot" e-mail address is provided in the web site. I would also appreciate your assistance in publicizing the site through your own newsletters, list-servers, etc., and where appropriate linking it to your own web sites.

In closing, I want to give special thanks to Wendy Walsh, a former employee of our Ocean and Coastal Protection Division, who set up the attractive homepage and worked up a good shell that I was able to fill in after her departure from my office. I also want to note that a considerable amount of the material in this web site—especially in the section on the major bird conservation initiatives—was "borrowed" extensively from the web sites of other organizations or initiatives. In every case, a hyperlink back to the primary site is provided, so that the appropriate organization or initiative will ultimately get the credit, and probably a greater number of visits. Your contributions are appreciated.

\*\*\*\*\*

David G. Davis  
Deputy Director  
Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
Phone: 202-260-7166 Fax: 260-6294

## National Conservation Summit

The USDA is holding a series of Conservation Forums across the country starting in October, with a national summit at the end held in Iowa. All forums are open to the public. These sessions will raise public awareness of the value of private land conservatoin, private landowners' tradition of stewardship of natural resources, and initiate a dialogue on national issues. The Summit will be held Tuesday, December 14, 1999, at the Scheman Center, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Contact Lynn Bets, NRCS, Des Moines, IA (515-284-4262) or [lbetts@terra.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](mailto:lbetts@terra.ia.nrcs.usda.gov) for more informaiton.

## New BBAS Display

BBAS thanks the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST), Ames, for their generous donation of a beautiful oak display case. We used it for the first time at the First Annual Iowa Audubon Conference at the Y Camp, Boone, Iowa, on October 22-24, and we received many compliments on the handsome display of BBAS programs, photos, and Birdathon material. Thanks to all the members who contributed material for the display.



## Prairie Creek Seasonal Report— October

by Carl Kurtz

All the Rudbeckias described below can now be collected, if you can only find them. Good Luck!

We are all familiar with black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) which is a favorite flower for a great many people. It is also one of the first plants to appear in large numbers in a new prairie planting. They are a biennial and thus dependent on reseeding to maintain their population in the plant community. They are often found mixed with pale-purple coneflowers, and downy phlox in late June and early July.

Another important prairie species is sweet coneflower (*Rudbeckia subtomentosa*). This plant is physically larger and has larger flowers than black-eyed Susan. It blooms in mid-summer, growing in more moist sites and from my observations here at Prairie Creek, it is used extensively by Red-winged Blackbirds as a nest site.

Well into mid-August you may find thin-leaved coneflower (*Rudbeckia triloba*) on the prairie edge. It was likely a savanna species with flowers that are smaller than either black-eyed Susan or sweet coneflower. It readily self-seeds and is easily established on a woodland edge. This plant may be called brown-eyed Susan.

## News Flash—Conference a Big Success!

by Kay Niyo

Thanks to those individuals and groups who worked so tirelessly to ensure that the First Annual Iowa Audubon Conference held at the Boone Y Camp on October 22-24 was a success! A special thanks to Paul and Ellen Zeph and to all the Iowa Audubon board members. The conference was well attended by nearly a hundred participants. The list of speakers was impressive and their presentations were very informative. Paul Johnson, Director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, treated us on Friday evening to a very special keynote address. His message was that of an Iowan who not only is the Director of the DNR, but who also obviously cares deeply about the environment of the state. It was a personal and heartfelt presentation with many references to the great Aldo Leopold. The Auduboners were honored to have Paul and his wife, Pat, stay through the concurrent sessions on Saturday morning and they greatly appreciated his taking the time from his busy schedule to share his thoughts with all of us. We all enjoyed meeting fellow Audubon members from the four corners of Iowa and in between! Next year the conference will be held in eastern Iowa in conjunction with a Mississippi River conference. Watch for future information!

Continued from page 1—Coming Field Trips

### December

18—Ames Christmas Bird Count. Dave Edwards (515-292-3790).

19—Saylorville Christmas Bird Count. Steve Dinsmore (970-482-5264) [steve\\_dinsmore@usgs.gov](mailto:steve_dinsmore@usgs.gov).

### January

1—Boone Christmas Bird Count. Mark Widrechner (515-233-1532).

Plan to attend the December 16 Holiday for the birds and sign up for the Christmas Bird Counts.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE—DECEMBER 17,  
2 p.m.



## Clip and Join

Do you have a friend who has a burning desire to learn about birds and the natural world, and wants to meet other like-minded individuals? Or, are you looking for that unique and special gift? Don't wait any longer, just clip the membership application form below and send it in.



### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

New member of the National Audubon Society (receive the *Audubon* magazine, the *Big Bluestem Flyer*, membership card, and participate in all Big Bluestem Audubon Society activities)—\$20. Please make your check payable to: National Audubon Society and include "Chapter Code H-57" on the check.

OR

Subscribe to the *Big Bluestem Flyer* for one year and participate in some Big Bluestem Audubon Society activities—\$5.50. Restrictions are that you will not be a National Audubon Society member or have voting privileges, and you cannot be an officer or committee chair. Please make your check payable to: Big Bluestem Audubon Society.

Send your check and this coupon to Mark Widrechner, Membership Chair, 2121 Burnett Ave., Ames, Iowa 50010.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_ fax \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Please do not use this form for renewals to the National Audubon Society.

# Notes from the State Office

*Paul Zeph, Executive Director, Iowa Audubon*

## Looking Back and Looking Ahead

On September 30, we said goodbye to Bill Heidenreich, former treasurer of the Iowa Audubon Council, and strong advocate for our newly established state Audubon program. Bill had been declining for years with emphysema, but his fiery spirit for the Audubon Cause burned bright up to his last moments.

The death of someone you know always makes you stop and reflect on life. Bill's death first caused me to look at where I've been and the choices I've made throughout my life that brought me to Iowa and to this wonderful job with Iowa Audubon. But, Bill was a man who always looked ahead to what could be if we worked together to make some changes — such as a new-thinking governor, a conservation-minded state representative, or an Audubon state office. And he worked with others who felt similarly to make whatever changes he could so his vision for a better Iowa would have a chance to grow.

Bill joined with other Audubon leaders of Iowa to map out an exciting and ambitious collective plan for our future that is part of a national Audubon initiative called the "2020 Vision." Looking ahead to the year 2020, we see Audubon in Iowa as a major conservation and education leader in the state. We'll have more and stronger chapters, each playing a key role in the environmental future of their community. Audubon Centers will be established in many communities with hands-on, outdoor, bird and habitat education programs reaching one in four students every year. Hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat will be protected or restored as a result of Audubon work, and our membership will grow from its present 6,000 members in Iowa to over 25,000!

We've got a lot of exciting work to do, and when you have a group of people who share the same values and ideals it also makes it an awful lot of fun! Bill Heidenreich believed that if you feel strongly enough about a cause and are willing to give of yourself to help that cause, then dreams can come true. If the Audubon Cause is important to you, there will be lots of opportunities to get more involved at the local and state level. I have absolutely no doubt that with your support we all can make our 2020 Vision become a reality.

**If you have an "X" after your name on your mailing label, this will be your last issue of the Flyer unless you renew.**



KAY NIYO  
1531 STONEBROOKE RD  
AMES IA 50010

Rebecca A. Shivers, Editor  
Big Bluestem Flyer  
2380 220th Street  
Boone, Iowa 50036

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
Permit No. 131  
Ames, Iowa