



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 34 Number 3

January/February 1999

Featured Speaker—January 21 meeting: *Paul Zeph, "What good are Birders?"*

Paul Zeph, the new Executive Director for Iowa Audubon, will give a lighthearted slide presentation on how birders can and are making an important contribution to the ecological and economic health of our communities. Paul will give us an overview of current Audubon initiatives and provide a glimpse into the future for Audubon activities in Iowa. He will also highlight contributions that birders make in the areas of research, education, tourism, jobs, and conservation.

Featured Speaker—February 18 meeting, *Dr. Bonnie Bowen, "Cooperation and Competition in Breeding Groups of Groove-billed Anis in Costa Rica"*

Dr. Bonnie Bowen, Department of Animal Ecology, Iowa State University, and her husband, Rolf Koford, lived in Costa Rica for three years while studying the social behavior of Groove-billed Anis. In this unusual species, adults live in groups in which there can be as many as four breeding pairs. All females lay their eggs in the same nest and all the adults help incubate the eggs and feed the young. Although cooperation exists, so does competition. Before laying her own eggs, a female will remove the eggs of other group members from the nest and toss them to the ground. Dr. Bowen will discuss this interesting breeding behavior in a presentation illustrated with slides from the study area and other areas of Costa Rica. See you there!!

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS) meetings are held monthly, September-May (except December and 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: January & February

Kevin Healy, Field Trip Chair

January

16-State Forest Nursery. Mike Freiberg will lead a walking tour of the area. In past years we have seen raptors and a variety of sparrows. **MEET IN PARKING LOT OF STATE FOREST NURSERY AT 0800.** Directions: From Highway 30 turn south on to Duff Avenue.

Turn left on Billy Sunday road and take gravel drive (right) to State Forest Nursery. Park in lot in front of green metal building. Call Mike Freiberg @233-8213 for details.

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Bird Term of the Month: Mealworm. *A type of beetle larva much used for feeding insectivorous birds in the wild and in captivity. From Peter Weaver's Birdwatcher's Dictionary.*



View from the Prairie

Kay Niyo, President

I hope everyone enjoyed our unseasonably warm fall and early winter and birded with friends or on the Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). Unfortunately, a blast of Arctic air before many of the counts probably caused some birds to move farther south. There also were lesser numbers of seed eaters in some areas. However, we had a few surprises just as we do every year. That's what makes birding so intriguing—our feathered friends are not entirely predictable! We are enjoying some late records for Story County. (See Bird Drop-ins on page three.) The great sightings on Hallett's Quarry is a good reason to heed Steve's and Hank Zaletel's plea in *The Birds of Story County, Iowa* to check Hallett's for record birds!

Thanks to Jon Bahrenfus, many Central Iowans were treated to wonderful views of a beautiful immature Snowy Owl at the agronomy farm west of Ames on December 10–12. It was not difficult to spot without snow for camouflage!

This fall we experienced a great lesson in "Provide the habitat and the birds will come!" Many of us heard about a "new wetland"—an acre or two—a couple of miles south of Ames and began visiting it to see unusual shorebirds. It was a cornfield that was flooded due to a plugged drainage tile. Jim Dinsmore, Hank Zaletel, and others visited the area on a regular basis and recorded the species and numbers present. Jim reported the results of his sightings in the *IOU News* 14(4):4–5, the Iowa Ornithologists' Union newsletter (see page 4 of this BBAS newsletter). From early September until November 18, Jim saw 25 wetland species including 7 waterfowl species and 14 shorebird species as well as other nonwetland species. He also saw a Prairie Falcon killing a Common Snipe on November 8. Several sightings were record late county records and a few were "first county sightings" for Jim personally, and he has been birding here for 23 years.

There are a number of messages in this accidental drainage tile blockage. Jim stresses the importance of being persistent in watching local areas to prevent unusual bird sightings from being missed. Another message is the importance of habitat for attracting birds to food or shelter. This small, temporary "wetland" illustrated that there are a variety of birds looking for the right habitat as they migrate. We know that Central and Northcentral Iowa had many prairie potholes prior to installation of the drain tiles. Several years ago at a BBAS meeting, Jim showed us aerial photos of Central Iowa during a wet spring, which illustrated what the landscape must have looked like before tiling. If only landowners would allow areas such as this example to revert to "natural," whether that be wetland or prairie or woodland, we could provide additional habitat for many

interesting flora and fauna that cannot exist in agricultural land.

Please join us for our monthly meetings with interesting speakers and for our fun explorations of great birding areas nearby!



Cedar Waxwing

Photo from Donald E. Waite and Isidor Jeklin

<http://www.globalairphotos.com/globalbirdphotos>



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BBAS Web Site:

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

National Audubon Society Web Site:

<http://www.audubon.org>

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

Bird Drop-ins

Sightings by BBAS Members

December 22—Jamaica CBC. They turned up a record 67 species including Pied-billed and Western Grebes, Double-crested Cormorant, all three merganser species, and Fox Sparrow. Also of note was the presence of a neck-collared Snow Goose at Bays Branch that was apparently banded at Wrangle Island in Russia.

December 23—Red Rock and Saylorville Reservoirs. Kevin Healy, Kay Niyo, and Stephen Dinsmore noted lots of open water and birds. Specific species identified were fourteen Pied-billed Grebes, eight Double-crested Cormorants, and sixteen species of waterfowl. Saylorville Reservoir was mostly frozen, but they saw eleven Red-breasted Mergansers. Big Creek Lake was also mostly frozen, but the female Oldsquaw was still present on a large area of open water just northwest of the swimming beach. Finally, we checked Hallett's Quarry north of Ames at dusk. There were five swans—three adult Trumpeters and two immature Tundras. Although the quarry was mostly frozen over on the morning of December 24, all of the swans were still present.

December 27—Red Rock Reservoir area. Some of the highlights included three Pied-billed Grebes, one Double-crested Cormorant, one adult Trumpeter Swan, an adult female White-winged Scoter, and an adult Franklin's Gull. Stephen Dinsmore and Jim Sinclair also birded a few more areas in the afternoon on their way back to Ames. At Lake Colchester in Warren County, they saw an American White Pelican and an adult Trumpeter Swan. At Saylorville Reservoir, they saw a female Oldsquaw (probably the same bird seen earlier at Big Creek Lake) and a Greater Scaup in the open water above the dam.



The 2nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count—February 19-22, 1999

Last year, some 14,000 bird enthusiasts across North America reported over half a million birds they saw at their feeders, local parks, and natural areas for the first-ever count of its kind, the Great '98 Backyard Bird Count, February 19-21. Jays, chickadees, cardinals, finches—these citizen scientists identified and tallied them all, and they sent their sightings to *BirdSource*. This year, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society are asking everyone across North America to participate in the 2nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count. They need the help of every able-bodied birder to find where all the birds are the week before they begin their northward migrations. During the event, bird enthusiasts of all ages will count the birds they see in their yards, local parks, and

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Conservation Corner

Sherry Dragula, Conservation Chair

Dollars for the Wild?

The need for bigger and more stable sources of wildlife conservation funding is nothing new. Many of you remember the "Teaming With Wildlife" initiative to put a small user fee on outdoor products. The 105th Congress brought encouraging new recognition of that need in the form of an innovative approach to meeting it.

Proposal of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1998 (HR 4717) and the Reinvestment and Environmental Restoration Act of 1998 (S 2566) promised critical conservation funding through an automatic annual appropriation based on a dedicated percentage of revenues from outer continental shelf oil and gas leases.

Although these new funding proposals died with the last Congress, prospects for their reintroduction when lawmakers re-convene in January are seen as excellent.

Automatic Appropriation

Under current law, revenues from Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas leases goes to federal coffers and is available for appropriation. As much as \$900 million per year is available for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF dollars can be used for federal acquisition of land and for support of state land conservation and recreation programs. Unfortunately, Congress usually does not appropriate adequate funds. Under the proposed legislation, the LWCF would be funded with a much-needed automatic appropriation feature. In addition, the bills would provide state fish and wildlife agencies with significant new funding for wildlife conservation. The third component of the bills would provide "impact assistance" funds for coastal states.

Still Needs Work

However, there are several issues which the Congress must address to garner the broad support that will be necessary for the bills to become law, including:

- Funds for state fish and wildlife agencies should be used primarily for non-game wildlife.
- The proposed 7% expenditure of oil and gas revenues for Title III in the Senate bill must be raised to match the 10% in the House bill.
- Allocation of these funds should be structured so that local communities are not drawn by the financial lure of additional money to support inappropriate oil and gas development along their coasts.
- Impact assistance funds for coastal governments must be dedicated to environmentally sound projects and programs that include a public participation process.

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Notes From the Field

Kevin Healy, Field Trip Chair

November 14—Chichaqua Nature Area

Wonderful weather and a good day for sparrows. We saw Fox Sparrows, Swamp Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows and Juncos. We also saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harrier, and Bald Eagle. Mark Widrechner was trip leader.

December—Christmas Bird Counts

See page 9 in this newsletter for results.

Ames Results—David Edwards

Thirty-five participants plus 7 feederwatchers tallied 58 species. Total individual birds was 24,095. The temperature was 15-22 F, 11-20 mph winds from the NW, no snow, cloudy morning and a partly cloudy afternoon.

Boone County Results—Mark Widrechner

There were 55 species identified on 1 January 1999. There was a total of 6,187 birds. These data do not include reports from most of the feeder watchers. The day was cold and snowy in the afternoon with a strong E wind.

Saylorville Reservoir Results—Steve Dinsmore

Thirty-three participants tallied 87 species. Total individual birds was 34,767. The day was cloudy with a NW 5-15 mph wind. The water was partly frozen.



Book Review

Kay Niyo

Pete Dunne. 1998. *Small-Headed Flycatcher. Seen Yesterday. He Didn't Leave His Name. and other stories.* University of Texas Press, Austin.

For those of you who were privileged to bird with Pete Dunne, absorb his raptor identification tips, and sit spellbound as he demonstrated his captivating storytelling skills, you will recognize the title of this book as being the same as his banquet presentation at the Iowa Ornithologists' Union's 75th Anniversary meeting at Camp Sunnyside on September 12, 1998. Whether or not you were present, you will want to read this delightful book of essays—essays that will strike a chord deep inside many birders and naturalists as only those by Pete can. He shares a poignant Christmas story about suggesting birdfeeders for his father, and his and his mother's deep pleasure and relief in successfully piquing his father's interest in winter birdwatching to assist in his convalescence from Lyme disease. We see a true naturalist who makes it a practice not to interfere with nature and writes a thought provoking essay about conservation and management. He humorously reminds us of our birders' cars—his old car was named "Pig Pen," his current one is "Pete's Pit"—that contain "... everything—I mean everything I might ever need in the next five years. ..." His wonderfully perceptive eyes can gaze deep into human souls and understand their thoughts and special needs. He lets us enter his mind and shares some of his deepest thoughts and word pictures of all those wondrous creatures, their environment, and their special qualities that are most important to him and to many of us. This one will touch your heart and your funny bone many times over.

Local Birding

Jim Dinsmore

In early September, one of my students mentioned to me that he had seen what he was certain was an ibis at a flooded field south of Ames. Obviously the ibis raised my interest but I also was puzzled since I did not know anything about the wetland he described. I visited the site the next day and although the ibis was no longer there, I did find a flooded field of an acre or two that had a number of shorebirds. The wetland was obviously formed by a plugged drainage tile, since it was in the midst of a corn field. I told several others about the site and, since it was only a few miles from my house, began visiting it on a regular basis, recording what species and how many of each were present. These visits soon became addictive as I kept finding "new" species as migration progressed through the fall. I also often found Hank Zaletel there, and we began comparing notes. The pond held water well and shrank slowly through the fall until late October when the landowner cleaned out the plugged up tile. After that its level dropped rapidly and finally, on 29 November, it was dry. In all, I visited the site 40 times, with my last sighting of any wetland birds on 18 November. I saw a total of 25 wetland species at the site including 7 waterfowl species and 14 shorebird species. Besides the wetland species, I also saw a Prairie Falcon (killing a snipe on 8 Nov) and 20 Brewer's Blackbirds on 6 Nov as well as a number of other nonwetland species. I suspect that Hank may have seen a few species that I missed.

Other interesting finds were a record early (for Story County) fall Northern Shoveler and record late county records for American Golden-Plover, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Franklin's Gull. On a personal level, I saw five species there (Prairie Falcon, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, American Pipit, Brewer's Blackbird) that I had never seen before in Story County where I have resided for 23+ years. The falcon was also a state first for me. The whole point of this little note is to point out how persistent watching at an interesting local area led to some interesting sightings that easily could have been missed. For the record, here are the wetland species that I saw there. The first number is the number of visits (out of 40) on which that species was present. The second is the maximum number seen.

Pied-billed Grebe 11 8	Pectoral Sandpiper 16 10
Canada Goose 5 108	Dunlin 9 3
Northern Pintail 4 6	Stilt Sandpiper 2 4
Mallard 15 51	Buff-breasted Sandpiper 1 1
Northern Shoveler 4 3	Long-billed Dowitcher 1 1
Green-winged Teal 1 3	Common Snipe 10 18
American Wigeon 2 4	Franklin's Gull 2 20
Blue-winged Teal 8 202	Ring-billed Gull 5 101
Killdeer 38 170	American Pipit 4 3
Semipalmated Plover 3 1	
American Golden-Plover 11 12	
Greater Yellowlegs 1 1	
Lesser Yellowlegs 9 23	
Spotted Sandpiper 3 2	
Semipalmated Sandpiper 3 1	
Least Sandpiper 12 19	

Highlights from the First Thirty Years of Big Bluestem Audubon Society (formerly the Ames Audubon Society), Part III

Sherry Dragula

The 1990s were marked primarily with regular monthly programs and field trips. There were numerous service projects, conservation actions, fundraisers, prairie maintenance activities, educational activities, and a few internal changes to keep the Chapter vital and moving ahead.

Service projects included assisting the Story County Conservation Center with its landscaping for wildlife around their new Center in 1991. That same year we had a litter pick-up at Saylorville Reservoir. In June 1992 we assisted the American Ornithologists Union with their meeting in Ames. Starting in December 1992 we donated bird seed and money for seed to the Story County Conservation Center. This yearly project continues. We also provided funds for the bird feeders at the Y Camp near Boone. In April 1994, members participated in a survey of birds at Saylorville. That spring we hosted the Iowa Ornithologists in Ames. We hosted the same group again in 1998.

Conservation action focused mostly around letter writing campaigns. In the fall 1991, we began our involvement in National Audubon's "Armchair Activist" program, where an issue is focused on each month and a letter written by each participant. State issues that were acted on include the Resource Enhancement and Protection program (starting in 1991), Non-game Wildlife program (later the Wildlife Diversity program), Engeldinger Marsh (winter of 1996 and 1997), and Mourning Dove hunting (1997 and 1998). In December 1991, we assisted with fundraising for the Paul Errington Marsh. Starting in 1995, we endorsed and worked for the Fish & Wildlife Diversity funding initiatives.

Conservation and service combined on our prairie maintenance work-days. We held at least five of them in the 1990s doing brush cutting and burning to promote growth of native prairie species.

To help raise funds for all BBAS activities, the Chapter sold T-shirts and sweatshirts, Audubon Holiday Cards, and Shade-grown Coffee to our members. Raffles at our meetings were held. A Bird-a-thon was held in May 1998 as a fundraiser for our education program, *Audubon Adventures*, and for our new state Audubon office. Brekke's Town and Country store helped us raise funds by providing a coupon for bird-related sales in their store.

Internally we made some changes to keep us functioning well. In the spring 1995, National Audubon engaged local chapters in a strategic planning process. In the fall of 1995, the

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Continued from page 3—Conservation Corner

The two bills have significant bi-partisan sponsorship. Now conservationists need to work with congressional leaders to turn a good legislative start into a better outcome for wildlife and the environment. In addition, the Department of Interior has a plan that would include dedicated funds for land acquisition, resource protection and restoration. It is called Partnerships for America's Resources (PAR) and it appears to be broader than the two bills listed above. This plan is still being developed.

You can reach your Congressperson at U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. BBAS members in Story and Marshall counties are constituents of Rep. Leonard Boswell's district. BBAS members in Boone, Hamilton, Greene and Webster counties are in Rep. Tom Latham's district. BBAS members in Polk and Dallas counties are in Rep. Greg Ganske's district. Senators Tom Harkin and Charles Grassley can be reached at: U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

For more information, contact Teaming with Wildlife, 444 N. Capitol St. NW, Suite 544, Washington, DC 20001, Tel: 202-624-7890, teaming@sso.org, URL: www.teaming.com.

Excerpted from National Wildlife Federation's Nov. 1998 "EnviroAction" and *Teaming with Wildlife's* December 1998 statement..



Continued from page 3—2nd Annual Great Backyard

other areas.

As a counter, you report your sightings online through *BirdSource*

<http://birdsource.tc.cornell.edu>

This award-winning, state-of-the-art website is a project of Cornell University and the National Audubon Society. Participants can quickly see how their information fits into the continent-wide picture by selecting animated maps regularly updated throughout the count, showing which species are being reported where all across North America.

The site provides scientists with an opportunity to see where birds are and what they are doing—electronically! The information is available for your use on the database and is stored along with other count information. At the website, visitors can see also colorful bird images, hear examples of songs and calls, compare species distribution and abundance graphs, and much more.

In 1998, participants gave researchers important information about North American winter birds that can be used for comparisons in future years and as a way to help keep common birds common. They also helped show the effects El Nino had on the birds. Now we hope families and chapter members across the continent will help us piece together the long-term effects of El Nino by participating in the 2nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count. There is no official sign-up and no fee.

Please join us and citizen scientists across the continent as we count the birds for the 2nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count!

Fundraising Idea: Matching Donations

Here is a fundraising approach that recently worked for the Big Bluestem Chapter (see box below). The BBAS Board felt that the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area included everything we wanted to support: grassland birds and neotropical migrants, a public area managed mainly for non-game species, and collaboration between many wildlife groups. We wanted to raise funds, but like many chapters, did not have much on hand.

Here is the approach we took:

1. Identify the project
2. Describe why it meets our Audubon Chapter's goals
3. Highlight why it is important for Audubon to support this project
4. Gain board consensus to support the project with a donation
5. The Key: Board members (two in this case) pledged challenge funds to match each member's donation 2 for 1. Members see up front support by the board, and know that their donation will be multiplied. The matching funds have a ceiling.
6. All money will be dedicated to the project in the name of Big Bluestem Audubon Society, pooling as much influence as possible from the members' dollars.

Thanks to Jane Clark and The Warbler, and Karl Jungbluth for this information.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT— 25 YEARS OLD

WASHINGTON, DC—National Audubon Society just released *Ark to the Future: 25 Years of the Endangered Species Act* praising the successes of the Act and outlining needed changes as the 25th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act approaches on December 28.

"The Endangered Species Act is one of the most significant environmental laws passed in the United States," said Daniel P. Beard, Senior Vice President for Public Policy. "The ESA is literally an Ark for many species to survive into the next century, including the Bald Eagle and the California Condor."

Though the ESA was created 25 years ago, Congress has not reauthorized the Act for more than 5 years. *Ark to the Future* demonstrates that the Act has made a real difference in saving species. Yet, ESA has been consistently underfunded and has been subjected to attacks by so-called property rights advocates.

"As well as the ESA has worked, improvements such as providing private landowners with incentives to protect species are essential to ensure the ESA is the Ark to the Future," said Beard. "Reauthorizing the ESA would be a perfect anniversary gift from the Congress."

Some of the recommended improvements to the Endangered Species Act are:

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KELLERTON BIRD CONSERVATION AREA FUNDRAISING CHALLENGE

The Kellerton Bird Conservation Area is a project of the Wildlife Diversity Program of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. This proposed area will be Iowa's first wildlife area where the primary goal will be to manage habitat for the benefit of nongame birds and animals. The project includes 680 acres where one of Iowa's few prairie chicken leks (booming grounds) is located. It is located just west of Kellerton in Ringold County in southern Iowa. The IDNR approved purchase of this property at their November 12, 1998 meeting!

Jamie Edwards of the DNR Wildlife Diversity Program says that \$13,000 is still needed to complete the acquisition. The land had to be re-appraised and the cost went up.

Why is the Big Bluestem Audubon Board of Directors in support of the Kellerton Area? We believe that it fills a great need: a public area managed for non-game birds. Kellerton preserves a natural ecosystem, and will allow all Iowans to enjoy the observation of its birds and

wildlife. This is an "Audubon" type project, and we need to step forward now with monetary support. A great show of Audubon support at this time will ensure that we have a say in the management of the Kellerton area. We want to see this project focused on the grassland birds including neotropical migrants and Prairie Chickens. We need to vote support with our pocketbooks and wallets!

The Challenge Donation: How it works

All money raised by Big Bluestem members, up to a total of \$500, will be matched 2-for-1 by two anonymous donors. If you pledge \$50, a total of \$150 will go to the Bird Conservation Area! All monies will be donated to the DNR's Kellerton Bird Conservation Area in the name of Big Bluestem Audubon Society. BBAS is a 501(c)(3) organization; contributions may be tax deductible.

Make checks payable to Big Bluestem Audubon Society, marked "Kellerton." Send to Paul Ovrum, BBAS Treasurer, 1515 Burnett Ave, Ames, IA 50010. Deadline for contributions is January 31, 1999.

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*Species should not be permitted to decline to the brink of extinction, a point when conservation and recovery measures may be both difficult and costly, or worse, unsuccessful.

*Reauthorization of the Act must include new, more proactive tools to promote the recovery of species on federal lands.

*Requirements for Habitat Conservation Plans must be strengthened to ensure that they are consistent with the recovery of listed species.

With over 550,000 members and supporters in 518 chapters throughout the Americas, the National Audubon Society conserves and restores natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

Blizzard, January 1999

Carl Kurtz

cpkurtz@netins.net

I am always impressed by the reaction of wildlife to a blizzard. Our house is, in effect, in the midst of a prairie savanna—a small island of trees almost completely surrounded by grassland. When the weather is severe it becomes a magnet for wildlife.

On normal winter days our feeding stations host a variety of birds and mammals, but when blizzard conditions persist each species more frequently utilizes the shelter from wind and the food we supply.

"Flight" behavior moderates as critters try to avoid the driving wind. Last evening a crow continued to hammer away on a suet ball as I scooped snow beneath a feeder only 25 yards away. Tree sparrows and juncos often refuse to fly as I spread food near them on the ground.

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**Continued from page 5—Highlights from . . .**

newsletter went from a monthly to bi-monthly. By the following year, the newsletter was expanded to 6 pages and we set up a website. In April 1997, the Iowa Audubon Council approved a plan to establish an Iowa Audubon office. In June 1997, BBAS was notified they qualify as a 501 (c) (3) Not for Profit organization.

In addition to providing *Audubon Adventures* classroom subscriptions every year and our monthly educational programs and field trips, we added two important educational efforts in the 1990s. BBAS members taught beginning birding classes at the Story County Conservation Center. And, BBAS helped fund *The Birds of Story County* monograph.

In the spring 1998, we celebrated our 30th Anniversary and we look forward to the next 30 years!

Audubon Adventures comes to a Classroom Near YOU!

Due to the generosity of Big Bluestem members and the success of the 1998 Birdathon, *Audubon Adventures* educational materials have been purchased for 34 classrooms! *Audubon Adventures* is an environmental education program of the National Audubon Society, geared toward students in grades 4 through 6. Its focus is an understanding of birds, other wildlife, their habitats, and connections to people.

If you know a teacher in one of the following schools near you, ask them about *Audubon Adventures*!

(Number of classrooms in parentheses if more than one)

Ames-

St. Cecelia School
Edwards Elementary
Crawford Elementary
Wilson-Beardshear Elementary
Fellows Elementary
Roosevelt Elementary
Meeker Elementary
Northwood Elementary
Kate Mitchell Elementary
Sawyer Elementary

Ankeny-

Northeast Elementary

Boone-

Bryant Elementary (2)
United Community
Franklin Elementary

Cambridge-

Ballard East Elementary (5)

Collins-

Collins Elementary

Colo-

Colo-Nesco Elementary

McCallsburg-

Colo-Nesco Community

Nevada-

Central Elementary (3)

Ogden-

Howe Elementary
North Elementary

Slater-

Ballard West Elementary (4)

Story City-

Roland-Story Elementary (2)

Thanks to Carol Berrier, Nancy Kurrle, and Story County Conservation for rounding up interested teachers!

Editor's Note: Audubon celebrates 15 years of environmental education. This January, NAS is proud to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of *Audubon Adventures*. It began in 1983 in 1,500 classrooms, and today there are more than 14,000 classrooms across the United States!

Observations From the Bluebird B&B

Karl and Carmen Jungbluth

In this column, we'll record bird and nature observations on the first day of each month. The location will be the "backyard" of our home, which is two miles south of Boone adjoining the northern reaches of Ledges State Park. We hope you'll enjoy watching the seasons, and the birds, come and go throughout the year. Karl & Carmen Jungbluth.

November 1, 1998—

The weather of November arrived right on schedule with cloudy skies, some drizzle and temperatures hovering around 50 degrees. Most of the trees in our yard and in the valley behind our house have lost their leaves, with only the oaks displaying some brownish-red color. Early in the morning, five deer visited the southeast corner of the yard, and two does spent some time licking each other's necks! Most of the migrants and the summer resident birds appear to have moved on, but there is plenty of activity at our feeders. A host of chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, tufted titmice and goldfinches are eating plenty of seeds. Hairy, downy and red-bellied woodpeckers were also frequent visitors today, and there were several dozen juncos in the yard.

It seemed quiet as I walked the short loop down to Peas Creek, except for the emphatic peek of the hairy woodpecker and the scuffing and clucking of some turkeys across the creek. A few golden-crowned kinglets followed me down a draw, their bright yellow and white caps standing out against the gray of the day. A handful of robins sat motionless among the branches of a cedar tree, and I could hear the high, thin call of cedar waxwings. Only after I heard the sound of their droppings landing on the leaves, did I realize they were straight overhead among the vines in a leafless walnut tree. No sparrows were to be seen or heard in the thickets along the creek, which I thought unusual for this time of year.

However, during my walk, Carmen had seen a fox sparrow "doing the shuffle" under the lilac near our feeders. And, the highlight of the day was a young male yellow-bellied sapsucker, checking the tree trunks around the yard for sap.

December 1, 1998—

The first day of December was much more pleasant than the first of November. It was sunny and mild, with temperatures in the 60s and green grass! As a result, the local birds weren't relying too heavily on our feeders. Still, the chickadees, titmice and white-breasted nuthatches are eating plenty of black oil sunflower seed. They traded places at the peanut feeders with downy, hairy and red-bellied woodpeckers too. Finch numbers have been low during the long warm spell, although Carmen saw two pair of house finches and a goldfinch today, plus a couple of pine siskins. A purple finch did stop by on Thanksgiving. Blue jays, cardinals, crows and a dozen

juncos rounded out the yard list today. Just for grins, a chipmunk stuffed its cheeks under the feeder during the day, and a possum cleaned up after dark.

Toward evening, Karl wandered down to the creek. Two tree sparrows posed nicely on a bare branch in the setting sun. A sharp-shinned hawk glided across the valley and a couple of deer showed their white tails. The chickadees and nuthatches were quite vocal near the creek. A couple of nuthatches spiraled up and down the branches in a row of old walnuts, and I wondered "where are they going to sleep tonight?" As the wispy clouds turned a peachy-pink and the bright white moon rose above the valley walls, I decided to wait and see. The nuthatches talked things over, fanned their wings and tails, and kept feeding. Quite abruptly, one of them swooped down and entered a hole in a horizontal dead branch just above my head. The other disappeared into a couple of nearby trees. All was quiet, and I headed home.

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Continued from page 7—Blizzard, January 1999

Red-tailed hawks often perch on the leeward side of our woods. This afternoon I watched one strafe a group of 20 pheasants which were feeding in an opening. The ring-necks ran in every direction as he sailed low overhead. Flight could be a serious mistake, as I once witnessed a red-tail take a hen pheasant on the wing.

As darkness approaches I can see sundogs which nearly always occur when there is blowing snow and a visible setting sun. In the fading light deer filter into our yard to forage beneath the feeders, lick the salt block, and drink from the bird water. As I watch the deer, a great-horned owl arrives and takes the red-tail's perch at the woodland-prairie edge for his night-watch. Cottontails and the occasional raccoon will soon join the deer. Their silhouettes against moonlit snow will entertain us throughout the night.

• • • • •

Board Happenings

Mary Doud, Secretary

On December 6, Board members met at Kay Niyo's house. The Board voted to sell t-shirts for fund raising. We have received good comments regarding the *Audubon Adventures* materials we have purchased for area classrooms. It was suggested to send a letter to each school to inform them where the materials are coming from and ask for feedback. We need 1978-1983 newsletters for our records. [If anyone has newsletters from these years and would be willing to part with them, please contact Joyce Bahrenfus to store them permanently in the archives.] The trend on membership is still moving up. Of the 450 members, approximately 25% participate at some point in a BBAS function. The Kellerton Bird Conservation area (Ringold County in southern Iowa—managed habitat for non-game animals and birds) is close to finalizing purchases, but is in need of funding. Two members have anonymously agreed to match up to \$500, making a total possible pledge of \$1,500 from our chapter. The next meeting is January 31, 7:00 p.m., Kay Niyo's house.

The Results of the Ames Christmas Bird Count, the Saylorville Reservoir and Boone County Bird Counts

The Ames Count was held on Saturday, December 19, Saylorville Count was Sunday, December 20, 1998 and the Boone County Count was January 1, 1999. The organizers were Dave Edwards, Steve Dinsmore, and Mark Widrechner, respectively. The results were as follows:

	Ames	Saylorville	Boone		Ames	Saylorville	Boone
Common Loon		1		Great Horned Owl	3	9	
Pied-billed Grebe		5		Barred Owl	6	2	1
Gr. Wh.-front. goose		31	19	Long-eared Owl		14	3
Snow Goose	66	131		Short-eared Owl		8	
Trumpeter Swan	3			Owl sp.			3
Canada Goose	1706	5689		Belted Kingfisher	6	2	2
Mallard	54			Red-headed Woodpecker		1	9
Gadwall		94		Red-bellied Woodpecker	54	54	55
American Wigeon	3	12		Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1		1
American Black Duck		10		Downy Woodpecker	165	139	113
Mallard		7071		Hairy Woodpecker	26	24	29
Northern Shoveler		81		Northern Flicker	5	17	1
Northern Pintail		6		Pileated Woodpecker			1
Green-winged Teal		79		Northern Shrike	1	4	
Canvasback		44		Shrike sp.			1
Redhead		12		Loggerhead Shrike	1		
Ring-necked Duck		17		Blue Jay	97	97	96
Greater Scaup	1			Horned Lark	79	100	542
Lesser Scaup	4	122		American Crow	14200	423	477
Oldsquaw		1		Black-capped Chickadee	371	296	290
Bufflehead		2		Tufted Titmouse	11	5	41
Common Goldeneye		191		Red-breasted Nuthatch		3	1
Hooded Merganser		30	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	116	75	90
Common Merganser	4	2260		Brown Creeper	30	3	12
Red-breasted Merganser		1		Carolina Wren	1	2	1
Ruddy Duck		123		Winter Wren	2	1	
Bald Eagle	4	43	15	Golden-crowned Kinglet	5	20	
Northern Harrier	1	7		American Robin	505	1285	16
Sharp-shinned Hawk	1	4	2	European Starling	2090	1901	661
Cooper's Hawk	2	4		Cedar Waxwing	146	345	3
Red-tailed Hawk	53	59	31	American Tree Sparrow	490	1512	990
Rough-legged Hawk	2	1	1	Song Sparrow	3	33	33
Buteo sp.			1	Swamp Sparrow		4	3
Golden Eagle		1		White-throated Sparrow	9	6	
American Kestrel	3	11	3	Harris' Sparrow	7	19	7
Merlin			1	White-crowned Sparrow		8	3
Gray Partridge	5		8	Dark-eyed Junco	1045	1510	2217
Ring-necked Pheasant	40	11	72	Lapland Longspur	50	310	330
Wild Turkey		26	52	Snow Bunting		24	3
American Coot		22		Northern Cardinal	226	303	259
Sandhill Crane		1		Red-winged Blackbird	4	304	2
Common Snipe		3		Meadowlark sp.	1		9
Bonaparte's Gull		3		Common Grackle	3	6	1
Ring-billed Gull	74	8500		Brown-headed Cowbird	52	71	
Mew Gull		1		Purple Finch		1	2
Herring Gull		200		House Finch	179	21	46
Thayer's Gull		1		Pine Siskin	22		5
Rock Dove	313	214	99	American Goldfinch	120	55	88
Mourning Dove	33	113	24	House Sparrow	1591	509	408
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	2	1				

THE COFFEE CONNECTION—THE NORTHWEST SHADE COFFEE CAMPAIGN—*John Bianchi, National Audubon Society*

Coffee is good for migratory songbirds. No, they don't need it stay awake on all-night migration flights. But, they do need coffee plantations to spend the winter when they get to the tropics. Throughout Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean islands, and Colombia—the destination of most wintering songbirds—there are virtually no forests still standing in the mid elevations (roughly 500 to 1500 meters.) These regions have all been converted to permanent cropland. Yet the birds have found a viable replacement—traditional coffee and cacao plantations. Grown in the time-honored manner, coffee bushes are cultivated under a forest overstory, using basic principles of agroforestry. This involves planting a mixture of nitrogen-fixing trees with up to 40 other useful species to provide not only shade but firewood and fruit for household and commercial use. Shade trees protect the coffee and cacao bushes from rain and sun, help maintain soil quality, counteract erosion, provide natural mulch which reduces the need for chemical fertilizers, and weeding. As far as the birds are concerned, coffee plantations are a modified forest. The flowers and fruits of the shade trees attract omnivorous species like Tennessee Warblers and Orchard Orioles. (Although most neotropical migrants feed primarily on insects in breeding season, some species readily turn to fruits and flowers while wintering in the tropics.) Researchers have found a surprising biodiversity of birds, butterflies, ants, amphibians and orchids. Wintering migrants are joined by resident tinamous, parrots, trogons, toucans and woodcreepers. Coffee has been called a "democratic crop." While there are vast plantations worked by tenant farmers for absentee landowners, most coffee is still grown by families on small farms. Because of its high profitability per unit compared to raising corn or beef, coffee growing has been looked to as way for small landowners to earn cash with relatively little investment. Traditional practices allow farmers to avoid dependence on expensive chemical applications, protecting them and their families from the harmful effects of pesticide exposure and fertilizer run-off in drinking water. Until recently, nearly all commercial production of coffee was managed under a canopy of shade trees. But debt-strapped nations seeking to boost export commodities have undertaken a deliberate campaign to modernize growing practices away from traditional "shade" coffee to new "sun," or "technified" coffee. The U.S. Agency for International Development has also encouraged this trend. Sun coffee plantations produce higher yields—at a serious social and environmental price. They require large applications of expensive chemicals, while the plants are more susceptible to disease and need to be replaced more often. Small farmers can't afford the increased costs. The removal of shade trees eliminates the grower's fuel wood, timber and fruit crops that often served as insurance for times when the coffee crop fails. Some farmers, unable to support themselves, have been forced to sell their land for cattle pasture, or in some regions, to convert to growing coca. A casualty of the conversion to "sun" coffee is biodiversity. Studies in Colombia and Mexico found 94-97% fewer bird species in "sun" than "shade" coffee plantations. The last refuge of wintering neotropical migrants is gradually disappearing. With so much tropical forest already eliminated, the birds have nowhere else to go. What's a coffee drinking bird lover to do? As consumers of one third of the world's coffee, Americans have a lot of influence. Until now, coffee importers, roasters and retailers haven't had a reason to track whether their product is grown in sun or shade. But due to consumer awareness of the impact of technified coffee on the environment, people are starting to ask for shade coffee. By buying coffee that is grown in the shade, we help keep shade coffee economically viable and preserve increasingly scarce habitat for migratory birds.

To raise awareness in the coffee industry and the public at large about the positive role played by shade coffee in conserving migratory birds, a group of local roasters, retailers and importers joined with Seattle Audubon Society to form the Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign. We define "shade coffee" as coffee grown under a canopy of trees of diverse species that provides viable winter habitat for migratory birds. We welcome other importers, roasters and retailers to become part of the Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign. To join the campaign a company must:

- 1) take steps to identify the source of its coffee
- 2) work with its vendors to ensure a supply of shade coffee
- 3) carry at least one offering that is 100% shade grown
- 4) educate its customers about shade coffee, and
- 5) donate coffee or services at campaign events, contribute to cover printing costs, and maintain regular contact with the campaign.

Current members include 26 importers, roasters and retailers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, British Columbia and northern California. By patronizing these companies and asking for shade-grown coffee, you can use the marketplace to help preserve habitat. For listings of stores in your area that carry shade coffee, contact the Seattle Audubon office at (206) 523-4483 or coffee@seattleaudubon.org. If you want to get your favorite coffeehouse or supplier to carry shade coffee, ask them to join the Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign by contacting Seattle Audubon Society at the above address.

NOTE: The Big Bluestem Audubon has coffee available for purchase. Contact Mary Doud, 296-2178, mfdoud@ames.net

Iowa Audubon Council Meeting

Karl Jungbluth

Everyone is invited. From noon to 5 p.m. on January 23, 1999, the Iowa Audubon Council will again meet at the Boone County Historical Center in downtown Boone. All BBAS members and their guests are invited to join other Iowa Audubon Chapters for a statewide meeting.

Learn about the exciting things happening with Iowa Audubon, and help set priorities for the new Iowa Field Office and its Board of Directors. A light lunch will be served at noon, with business beginning at 1 p.m. Contact Karl or Carmen Jungbluth @ 432-5057 for more information.

News Flash—A nicely-documented Harlan's Hawk was reported by Kevin Healy on 1 Jan 1999 on the Boone County Bird Count. It was observed by Kevin and at least three others along the Des Moines River about 1 mile east of Fraser.

Continued from page 1—Coming Field Trips

January

30—**Tour de Feeders.** Spend a comfortable morning looking at yard feeders in the Ames and Boone areas. Anyone who wants their yard to be included should call Kevin Healy @ 233-5914. Meet at the ISU Design Center parking lot at 0800.

February

7—**Owls and dinner.** A departure from our routine. Meet at the ISU Design Center parking lot at 1300. We will look for owls along the Des Moines River from the Y camp moving south, finishing up at Saylorville around dark. On our way back to Ames dine in style at the Cazador on First Street in Ankeny. Help Kevin Healy celebrate his 45th birthday for the first time. Call Kevin Healy @ 233-5914 for details.

27—**Eagles and gulls at Red Rock Lake.** The title says it all. Our agenda will depend on current conditions and Birdline information. Plan to be gone until mid-afternoon. Bring something to drink and a snack. Meet at the ISU Design Center parking lot at 0730. Call Kevin Healy @ 233-5914 for details.

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 these coupons 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 February 27, 1999



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.

Around Story County

Hank Zaletel

Story County has a new outdoor recreation area. Located three miles south of Brekke's Town and Country store on Highway 30 and two-thirds of a mile west, this 117-acre plot of land lies on the east bend of the Skunk River as it heads south towards Cambridge.

Originally placed in the Wetland Reserve Program after the floods of 1993, the federal government purchased the agricultural value of the land from the farmer. A perpetual easement was placed on the land, the farmer could no longer grow crops on the area. However, he still had to pay property taxes on the land.

The local Pheasants Forever chapter, working with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), purchased the fee title from the owner for an additional \$300 an acre for a total of \$38,000. The land will be owned by the DNR and managed by Story County Conservation Board. This area has not yet been named.

There are new developments at the Colo wetland complex located three miles east of Colo on the Lincoln Highway. Turn right (south) on the gravel road and head south of the railroad tracks. Looking to the west you will notice that a hundred and fifty yard-long dike has been constructed. At the

west level, the dike rises five feet above the ground. Eventually, this new wetland should reach a size of 25 acres. Several times this fall, flocks of American Pipits were seen in this area.

Hallet's Quarry, on the north edge of Ames, has been very productive with many species of waterfowl and gulls appearing. Two Horned Grebes and up to 40 Ring-billed Gulls have been present this past week [mid-December].

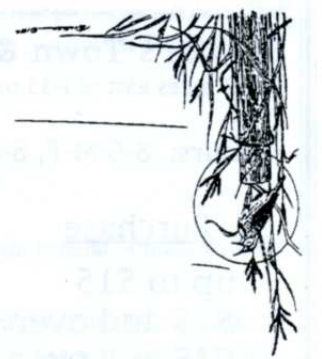
In the first weeks of November, up to five Common Loons were regular. During the big wind storm a month ago, Wolf Oesterreich briefly saw several Sandhill Cranes in the area. Large flocks of Snow Geese were blown east from their normal migration routes along the Missouri.

I cannot stress how important it is to get out and go for a drive or walk every day. The amount of wildlife and birds that you will see will amaze you. Jim Dinsmore's article on local birding is a confirmation of this observation.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE— February 15

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

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