

BIG BLUESTEM FLYER

Newsletter of the Mid-Iowa Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Volume 24, No. 7

March 1990

MONTHLY MEETING

AMERICAN KESTREL PROJECT

Dan Varland

Tuesday, March 20, 7:30 p.m., Room 181, Design Center, ISU, Ames

FIELD TRIPS

WATERFOWL WATCH

Bay's Branch, near Panora in Guthrie County

Saturday, March 24, 7:30 a.m. meet at Design Center Parking Lot

WOODCOCK WATCH

Izaak Walton or Ames High Prairie

Saturday, April 7 or Sunday, April 8.

One-half hour before dusk.

BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS 1989-1990

President: Mike Meetz, 382-2534

Vice-President: Sherry Dragula, 292-4014 Conservation Chair

Secretary: Kay Niyo, 292-5130

Treasurer: Mark Widrlechner, 292-4014

Executive Board

Steve Dinsmore, 292-3152 Field Trips

Andy Fix, 233-4956

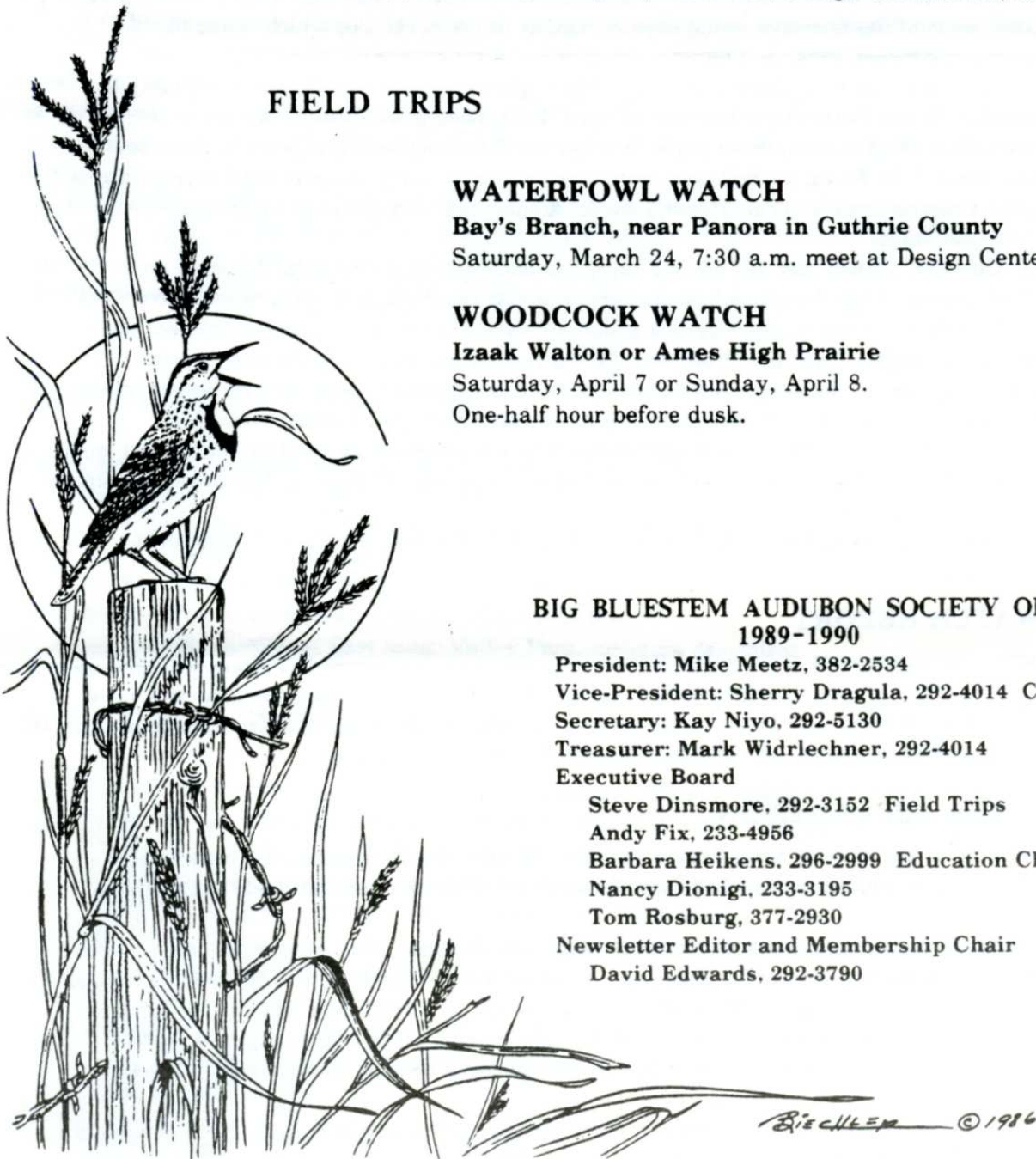
Barbara Heikens, 296-2999 Education Chair

Nancy Dionigi, 233-3195

Tom Rosburg, 377-2930

Newsletter Editor and Membership Chair

David Edwards, 292-3790



ACTION EDITORIAL: AMES HOMEWOOD GOLF COURSE PLAN

On Saturday, March 3 the Ames Parks Department staff held an informative meeting and tour at the Homewood Municipal Golf Course located just north of 20th Street and east of Duff. The Parks Department staff believe that heavy use of the Golf Course justifies major renovations. However, rather than just renovating the course using its existing design, they have approved a Master Plan for the course that recommends the destruction of a substantial part of one of the finest upland oak woodlands in the city.

If implemented, the Master Plan would lengthen the course by establishing new fairways and greens (consisting of monoculture turf) where there is now a diverse, established forest. The Parks Department staff claim that these developments will not have a major impact on the "undeveloped lands" in the park system. But after attending the meeting and tour on Saturday, I was quite disturbed. About nine acres of upland oak forest would be seriously damaged with the felling of large numbers of mature oaks and many younger trees. High quality habitat for wildlife and native spring wildflowers would be lost, and these lands could no longer be appreciated by hikers and other nature lovers. Once established, the grass of the fairways would require regular use of herbicides which would likely drain directly into the Skunk River aquifer.

It is clear that the Ames Park Department lacks the expertise needed to evaluate the quality of our natural lands. To the Parks Department staff open fields, flood-plain forests, ravines that are too steep to be safely hiked, and mature upland forests can all be lumped together as "undeveloped passive nature areas." In Ames, we will face continuing threats to our parklands until appropriately-trained personnel can be hired who can properly evaluate, manage, and serve as an advocate for our few remnants of natural lands.

The Ames City Council will soon be making important decisions concerning the future of the Homewood Golf Course. Until I attended the meeting and saw these plans, I never would have imagined how important it will be for everyone concerned about our natural lands to let city government know that the Golf Course Master Plan is environmentally destructive and in need of serious revision.

The changes proposed at Homewood would not come cheap. It is likely that the city would need to use bonding to finance the project. If the City Council does not reject the changes to the Golf Course proposed in the Master Plan, I very much hope that a referendum on bonding this project would not be combined with any other projects, so that the citizens of Ames can make a clear statement about the future of this beautiful woodland.

Please join me in expressing your concerns to the Ames City Council and Parks Department.

Mark Widrlechner

EAGLE WATCH REPORT

Big Bluestem members went to Lake Red Rock where they saw over 75 Bald Eagles. At Red Rock and at Saylorville, where Steve Dinsmore helped deliver a program on eagles, they also saw nine species of ducks/geese in great numbers, and three kinds of gulls including the Glaucous Gull (very large white gull). All this according to the list provided by Mike Meetz and Diane Hellwig.

NEWSLETTER RECOGNITION

The Newsletter of the West Central Region Audubon Council recently examined a collection of newsletters from its various chapters. Ours was featured prominently and described first with this paragraph.

"One newsletter that stands out, with its crisp, clear, well-designed front page, is the Big Bluestem Flyer, published by the Big Bluestem Audubon Society, Ames, IA. The layout is the same for each issue, with that beautiful drawing of a meadowlark on a fence post framing the lower left corner. Likewise, the message is similar -- monthly meeting, field trips, chapter officers. The information is brief, with lots of white space. If this doesn't invite readers, I don't know what will."

Our thanks must go to Dean Biechler for his picture contribution of some time back, and to the many people who have contributed bits to the present design.

OWL WALK REPORT

It was a calm, crisp Saturday morning (below zero actually). Chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, titmice, and the resident army of crows watched nine owl walkers squeeze through the two locked reactor woods gates like so many tomatoes in a ketchup ad. Mike figured he had eaten too much chocolate on the 14th. This little band was seeking the reported local Saw-whet Owl. Seeing none, the group retired to the vehicles, squeezing back through the first fence. Dave then discovered that the first gate opened with a pushbutton on the inside and nine birders could walk abreast through the opening.

On the way to the Ledges State Park five Horned Larks were seen along with three dozen pheasants. Again the Saw-whet Owls foiled the best efforts of the group as they combed the usual roost trees along the trails, including some not usually checked. Some six or seven bluebirds were seen along the Lost Lake trail by most of the group, and two Red-tailed Hawks were roosting along the river. The group had to take the long north route to Boone to get out of the park because Mike's car couldn't make it up the snow-covered south road. Mike blames the vehicle, but then.....

On to Big Creek State Park. At the north end on the juniper-covered point of land the group again searched every tree for Saw-whet Owls. The usual winter woods birds were seen, and there was a small band of Red-winged Blackbirds, but no Saw-whets. The day began to get exciting, though, when, at the end of the peninsula, several owls began to flush. Long-eared Owls kindly roosted in sight and gave everyone a good look, and at least one Short-eared Owl did a low, slow overflight for some of the group.

The last stop of the day was the cemetery just west of the mile-long bridge over Saylorville Reservoir. Again no Saw-whet Owls in the famous drive-up owl spot, but two more Long-eared Owls appeared. Seven Bald Eagles were seen in trees and on the reservoir ice. Finally, just north of Slater on the gravel bypass, large flocks of Horned Larks seemed to want to commit suicide under the car.

BBAS EARTH DAY ACTIVITIES

On outline of the activities of BBAS for Earthday includes these:

April 17 - BBAS display booth at Memorial Union

- BBAS meeting at 7:70 p.m. Wetlands Restoration: For the Birds?

Dr. James Dinsmore

April 21 - BBAS field trip to Hendrickson's Marsh, Colo Ponds, Kettlesen Marsh

to be set - Prairie restoration project - Mortenson Road

- Tree planting at East River Valley Park, moisture dependent

MIKE'S FEATHER-WEIGHT QUIZ

1. Birds are the only creatures known to have feathers. True or False.
2. On the average, feathers comprise what percentage of a bird's weight?
a. 2-4% b. 6-9% c. 10-13% d. 15-22%
3. Considering all birds, which is not considering as a specialized feather type?
a. down b. powder down c. facial bristles d. tuft dusters
4. Bird produce feathers in large numbers. About how many are found on a hummingbird?
a. 1,000 b. 10,000 c. 15,000 d. 25,000

Answers

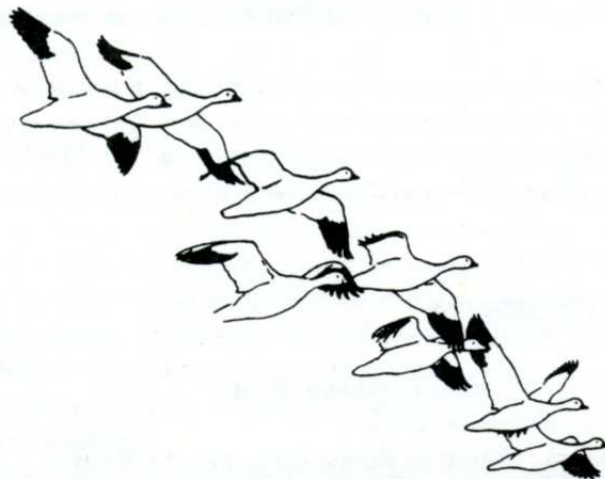
1. True. No healthy bird is without them; no other animals have them.
2. 6-9% in most species
3. tuft dusters
4. 1,000. Some swans produce up to 25,000

CALENDAR FOR THE COMING MONTHS

- April 17 BBAS Meeting. Wetland Restoration: For the Birds? Dr. James Dinsmore, ornithologist.
April 21 BBAS Field Trip. Waterfowl and Shorebirds. Hendrickson's Marsh, Colo ponds.
April 29 BBAS Field Trip. Warblers and Wildflowers. N. W. Marshall County.
May 12 BBAS Field Trip. Warblers and Wildflowers. Brookside Park, Ames.
May 15 BBAS Meeting. Prairie Foray. Tom Rosburg, ISU Botany Department.
June 2 BBAS Field Trip. Annual Birder's Breakfast and Bird Walk. Ledges State Park.

BIRDERS' HOTLINE

319/338-9881 for state-wide sightings.
712/262-5958 for northwest Iowa sightings.



March 1990

Big Bluestem Audubon Society
2308 State Avenue, RR 5
Ames, Iowa 50010

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