

Big Bluestem Audubon Society, Ames, Iowa
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Tom Davis, Vice-Pres. 292-1869
Laura Marek, Sec. 292-9762
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Judy van der Linden, Ed. 232-3450



DECEMBER MEETING

WHEN: Tuesday, Dec. 13, at 7:30 p.m.

WHERE: The basement lounge of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, 2210 Lincoln Way -- across from Memorial Union parking ramp

WHAT: Annual membership Christmas Party. All are welcome to bring 5-8 slides of birds, vacation spots, etc., to show. Several carousel projector trays will be available. Please have slides identified so they can be returned after the program. All are welcome to bring cookies, cake, beverage, etc., for the refreshment table. The staff of St. Thomas would appreciate it if we could park in Memorial Union parking ramp to avoid congestion in other parking lots.

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UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Christmas Bird Count -- The BBAS Christmas Bird Count will be held Saturday, Dec. 17. Group leaders from previous years will be contacted and asked if they will be able to census the area they had previously. Those who are new to our area or who have not been able to participate in past years will be teamed up with group leaders at the Christmas party. At that time, areas to be censused will be discussed, maps, checklists and instructions will be distributed and any questions answered. Tabulation will take place at the YMCA Nature Center in Reactor Woods between 4:15 and 5:00 p.m. If you have questions, call Hank Zaletel (Ames -- work, 239-1379 or Colo--home, 377-2889).

Conservation Committee -- The BBAS Conservation Committee will meet briefly at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 6, to discuss the chapter's 1984 tree planting project and any other business that may arise. The meeting will be held at the van der Linden home, 610 9th St., Ames. Anyone interested in the work of the committee is encouraged to attend.

Education Committee -- The Education Committee meeting planned for Nov. 9 was postponed because the meeting organizer became ill. The committee will (try again to) meet on January 5 at 7:30 p.m. at Judy van der Linden's home, 610 9th St., to choose projects for the year.

RARE BIRD AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

A Sabine's Gull, a native of the Arctic, visited Saylorville Reservoir for nearly ten days -- November 10-20. This was only the third sighting in Iowa of the gull in 90 years, the latest sighting more than 50 years ago. The bird would swoop into the spillway at Saylorville, fish for several minutes and then fly back over the dam, not to be seen for another 30-60 minutes. Birders came from all over the state for this event. If you missed seeing this rare bird, call the Iowa Birdline at 319-622-3353 to be informed of any unusual sightings that have been reported.

"Gull" is a Celtic name that probably passed into English from the Cornish gullan and gwilan. It probably derives in some way from the bird's cry as a "wailer" - the Breton gwel-a means "to weep."

Sabine's Gull is named after Sir Edward Sabine (1788-1883), an astronomer to the Arctic expeditions of Ross and Parry in 1818 and 1819. He published a large body of work surveying magnetic forces over the surface of the globe. His name was given to the gull by his brother Joseph Sabine, a naturalist, horticulturist and a founder of the Linnean Society.

--from Words for Birds: a Lexicon for North American Birds with Biographical Notes by Edward Gruson

Birders who saw the Sabine's Gull included participants in the BBAS field trip led by Jim Murdock on Nov. 12. They also spotted 20 other species of birds, including Pied-billed and Horned grebes, Green-winged Teal, Hooded Mergansers, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls, a Water Pipit and Song and White-throated sparrows. They birded primarily at the south end of Saylorville Lake, the spillway below the dam and in forested areas south of the dam.

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EFFECTIVE POLITICAL ORGANIZING

On Nov. 20 I attended an environmental conference on "Skills Development for Effective Organizing" in Des Moines. The conference was hosted by Americans for the Environment, a non-profit educational institute, and included trainers from the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth and the Clean Water Action Project. The keynote speaker was Lois Gibbs, a citizen activist who was prominent in the Love Canal incident and who is now working for Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste.

The conference was packed with useful information on how to use the electoral process to help candidates with good environmental records. Specifically, the Iowa Environmental Coalition hopes to focus on hazardous waste as a state issue and to make that issue part of the Iowa presidential caucuses.

Our chapter has the option of joining the Coalition -- the Dubuque Audubon chapter has already done so. For more information on that and on the conference, come to the January meeting and/or please contact me, Cindy Hildebrand.

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GARRISON MEETING

Cindy Hildebrand and I (Judy van der Linden) attended a regional Audubon meeting Nov. 19 at Albert Lea, Minn., to discuss the Garrison Diversion Project and the current strife within National Audubon Society. Approximately 35 persons were present, representing Audubon chapters from five states within the North Midwest Region -- Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota and Wisconsin. The meeting was organized by several members from the region. One NAS board member was present.

The first half of the 5-hour meeting was devoted to Garrison, a massive project now under construction to divert water from the Missouri River via dams and canals to irrigate farmland in north and central North Dakota. National Audubon Society (NAS) has led environmentalists' opposition to this project for nearly 10 years, but many persons in the region now feel the society has backed off the fight.

The controversial former vice-president of our region, Richard Madson, was present and showed slides of the project site. I can now understand why Madson, who worked out of North Dakota before he was fired, was so effective organizing local farmers and ranchers against Garrison. His slides and narration were both powerfully emotional and inspiring, without somehow being overdone. After his slide show and more talk, we all agreed that some new organization of North Dakotans opposing Garrison was necessary. (Currently, NAS's regional office is in Minneapolis and all grassroots work in North Dakota has been essentially discontinued.) Exactly who would sponsor and run the organization was not decided.

After a break, during which everyone talked about Garrison anyway, the portion of the meeting devoted to problems within NAS commenced. There was a lot of talk for such a small group. Probably the most impressive words were spoken by Tom Sykes, a member of the Wisconsin Audubon Council. (WAC recently sent a letter to every chapter in the country outlining its grievances with NAS and president Russell Peterson.) Tom struck me as a thoughtful, rational person, not easily given to emotional or illogical conclusions. He reported he had met with the NAS board of directors at its latest meeting and felt positive about the discussions he and board members had concerning problems within NAS. He said the only negative aspect of the meeting came in the person of Russell Peterson, whom he described as openly upset and angry at Tom's presence, rude and arrogant.

Pat Heindrick, the NAS board member who was present, told us that a chapter relations committee had been formed at the national level to improve relations between chapters and the regional and national offices. She urged us to put our specific complaints or comments in writing and send them to regional vice-president Ed Brigham for best results.

Finally, just before 6 p.m., the group approved several loosely-worded resolutions that call for your consideration, as members of NAS. Participants resolved to: 1) ask their chapters if a) there should be an office in North Dakota to fight Garrison b) the office should be sponsored by the Audubon Society, another environmental group or a coalition of these groups c) we are willing as a chapter to contribute money to support such an office; 2) Urge the NAS board in letters to file a suit that has been prepared for several weeks but has not yet gone to court. It would help delay construction of dams and canals, and is referred to as Audubon versus Grove Reclamation and Garrison Water Conservancy District; 3) call for an investigation into problems within NAS, and 4) call for a North Midwest Regional meeting to discuss these problems with NAS board members.

As individuals, you may write the NAS regional vice president or board president Donald O'Brien, c/o the national office, and urge NAS to activate the suit mentioned in resolution #2. For more information about the suit, the Nov. 19 meeting, donating money to fight Garrison or personal problems with all of this conflict, contact Cindy or me.

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TIPS FOR INFLUENCING CONGRESS

Every letter to a legislator counts, and it only takes a few minutes to write. But there are simple ways of making your letters even more effective. The following tips are adapted from the book How You Can Influence Congress: The Complete Handbook for the Citizen Lobbyist, by George Alderson and Everett Sentman.

1. Make the letter a page or less, covering only one subject and including thoughts of your own.

2. Refer to a bill by number and name if possible.
3. Tell the legislator exactly what you want him or her to do and give reasons. Stress how the issue affects people in your district or state, and cite your own experience.
4. Ask the legislator to tell you his or her position on the matter. When a reply comes, write a follow-up letter with your reaction to the reply.
5. Show your awareness of the legislator's past actions. If possible, cite an instance of his or her recent voting on the issue.
6. If possible, use the legislator's own words and positions. (Example: "Your recent speech on wasteful federal spending hit the nail on the head. An example of such waste is the Garrison Diversion project, which will...")

(Ed. note -- another six tips will be published in the January "Flyer")

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