



Big Bluestem Flyer

Newsletter of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society

Volume 36, Number 2

November/December 2000

Upcoming Programs

November 16—Bluebirds and Bluebird Houses

Jaclyn Hill will talk about bluebirds, bluebird habitat, the advantages of different bluebird nest box styles, plus how to attract bluebirds to your yard. Jaclyn lives on a farm 25 miles north of Ames and has been editor of the Iowa Bluebird Directory for many years. She loves bluebirds so much, she'll probably be wearing blue!

December 14—BBAS Holiday for the Birds—No speaker, Story County Conservation Center, McFarland Park, 7:00

p.m. Join with Audubon friends for an evening of good cheer at the Story County Conservation Center, McFarland Park, north Ames. We won't have a speaker, so bring a few slides (10 or less please) and your favorite finger food to share. Drinks will be provided. Also, bring along a bag of birdseed or a few dollars for the feeders at the Conservation Center. It's all for the birds! Please note: This event starts at 7 p.m.

Program meetings are held monthly, September-May (except December) on the third Thursday of the month at 7:30 p.m., Room 2532 Veterinary Medicine Building, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. If you need directions, please see the map on the back of the Events Calendar. If you would like to meet and dine with the speaker and the BBAS board before the monthly meeting. Please call John Snyder, 515-232-8824, to confirm space and location.

Christmas Bird Count: Join the Tradition

The Christmas Bird Count started on Christmas Day, 100 years ago. Today, more than 45,000 people participate nationwide in this all-day, all-volunteer census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest-running database in ornithology, representing trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas.

Up until 1900, people commonly engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns. Whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages at the turn of the last century, and many observers were becoming concerned about the indiscriminate slaughter of wildlife, and concurrent declines in bird populations. On Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the budding Audubon Society, called for an end to the slaughter. He suggested that, rather than shooting birds, people count them instead.

So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Frank M. Chapman and twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that first day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied a total of 90 species on all the counts combined.

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BBAS Web Site:

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

National Audubon Society Web Site:

<http://www.audubon.org>

Iowa Audubon State Director:

Paul Zeph 515-727-4271 pzeph@audubon.org

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

Wildlife Care Clinic—515-294-4900

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.

**Newsletter deadline:
December 15—2 p.m.**



Beyond the Backyard

Karl Jungbluth,
President

Ten Pine Siskins showed up at the feeders today, and autumn is progressing rapidly after the big freeze of early October. Did you notice how quickly but gently the leaves fell as the sun warmed the frosted trees? The first Juncos and White-throated Sparrows are here, and Yellow-rumped Warblers and Kinglets are active around the yard.

In late August, Carmen and I watched with joy as 15 bluebirds took turns splashing in the birdbath. There were adults, youngsters molting to adult plumage and immatures still fully speckled. At times, six were in the water at once, with many others right nearby. What a sight! This summer, I was fortunate to have 28 bluebirds and four Tree Swallows fledge from my boxes down the road. By the way, don't miss Big Bluestem's November 16 program. Jaclyn Hill will be talking about bluebirds!

The first ever Pelican Watch at Saylorville Reservoir turned out to be a big event in September. Over 750 people stopped by, and the people almost outnumbered the pelicans on a very hot day! Big Bluestem members Linda Bystrak and Jim Dinsmore were there helping out, and Jim brought along several students to enlighten the pelican watchers. At 2 p.m., sixty people were on the bluff watching the pelicans through binoculars and scopes, while another 86 listened to Jim "talk pelicans" under the tent!

The Conference and Celebration of the Upper Mississippi River, Iowa Audubon's second annual conference, was a first class event. I wish more Audubon members from our chapter and around Iowa could have attended. Our hosts in Dubuque and in southwest Wisconsin were extremely gracious. There were small boat trips into the backwaters of the Mississippi, pertinent discussions on the Upper Mississippi ecosystem, museum tours and foot-tapping environmental music by Bill Oliver and Glen Waldeck. Look for next year's conference to be in western Iowa!

Don't forget to step out of your backyard this fall and winter. If you've been thinking about trying "birding," but just haven't done it, join a Christmas Bird Count. The camaraderie is as enjoyable as the birds, and that's what Audubon is all about.



Conservation Corner

Guest writer—Bruce Ehresman

Does Congress Really Care About CARA?

Hopefully, by the time you read this article, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA), will have passed in the 106th Congress. If so, there then should be \$350 million dedicated annually in this country toward enhancing and conserving nongame fish and wildlife species. The total bill package would provide the **largest infusion of funds for conservation in U.S. history**, \$44 billion over the next 15 years. Iowa's share of that could be between \$15 and \$16 million each year, of which about \$4.6 million could be used directly for wildlife conservation and restoration.

Iowa's Wildlife Diversity (nongame) Program presently operates on a budget of less than \$250,000 annually. About \$140,000 of this comes from the "Chickadee Checkoff" on the Iowa Income Tax form, where only 1% of Iowa taxpayers contribute. Obviously, Iowa's 400+ nongame species need and deserve more funding than this to put a halt to the steady decline in many species' numbers. Reptiles are presently Iowa's most endangered group, but if current downward trends persist for many bird species, the future does not look good for them either. This trend probably cannot be reversed unless there is more money made available for these species' aid. CARA presently offers the best hope to do that.

Despite the fact that there is huge national support (80% of the American public) for CARA funding, it appears that Congress might not be listening to the majority of Americans who want this funding. Instead of voting on the bill on the Senate floor, a watered down version of CARA has been added to the Interior Appropriations Bill, which has already passed in the House and Senate. The \$350 million for wildlife conservation has been reduced to \$50 million (for one year only, subject to annual appropriation by Congress after that), and there is no guarantee that any state will receive money with this new proposal.

The final hope for salvage of CARA is to include it in a "must-pass" bill or to add key components of CARA as a "stand-alone" in a final omnibus package. If the democratic process does still work as it should, then Congress will pass CARA before it adjourns.

If, for some reason, Congress is still in session and CARA has not passed when you read this article, please contact your congressmen to voice your support for this important bill. For more information on CARA, contact the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies at Tel: (202)624-7890 or email teaming@sso.org, or check the Teaming With Wildlife web site at <http://www.teaming.com>.

Cyber Birdin – Surf'n the Net with Paul and Kevin

Paul Bystrak and
Kevin Healy

Wisconsin is a favorite birding destination for many birders from the Ames area. One of the many ways you could use the Internet to find birding places there is the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas home page (<http://wso.uwgb.edu/wbba/>). The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology is currently undertaking a state-wide atlas project much like the Iowa bird atlas, except on a much more ambitious scale. They won't consider it complete until a grid of blocks covering 1/6 of the state has been surveyed! The site is very easy to navigate. On the left side is a list of functions that you can click on to open new pages. For example, there is a "Species Maps" button. Click on it and a list of the breeding birds of Wisconsin appears. Click on one of them and a map of the state appears, showing which of the approximately 1100 blocks contain that species. If you have some species that you would like to find, say LeConte's sparrow and yellow rail, you can see which part of the state has both of those species breeding and plan your trip accordingly. Or you can obtain species lists for the survey blocks or for any county in the state (click on the "Data Summaries" button). For example, we tried Bayfield county (no idea where it is, chosen at random) and were astonished to find a list of 156 breeding species! There is also a button labeled "Species Images" that allows you to see pictures of most of the species, and another labeled "Casual Form" that allows you to report your sightings. The "Web Links" button connects you to all the other Breeding Bird Atlases on the Internet. So, if you are planning a birding trip to Wisconsin, consider this as one of the sites you can use to make your trip more enjoyable and productive.

A Party With A Purpose

Paul Zeph, Iowa Audubon Executive Director

September was an exciting month for Audubon in Iowa. Not that every month isn't full of Audubon excitement, but this year we launched a new event that reconfirmed why we are working so hard to connect people with wildlife.

September 10 was the first Pelican Watch Festival held at Jester Park on the southwest side of Saylorville Lake. As you know, this spot has become one of the largest fall gathering places in North America for the American White Pelican. Audubon formed a partnership with the Polk County Conservation Board, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the ISU Fisheries and Wildlife Biology Club.

We passed out some flyers and sent out some news releases to invite folks out to celebrate the gathering of these magnificent white birds, and to "Come and Party with the Pelicans!" We had no idea how many people would wander over to see these birds, but in case we had a few hundred folks the Corps rented a nice, large tent for rain or sun, and Jim Dinsmore and students came with an armload of spotting scopes.

As we were setting up for our 11:00 opening, we found that a small crowd had formed by 10:15. By 10:45 the group was growing and wanted to hear about the birds, so Jim jumped in and gave the first of the hourly talks on pelicans. The crowd grew quickly to a hundred, then two hundred, then there too many to keep track of.

Every hour during the pelican talk under the tent, I counted at least 100 people. Folks didn't stay too long, but there was a constant stream of people coming and going -- old people, young couples, and parents with children. There were area residents who had never seen a pelican before, obsessive birdwatchers, and casual backyard bird feeders. A van drove up with a load of young people with mental and physical disabilities. People were looking through a spotting scope for the first time in their lives, and exclaiming when they focused on the birds preening on the mud bars.

Everyone was converging on this one spot to watch and celebrate and learn. To collectively marvel at nature's annual majestic ballet of white with black wingtips, and a beak that can hold more than its belly can! We put up a tent, a few spotting scopes, and nearly 1,000 people came. This is happening at Effigy Mounds for HawkWatch, at DeSoto NWR for waterfowl watching, and anywhere else large numbers of birds gather and travel during their migration.

I think the public is telling us something!

Christmas Bird Count—continued page 1

Our Big Bluestem Audubon Society conducts three Christmas Bird Counts: for Ames, Boone and the Saylorville area. The excitement of the local count has introduced many a novice birder to a lifetime of bird watching enjoyment. Anyone interested can participate. People can join a field party, or participate as a feeder watcher from home. Just contact a count coordinator listed below. After the counting is done, participants gather for a meal and to trade stories of birds sighted during the day.

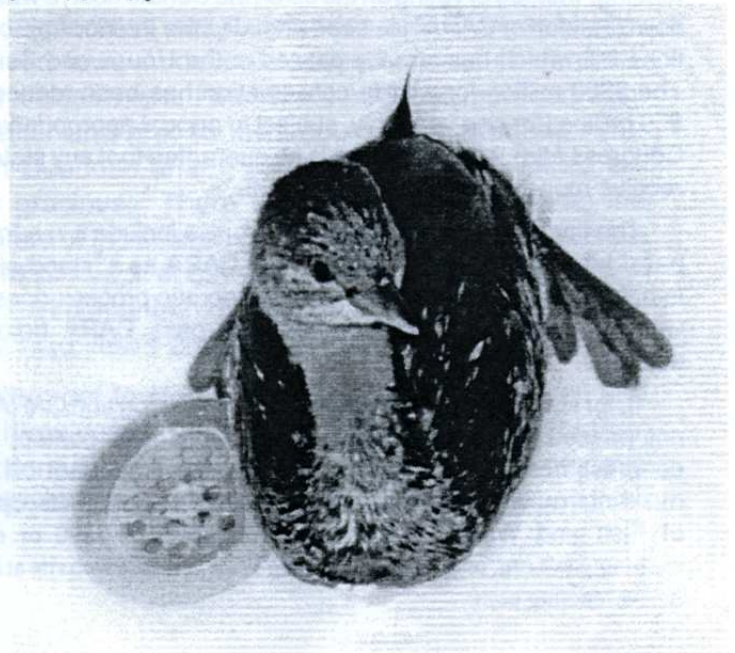
Ames Christmas Bird Count- Saturday, December 16, 2000- Contact Dave Edwards, 515-292-3790, email: dcejce@uswest.net

Saylorville Christmas Bird Count- Sunday, December 17, 2000- Contact Jim Dinsmore, 515-292-3152, email: oldcoot@iastate.edu

Boone County Christmas Bird Count- Saturday, December 30, 2000- Contact Mark Widrechner, 515-233-1532, email: mpwskd@aol.com

Check out the Audubon Society's BirdSource website for all kinds of information on the Christmas Bird Count, including results from last year's count. <http://birdsource.cornell.edu/cbc/>

What was swimming cautiously in Lotus Miller's "urban pond" recently? (see page 5 for details)



Welcome New Members

Kevin Anderson, Jack Bass, Judith Burris, Sandra Cable, Larry Cleppe, John Croker, Louise Dengler, Doug Finnemore, Trish Freeland, Mary Gillette, Lorraine Gowdy, Richard Gustafson W.A. Hagemoser, Ann Hartwig, Mr. & Mrs. Leroy Higgins, David Hoffman, Harold Hunter, Videll Joyce, B.A. Keenan, Robert Kelso, Jodi Krambeer, Kathryn Kramer, Diane Litchfield, Pnina Luban, Edna Madden, Meagen Marquardt, Gary Mattson, Marcia Minear, Marsha Morgan, Joe Mulder, Peggy Murdock, Pam Patterson, Vera Peterson, Pauline Richardson, Betty & Leo Runge, Ron Spillers, Ryan Thompson, Francis Tiffany, M.A. Ukena, Jim Wells

Watch for Banded Pelicans

by Linda Bystrak

Pelicans are still migrating through Iowa, although the largest concentration has passed already. Several BBAS members have noticed banded pelicans, especially at Saylorville this fall. Upon further investigation, Jim Dinsmore was able to discover that the ones with pink wing tags are coming from Marsh Lake, Lac Qui Parle County MN. They were banded June 16, 2000 by Dr. Al Grewe at St. Cloud State University. If you see a tag number, please notify Jim Dinsmore at Iowa State University, (515-294-7669 or oldcoot@iastate.edu).

He also discovered that Eric Nelson from MN banded over 200 pelicans on the Mississippi this summer. The birds were banded after they were 7 weeks old and have large size cattle ear tags on them (*color not mentioned). Also banded in the same area were young Ring-billed Gulls, Great Egrets, Double-crested Cormorants, and Great Blue Herons. Birds are being tagged to determine their origin. If anyone sees these birds, they should notify Eric Nelson, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge at 51 East 4th Street, Room 101, Winona MN 55987 or call (507-494-6234).

Jane Clark reports there is a third group of banded pelicans banded in July 2000 at a research center in ND. They banded about 3,000 pre-fledged White Pelicans with a BRD metal band on one leg and a color band (green with white codes) on the other. Observers are asked to record which leg has the color band, the color, and if possible the alphanumeric code. Please send observations to Tommy King, USDA, NWRC, Mississippi field Station, P. O. Drawer 6099, MS State U., MS 39762 (662-325-8314 or Tommy.King@usda.gov).

Volunteers Needed for the Tour de Feeders—February 3, 2001

BBAS is looking for volunteers who would be interested in being a stop on the Tour de Feeder field trip scheduled for 3 February 2001. This would be a nice opportunity to share your backyard birding views and some socializing with your fellow birders. If you would like to be included on the Tour or would like additional information, please call or e-mail Jeff Nichols (515-292-752, jnichols1961@hotmail.com) or Karl Jungbluth (515-432-5057, weatherbird@opencominc.com).

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The Miller's Urban Pond

Lotus Miller

In early October, as Brian Richardson was driving up the lane to his mother's farm just south of Story City, he almost ran over a strange bird stumbling along the ruts in the road. He stopped and picked it up to avoid hitting it and took it to the house of his mother, Arris Richardson. She saw a stocky, pigeon-sized, duck-shaped bird with legs attached to the rear of its body, so it could not really walk on land but rather waddled or flapped. Arris kept it in a bird cage overnight, where it kept her awake all night by trying to escape.

She decided to take it to Lotus and Wilmer Miller's to identify. They looked at the brownish, pointed-tailed bird with a "chicken" bill and unwebbed feet with lobes on the toes and looked in the bird book under "grebes." Although it was missing the typical black mark on the bill and under the chin, they decided it was a pied-billed grebe already in winter plumage, perhaps a juvenile. Had it scrambled up from a dry creekbed looking for water?

Rebecca Shivers came to the rescue. She and Lotus took the grebe to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic at the Veterinary School. The wildlife caretaker there promised to give feed and water to it for the night. He said he would release it on a lake the next morning together with some wood ducks. Happy ending, we hope.



Notes From the Field Trips

2 September - Field trip to Otter Creek Marsh, Wolf Oesterreich and Jeff Nichols, Trip Leaders.

Nine people gathered in a thick morning fog to travel to Otter Creek Marsh, in Tama County. After a short discussion of the weather and travel conditions, the group decided instead to travel to Jester Park Campground #4 at Saylorville Reservoir to see the migrating American White Pelicans. The first stop en route was Sandpiper Beach. There we saw Least Sandpipers and a Willet. Carol Berrier then led us to a portion of the Bluebird Trail she maintains. Many Bluebird adults and fledglings of various ages were in the surrounding trees and fields. Next we visited the Polk City Wildlife Area. Notable birds observed were a large number of White Pelicans and a Blackburnian Warbler. Finally we headed for Jester Park Campground. Thousands of migrating pelicans were observed on the mudflats and waters below the campground, in addition to numerous shorebirds (Pectoral and Least Sandpipers and an American Golden Plover), gulls (one Franklin's and many Ring-billed), many Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, and a solitary Cattle Egret. Despite the less than ideal observing conditions (lingering fog), the pelicans were a magnificent sight. We were also able to observe one of the five Osprey released as part of the Osprey Introduction Project in a tree near the hack tower. The total species count for the day was 51.

10 September - Pelican Watch at Saylorville Reservoir, Jeff Nichols, Trip Leader.

This Big Bluestem Field Trip was scheduled to coincide with the Saylorville Lake Pelican Festival, held at the Jester Park Campground. The event was co-sponsored by Iowa Audubon, Polk County Conservation Board, and the US Army Corp of Engineers. Six people met at Wild Birds Unlimited in Ames to carpool to the event. Many pelicans were still present, although considerably fewer in number than were observed on the previous week's field trip. Despite the high temperatures and humidity, the public turnout was excellent. Participants were treated to great views of the pelicans as well as the fledgling Osprey near its hack tower. Spotting scopes were provided by Big Bluestem Audubon and others. In addition, Jim Dinsmore and his

graduate students gave informative and entertaining presentations on pelicans. Several well-designed visual displays also helped educate the participants about pelicans, osprey, and wildlife conservation issues. Other notable birds observed during the day were a Bald Eagle, a Peregrine Falcon hunting shorebirds, a Least Tern, numerous Caspian Terns, and Franklin's and Ring-billed Gulls. By 2:00 in the afternoon, the total species count was 23.

14 October - Hawk Watch on the Des Moines River, Kevin Healey, Trip Leader.

Thirteen people braved the chilly October weather to watch hawks flying down the Des Moines River Valley. Our vantage point was west of Boone, Iowa just north of the Union Pacific (Kate Shelley) high bridge. We saw our first snow of the season and a Turkey Vulture within 30 minutes of one another. Other sightings of interest were six Sharp-shinned hawks, eighteen Red-tailed Hawks, two Osprey, three Bald Eagles and a late Broad-winged Hawk. We heard an Eastern Towhee and saw Chimney Swifts.

Bird Drop-ins

*Sightings by
BBAS Members*

Karl Jungbluth—
October 15, 2000



In the backyard tonight we had an immature White-crowned and immature Harris' Sparrow, plus a nice male Spotted Towhee. Down by the creek, there were lots of Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Great Horned Owls hooting.

Saturday evening, at the end of the road to the south, there were several dozen Swamp Sparrows and Bluebirds, and a stealthy Orange-crowned Warbler and a House Wren. Lot's of Yellow-rumped Warblers too. The sparrows were in a large plot (20+ acres?) seeded last fall by the DNR in prairie species. It is chock full of foxtail right now, so should be good for sparrows all fall. Problem is, they pop up, and they dive down, and your shoes get full of itchy seeds.

Wild Birds Unlimited



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Membership Incentive- Ask a Friend to Join BBAS!

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society has been asked by the National Audubon Society to participate in a special Autumn Membership Drive. BBAS will receive \$30 for each new member we recruit between now and the end of the year, which is considerably more than the usual rebate that our Chapter receives for each newly recruited member. There will be special membership sign-up cards for this membership drive. They can be obtained, along with our regular membership brochures, from Mark Widrlechner, BBAS Membership Chair (515-233-1532). This is a great opportunity to bring in new members to our group and give us an extra financial boost. Let Mark know if you'd like some sign-up cards or know of people who would like to join us.

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; nature education; and *Audubon Adventures*, a bimonthly elementary classroom teaching program used in central Iowa schools.



Clip and Join

Don't forget gift memberships!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

New member of the National Audubon Society (receive the *Audubon* magazine, the *Big Bluestem Flyer*, membership card)—\$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 Widrlechner, 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.

Don't have a speaker, so bring a few slides (10 or less please) and your favorite finger food to share. Drinks will be provided. Also, bring along a bag of birdseed or a few dollars for the feeders at the Conservation Center. It's all for the birds! Please note: This event starts at 7 p.m.

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Christmas Bird from Toronto, in or near the Those original species on all

Field Trips

Meet at the Wild Birds Unlimited at 8:00 a.m., unless otherwise noted.

November

11—Saylorville Lake to view migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. Visit the Iowa Audubon Office. Trip leader: Hank Zalatel (515-382-5427).

December

2—Road trip to DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge (western Iowa) to view migrating Snow Geese and other waterfowl. Visit Bertrand steamboat exhibit and wildlife museum. Carpool or meet at Refuge Visitor Center at 8:00 a.m. Trip leaders: Wolf Oesterreich (515-232-3285) and Jeff Nichols (515-292-7521).

16—Ames Christmas Bird Count. Contact Dave Edwards (515-292-3790) for details.

17—Saylorville Christmas Bird Count. contact Jim or Steve Dinsmore (515-292-3152) for details.

30—Boone Christmas Bird Count. Contact Mark Widrechner (515-233-1532) for details.

January

6 - State Forest Nursery. Meet at 0800 in parking lot behind Wild Birds Unlimited. From WBU, we'll drive to the Nursery located in south Ames to look for Pine Siskins, crossbills, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and owls. Trip Leader: Jeff Nichols (292-7521).

Big Bluestem Flyer

Rebecca A. Shivvers, Editor

Big Bluestem Audubon Society

2380 220th Street

Boone, Iowa 50036

We welcome new members!



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in the backyard tonight we had an immature White-crowned and immature Harris' Sparrow, plus a nice male Spotted Towhee. Down by the creek, there were lots of Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Great Horned Owls hooting.

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