



# Big Bluestem Flyer

Big Bluestem Audubon Society Newsletter

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

Volume 35 Number 3

January/February 2000

Featured Speaker—January 20 meeting: *Dr. Donald R. Lewis, "What's bugging birders?"*



The entomological fauna that surrounds bird watchers might be as interesting as the birds if you just knew more about them. And, of course, there are some insects (and their arachnid relatives, spiders and ticks) that may cause you problems. ISU Extension Entomologist Donald Lewis will discuss a little of both kinds and answer any of your bug-related questions.

Featured Speaker—February 17 meeting, *Carl Kurtz, "Arrowhead Country—Northeast Minnesota"*

Carl has been going up to northeaster Minnesota since 1967 to poke around and canoe in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. He will show slides that illustrate its broad range of habitats, critters, and special places from the Lake Superior shoreline to the Canadian border. He is a professional photographer from St. Anthony, Iowa.

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS) meetings are held monthly, September–May on the third Thursday of the month (except December and March) 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

*Jon Bahrenfus, Field Trip Chair*

### January

**22–Saylorville Lake.** Will look for gulls, eagles, and owls and visit the Iowa Audubon Office if it is open. Meet at the ISU Design Center west parking lot at 0800 to car pool. Trip Leader—Jon Bahrenfus (432-3396).

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- Christmas Bird Counts

**Bird Term of the Month:** *Piscivorous*—Fish-eating birds. *The Osprey is piscivorous.* [from: birdsource.com]





## View from the Altamont Moraine

Kay Niyo, President

I hope you were able to participate in Audubon Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) in your area. I regret that for the first time, I missed the Central Iowa CBCs. But I had a variety of birding experiences in other

parts of the nation that were very special. I spent a week in Boise, Idaho and saw lots of good birds including a Swainson's Hawk. Coincidentally, Idaho has the first state record Yellow-billed Loon on the American Falls Reservoir. We watched the Winter Solstice moon arise over the Snake River after climbing to the top of the Bruneau Sand Dunes in southwestern Idaho. Coyotes were calling across the dunes and Canada Geese were rising off the water to join circling flocks heading south in the moonlight.

On Christmas Day, I flew to Maryland to participate in four Maryland CBCs with Bystraks and their friends. I now understand the "pull" for them at this time of year to the eastern Maryland shore. The variety of habitat and birds is amazing and the history of the area is fascinating. I was told that the Chesapeake Bay has well over 4,000 miles of shore line. I saw lots of it, some by canoe! Before crossing over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge near Annapolis, we spent the 26th on the Bowie CBC walking the Little Patuxent River, which runs through Fort Meade adjoining Patuxent Wildlife Research Center. We were startled when we flushed six American Woodcocks in the bottom land. I was amazed that several birders on all the counts reported hearing their courtship flight display—in December! That night we slept in an old farmhouse at Irish Grove, a 1,500 acre preserve near Rumbly Point overlooking the Pocomoke Sound and Chesapeake Bay that is owned by the Maryland Ornithological Society. We spent the day in a canoe traversing the marsh with occasional stops at the few-acre Loblolly Pine, Swamp Oak, and Red Cedar groves that dot the marsh. Our lunch every day was a can of soup heated on a backpacking stove! Special birds were Clapper, Virginia, and King Rails; Carolina, Sedge, and Marsh Wrens; Saltmarsh and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows; Short-eared Owls; and very rare to that area, the LeConte's Sparrow. Unofficial count was 93 species. On the 28th, our territory for the Ocean City count was the northern portion of Assateague Island National Seashore with its sand dunes, dune grasses, few Black Pines, and shrubs. Great finds were 16 Red Crossbills, Orange-crowned Warbler, Northern Saw-whet Owls, Willets, Sanderlings, Little Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Clay-colored Sparrow, Long-billed Dowitchers, Eurasian Wigeons, and of course, thousands of waterfowl including Northern Gannets, Eiders, Grebes, and Red-throated and Common Loons. Unofficial count was 157 species. On to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge on

the 29th where the highlight of my day was the opportunity to bird alone for 3 hours with Chan Robbins, author of *Birds of North America*! He is the compiler for that count and is loved by all who know him. Highlights were Golden Eagle, Eurasian Wigeon, Peregrine, Barn and Short-eared Owls, Hermit Thrushes, White-crowned and Vesper Sparrows, Seaside Sparrow, Pine Warbler (Yellow), and Palm Warblers. Unofficial count was 115 species. Flocks of hundreds of Myrtle Warblers were common on all of the counts. So if you are ever birding with Paul Bystrak in the spring in Iowa and you hear him say "Just another Myrtle," you will understand why! Compilation dinners are much like ours except each party calls out the number of each species. That takes more time, but it does provide a feel for the population numbers in the different territories. It was a great experience and an opportunity to meet lots of excellent birders. If you are traveling next year, I encourage you to check on the opportunity to participate in a CBC in that area.

Check the enclosed schedule and join us for some really exciting speakers and trips this spring!

## Hallett's Quarry Flash

Thanks to the Ames City Council for rejecting the developer's proposal and for instructing the city staff to investigate ways to protect and enhance the Hallett's Quarry water supply and the surrounding land! BBAS and other citizens will be working with the city to assist in this important task.

### Big Bluestem Audubon Society Officers and Committees

#### Officers:

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

#### Board Members:

- Carol Berrier 965-8242
- Mike Freiberg 233-8213 [trogon70@hotmail.com](mailto:trogon70@hotmail.com)
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- Stuart Huntington 296-0248 [x1huntin@exnet.iastate.edu](mailto:x1huntin@exnet.iastate.edu)
- John Pohlman 232-6816

#### Committee Chairs:

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

#### BBAS Web Site:

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

#### National Audubon Society Web Site:

<http://www.audubon.org>

#### Iowa Audubon State Director:

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

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



## Bird Drop-ins

Sightings by  
BBAS Members



**November 13**—*Karl Jungbluth*. Even though it is still fall, we had a Yellow-rumped Warbler in our yard near Boone this Saturday.

**November 20**—*Paul Bystrak and Kay Niyo*. They made a circular tour of the Saylorville Lake Area (Polk County) this afternoon. At Sandpiper Beach highlights were a raft of Ring-necked Ducks and a good flock of sparrows, including Harris', Fox, Song, and Tree. At the Big Creek Wildlife Refuge, the highlights were 54 Hooded Mergansers, 10 Great Blue Herons, a raft of Lesser Scaup, 2 Great-tailed Grackles, and a Common Snipe. At the Visitor's Center, they added a Tufted Titmouse and Northern Flicker. At the dam and spillway, the highlights were Bald Eagle, Common Merganser, and Pied-billed Grebe. At Jester Park, the best birds were 5 White Pelicans, Killdeers, a Harrier, and large numbers of Bonaparte's Gulls. At Jester Park Drive on the east side, they had 2 Winter Wrens and a Screech Owl. At Big Creek State Park they saw a Swamp Sparrow, Belted Kingfisher, and Red-winged Blackbird. There were large rafts of ducks at several places in the middle of the lake, but even with good light and good scopes, they could only identify a few of them (mostly Buffleheads). They did not find the previously reported Red-throated Loons. Fifty-three species was not bad for an afternoon in late November.

**November 26**—*Kay Niyo, Kevin Healy, Wolf Osterreich, and Mike Frieberg*. If you want a great trip, go to Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge in NW Missouri near Mound City, Missouri. It is a four-hour drive from Ames. During the hours they were there, 0830–1500, they saw about 150,000 Snow Geese, some Canada Geese, 55,000 ducks, and many Bald Eagles and the counts continued to increase. Because of the warm weather this fall, the waterfowl were really late in arriving. For much of the morning, there were flights of additional geese coming in from the north and northwest as far as you could see with binoculars and scopes! It is a phenomenal refuge for viewing waterfowl because you are 25–50 feet away from thousands of geese and ducks. It is really an awesome sight when eagles fly over and all 150,000 geese rise up in mass right above you. They ended up with 49 species for the day.

**December 1**—*Kevin Healy*. At 1500 this afternoon, he saw a winter plumage Yellow-billed Loon at Little Wall Lake. The bird was about twenty yards off the boat lift area on the south end of the lake. The bird had a dirty brown color to its head and neck with white on the face and a dark spot in the auricular area. The head showed frontal bossing and the bill was held slightly upturned with a convex ventral surface to the mandibular portion of the bill. This is a second state record.

(Continued on page 5)



## Conservation Corner

*Linda Bystrak,*  
Conservation Chair

### Letter From the Governor's Office regarding Eddyville Dunes

*The following letter from Governor Vilsack was recently sent to a member of the Des Moines Audubon club, in response to the Sierra Club's Eddyville Dunes postcard. Since many members of our Big Bluestem Audubon chapter sent the same postcard and received no response, we thought that you might be interested in the latest DOT position. We hope that this response will not discourage the membership from continuing to voice concerns regarding this project.*

December 7, 1999

On November 19, 1999, representatives of the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club presented my office with a number of postcards pertaining to the Eddyville Bypass. Your name was among those included on the postcards.

The Eddyville bypass is a key link in the four-lane Burlington-to-Des Moines highway corridor. This southeast Iowa corridor is a high priority transportation facility intended to stimulate and support commercial and industrial development and, accordingly, regional and state economic growth.

The state of Iowa, which includes the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT), is committed to finding ways to balance Iowa's need for continued economic growth with the need to preserve and protect the environment.

Regarding the Eddyville bypass, measures have been taken to preserve adjacent resources and mitigate unavoidable losses so that the most critical elements of the sand dunes and wetland resources at Eddyville are protected. The route selected ensures protection and preservation of the ornate box turtles and pale green orchids, along with other important plants and animals in the area.

The Eddyville bypass segment of U.S. 63 has been under development since 1989. Since then, a considerable amount of time has been spent conducting the environmental impact assessments and studies of the flora and fauna in the area.

The environmental impact assessment process and subsequent statement, has objectively evaluated numerous alternatives as required by law. Several possible route locations were considered for this project. In fact, five possible route alternatives were included in the location public hearings. Those routes included a no-build alternative, as well as a west, far east, near east and revised near east bypass of Eddyville.

(Continued on page 6)





## Notes From the Field

### Trip Leaders

#### October 30—Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge

Fourteen birders enjoyed a trip to Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County. Barry Christensen, refuge manager, and Erv Klaas provided us with a history of the refuge and future plans for enhancement and additional land acquisition. Barry led us on a tour of the closed portion of the refuge where we saw Tundra Swans and other waterfowl. We also had good looks at several sparrow spp. and visited the nearby Maynard Reese Slough.

#### November 13—Yellow Banks County Park and Des Moines River Valley near Runnells and Swan.

Nine members enjoyed an unusually warm and sunny day for the middle of November; by mid-day it reached 80°F. We started with a tour of the savanna restoration at Yellow Banks and then birded the lower part of the park along the Des Moines River where we saw Tufted Titmouse, Purple Finch, and heard a Pine Siskin. We then drove down river past Runnells to the mud flats and ponds at the upper end of the Red Rock Reservoir, where we saw large numbers of gulls, ducks, and geese along with at least four Bald Eagles, a Harrier, Red-tailed Hawks, and a Great Horned Owl.

## Book Review

### Kevin Healy

*Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds* by Scott Weidensaul. North Point Press, New York. 373 pp., bib., index. 1999

Scott Weidensaul is a nature author and bird bander. In *Living on the Wind* he brings his expertise to bear in an absorbing description of avian migration. His narrative style is sufficiently entertaining that the book can be read straight though as an anthology, yet well enough grounded in field research to be a valuable educational resource. Shore birds figure prominently in his discussion, providing food for thought in July and August while examining molting peeps through a spotting scope. Six to eight weeks after the summer solstice, the declining amount of daylight (among other possible cues) triggers an urge to travel. Moving south, they find glacial kettles which are beginning to dry down in the height of summer, revealing fresh feeding grounds and an energy resource to fuel their pursuit of sunlight. Most of the birds he discusses are New World species, but he includes some information on the effects of natural selection on European Blackcaps. He also describes some basic research conducted in Germany in the mid-twentieth century. Read this book and you'll be able to drop the word *zugenruhe* in casual conversation, impressing your friends and confounding rival birders.

## The Trouble with Good Leaders

Paul Zeph

Iowa Audubon Executive Director

We currently have state officials who are working hard to improve the quality of Iowa's natural environment. In addition to the biological reasons why this makes sense, it also makes economic sense. Iowa and its communities cannot attract businesses (and their employees) if the water is fouled and the air is dirty.

So, unlike the previous administration, Governor Vilsack and DNR Director Johnson are working to improve state spending on environmental programs and to increase agency activities for environmental protection, environmental education, and pollution prevention. The Governor has proclaimed "Earth Year 2000" for Iowa, and is pushing for the full \$20 million funding for the REAP program. Increased monitoring and cleanup of our waterways is a high priority for this administration, along with adding more "wildness" and biodiversity to Iowa's landscape.

The trouble with having good environmental leaders, however, is that we feel our interests are being looked after, and we go about other business. We're not outraged by the latest budgetary buffoonery. We're not angered by a lack of environmental priorities. We're not infuriated from being ignored. Conservation-minded citizens stop worrying, stop writing, stop calling, and stop e-mailing.

NEWSFLASH! Politicians who have strong environmental values need constant support from their constituents so they can work and vote for environmental protection.

SECOND NEWSFLASH! Opponents to environmental protection don't go away when the leaders are pro-environment. In fact, they work even harder than before to push through anti-environmental legislation.

The 2000 legislative session starts January 10. There will be heated battles over REAP funding, the bottle bill, and many other environmental issues. We all must contact our state Senators and Representatives and communicate our views on any proposed legislation that we care about - regardless of whether we think there are officials looking out for our interests. (In most cases, we also need to push for stronger measures than are being proposed.) The influences of the Governor and DNR Director on the State Assembly are small and will ultimately be meaningless without our voices to back them up.

The environmental future of Iowa is too important to leave up to others to decide. Keep worrying, keep writing, keep calling, and keep e-mailing. And do it now!



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

By Paul Bystrak and Kevin Healy



Some of us are old enough to remember how news of rare bird sightings was spread in the "old" days—a friend called you, if you were lucky! If you weren't lucky, you read about it long after the fact, or never heard about it at all. Fortunately, the extraordinary connectivity of the Internet offers an easy new solution to this old problem: the list server.

A list server is a computer program set up to receive and send out messages. The way it works is that interested people "subscribe" to the list server, that is, they give it their e-mail address. Anyone who sees a rare bird can post a message about it on the list server, which then automatically sends it out to all the other subscribers. The sender gets a receipt saying that his message has been sent to the other subscribers and the others receive the message the next time they check their e-mail. Although rare bird sightings make up most of the list server messages, you are likely to find just about anything that pertains to birds. It's also a great way to make a Request For Information (RFI) about some aspect of birding.

Iowa has a birding list server called Iowa Birds. To subscribe, send an e-mail to:

[LISTSERV@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG](mailto:LISTSERV@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG) with the message SUBSCRIBE IA-BIRD Your Name. (replace "Your Name" with your name, of course) You will receive a reply shortly afterwards that will take you through some steps to confirm your subscription. Once you are a subscriber, I suggest creating an address in your e-mail address book called IA BIRDS or something like that, and give it the Internet address of [IA-BIRD@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG](mailto:IA-BIRD@LIST.AUDUBON.ORG). Then when you want to post something, or join in an ongoing discussion, you can address an e-mail to IA BIRDS and it will automatically be sent to the other 130 interested subscribers. As the instructions indicate, you can also choose to receive the postings in a digest mode, instead of real time, which means that you are sent all the postings for one day condensed into one message. This isn't necessary with Iowa Birds, since Jim Fuller routinely summarizes the rare bird sightings and sends his summaries to the list server. You can just delete everything but his if you don't like a lot of e-mail, and all you will miss are the messages about ordinary birds, as well as the good-natured camaraderie of an excellent list server.

While there are few formal rules on most list servers, there is some general etiquette that is observed. Messages should be brief, pertinent to the purposes of the group, and relevant to everyone in general and not one person in particular. Politeness is a good idea too—remember that

*Continued from page 3—Bird Drop-Ins*

**December 11—Karl Jungbluth.** Karl saw a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets and a Winter Wren along the upper reaches of Pease Creek. Plus, a couple of Sharp-shinned Hawks were doing flybys at their feeders. The Saw-whet Owl was in the traditional location along the Lost Lake Trail in the park. It was just uphill (east) from the owl box which is easily visible from the trail.

**December 13—Mike Overton.** At the Ledges State Park in Boone County, he saw the adult Northern Saw-whet Owl reported by Karl Jungbluth in a Eastern Red Cedar grove along the Lost Lake Nature Trail. Other birds of interest included adult Golden Eagle, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Shrike, Winter Wrens, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Swamp Sparrows in the weeds along the river and the creek.

**December 13—Hank Zaletel.** The Yellow-billed Loon has moved to Story County on Hallett's Quarry north of Ames. It was found on the north pond. There was also a Pied-billed Grebe which was a Story County late date record by 3 weeks. On Sunday at Colo Ponds there was a solitary Killdeer. At Hendrickson Marsh, located five miles south of highway 30 on the Marshall-Story County line, there were 8 Meadowlarks, 3 Red-winged Blackbirds, and 1 Snipe. Not bad for this time of year.

**December 17—Kay Niyo.** The Yellow-billed Loon is still on the south pond at Hallett's Quarry. Hank Zaletel has seen it there every noon since it arrived earlier in the week. It is hanging out at the SW corner of that pond with a pair of Common Goldeneye. There is an Old Squaw male in winter plumage that is near 3 American Coots in the same vicinity. Wolf Oesterreich also saw 9 Hooded Mergs there this morning and a Northern Shrike is flying from tree to tree on the west and south side of the south pond.

## Big Bluestem Offers Opportunity for Ames Teachers

Big Bluestem is pleased to offer two \$450 scholarships to be awarded to two Ames teachers to attend a one-week environmental education workshop at the Audubon Center of the North Woods in east central Minnesota, halfway between Duluth and Minneapolis. The workshop will be held July 17-21, 2000. Graduate credits are available. The center is an accredited K-12 school, a college field campus, and a residential environmental learning center. Applications are being distributed to the Ames schools in January. Application deadline is March 15, 2000.

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## BBAS Sponsors 14 Audubon Adventures Classrooms

Karl Jungbluth

Thanks to generous support from our members, and a successful 1999 Birdathon, our chapter is providing *Audubon Adventures* learning material to 14 local classrooms. If you have a 4th or 5th grader at one of these schools, we'd like to hear how *Audubon Adventures* is being used. Or, if you'd like to check in on your neighborhood school, contact Carol and Galin Berrier, Education Co-chairs.

- Roland-Story Community School District
- Central Elementary, Nevada
- Ballard West Community School, Slater
- Ballard East Community School, Cambridge
- Ames Christian Elementary
- Colo-Nesco Community Middle School, Zeoring
- Kate Mitchell Elementary, Ames
- Edwards School, Ames
- Fellows Elementary School, Ames
- Meeker School, Ames
- Sawyer Elementary School, Ames
- Howe Elementary, Ogden
- Franklin Elementary, Boone
- United Community School, Boone County

*Continued from page 5—Cyber Birding . . . .*

hundreds of people will receive your message! *Be careful when replying to an individual message posted in the list. If you reply "To the list" your message will be distributed to everyone on the list. Depending on the nature of your message, this may or may not be a good idea.* Also remember that the Internet is basically unfettered by time and space; your message could be anywhere in the world in seconds, and could come back to haunt you years later! And you will never know everyone who sees it....

There are list servers for just about every geography. In this country, they are usually on a statewide level, but specialized ones exist for other purposes. If you are planning a trip to some other state, you can subscribe to their list server and find out what is going on in the birding world there. You can even send an RFI about birds in the area where you will be traveling, and usually you will get a prompt and helpful response.

The Iowa Birds list server is an ideal way for birders in Iowa to keep in touch with each other. If you aren't already a subscriber, we suggest that you try it.

*Continued from page 3—Conservation Corner*

Each of these alternatives was thoroughly and objectively evaluated. The "revised near east alternative" was selected as the preferred alternative. This alignment was accepted by the Corps of Engineers, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and area county conservation boards.

In July 1998, the Iowa Transportation Commission approved the revised near east route as the location for the Eddyville bypass. In rendering their decision, the Transportation Commission balanced a wide variety of input, reviewed the impact assessments and considered overall public interest. They considered the impacts to historical properties, archaeological sites threatened and endangered species, farmland, property, public safety, noise, corridor continuity, and economic development.

The state of Iowa shares your concerns for conservation of our state's natural areas and believes that the revised near east route for the Eddyville bypass remains the best alternative to address those concerns.

Best Regards,  
Thomas J. Vilsack, Governor  
Sally J. Pederson, Lieutenant Governor

## MORTENSEN MOUNDS UPDATE

Jeanne Edwards

Mortensen Mounds is lookin' good! After a few years of "low maintenance," it needed help. I have made it my retirement project—my gift to Big Bluestem and to my community. (The Mounds are located on the north side of Mortensen Road, at the intersection with Ash Avenue, just south of the Towers Dorms.) Once a month, I pick up trash—the wind blows a vast array of items (including parking tickets!!!), all caught by the grasses.

Last Spring I contacted the City of Ames (the Mounds are city-owned land) and requested they cut down the extra, non-native trees. Mark Widrlechner helped to identify species. Of the twelve trees, only the oaks and hackberry remain.

After calling Joe Kooiker, director of the Story County Roadside Management Program, for ideas to manage the remaining plants of Mortensen Mounds, we worked out the following plan: Burn every Spring for three years in a row (to curb Siberian elm). Burn #1 (conducted by Joe and his crew) was completed in May. Chemical treatment of woody plants (conducted by Joe and his crew). Removal of plants and/or seedheads of thistles, dock, wild parsnip, and ragweed. I completed three intensive "removals" of the entire area during the Summer. Planting seeds of native forbes. I completed this planting at the end of November, using seed I collected plus some contributed by Joe.

After getting permission from Big Bluestem to look into the idea of erecting a sign identifying the Mounds, I met with Matt Pepper, the superintendent of Ames parks maintenance. Matt took a sketch of the sign to the city for approval and then we met at Mortensen Mounds to arrange for its placement. (This sign will be constructed by D. Edwards, of heavy wooden posts and timbers, and installed on Mortensen Avenue in the Spring, after Burn #2.)

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# Big Bluestem Audubon Society Events Calendar—Spring 2000

All events are free and open to the public.

- Monthly general meetings are held Thursday evenings in Room 2532, Veterinary Medicine Building, Iowa State University, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

## January

- 20—General Meeting: Dr. Donald Lewis, Extension Entomologist at ISU. "What's bugging birders?," 7:30 p.m.
- 22—Saylorville Lake for gulls, eagles, and owls and visit the Iowa Audubon Office (if open). Meet at the ISU Design Center west parking lot at 0800 to carpool. Trip leader: Jon Bahrenfus (432-3396).

## February

- 5—Tour de Feeders at the homes of Kevin and Rosanne Healy and Karl and Carmen Jungbluth. Meet at the ISU Design Center west parking lot at 0800 to car pool. Trip leader: Kay Niyo (233-8803).
- 17—General Meeting: Carl Kurtz, Prof. photographer, St. Anthony, Iowa. "Arrowhead Country—Northeast Minnesota," 7:30 p.m.
- 18-21—Great Backyard Bird Count. Help the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology define the status of birds for a new millennium! Log on to the BirdSource website at <<http://birdsource.org>> and click on the Great Backyard Bird Count button to report your sightings.
- 26—Red Rock Reservoir to look for Bald Eagles and gulls. Meet at the Ballard Plaza on Highway 69 in Huxley at 0800 to car pool. Trip leader: Paul Bystrak (597-3926).

## March

- 9—General Meeting: Scott Peterson, Dept. of Natural Resources biologist., "Future for Harrier Marsh and Colo Ponds," 7:30 p.m.
- 25—Little Wall Lake, Teigs Marsh, and other areas for early waterfowl. Meet at the ISU Design Center west parking lot at 0800 to car pool. Trip leader: Hank Zaletel (382-5427).

## April

8—Road trip to Kellerton Bird Conservation Area and Sand Creek Wildlife Refuge. Sign up early. DNR biologist Melvin Moe will show us the reestablished Greater Prairie Chickens on their lek in Ringgold County. We will stay in Lamoni Friday evening and view the chickens at sunrise. Call Kay Niyo at 233-8803 by **April 1** to make reservations.

20—General Meeting: Mark Edwards, Dept. of Natural Resources biologist. "Future of Ledges State Park," 7:30 p.m.

22—Help a nearby habitat on National Earth Day. Meet at the ISU Design Center west parking lot at 0800 to car pool to site. Trip leader: Karl Jungbluth (432-5057).

## May

6—BBAS Birdathon. Have fun with fellow birders and help raise money for habitat preservation and environmental education. Call Karl and Carmen Jungbluth for details (432-5057).

13—Iowa Statewide May Bird Count. Call Kevin Healy for details (233-5914).

14—Mother's Day Warbler Walk. Meet at Brookside Park north parking lot at 0800. Trip leader: Kevin Healy (233-5914).

18—General Meeting: Steve Lekwa, Director of Story County Conservation. "The Story County Greenbelt," 7:30 p.m.

27—Waterfowl and shorebird trip to Colo Ponds and other wetlands. Meet near the cannon in the parking lot at the Nevada courthouse at 0800. Trip leader: Hank Zaletel (382-5427).

## June

3—Annual Birders' Breakfast at the Ledges State park near Boone. Meet in the upper Ledges at 0800. We will hike down the hill and have breakfast in the lower Ledges. Bring your breakfast. Call Jon Bahrenfus for details (432-3396).







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

*Carmen and Karl Jungbluth*

November 1, 1999—

Leaves are in the air. Leaves are swirling along the ground, but there aren't many leaves left on the trees. It is very windy and we are in the midst of the driest spell of weather since we moved to Boone 5 years ago. The lawn is dry and the trees and shrubs dropped their leaves quickly this year. But, the feeders are emptying at an amazing rate and the activity in the late afternoon compares to a busy airport as the birds come in for sunflower seeds and peanuts. A single Harris' Sparrow has been cleaning up below the feeders. The birdbath is an attraction as well, due to the dry weather. Bluebirds have been stopping by for a drink. Just before supper, a male Red-bellied Woodpecker and a male Hairy Woodpecker perched on opposite sides of the birdbath rim, dipping their heads for long drinks.

December 1, 1999—

Even though nearly an inch of rain fell on the 23rd of November, the mild dry weather continues. We haven't had any snow or cold weather, so the natural world seems to be in a holding pattern. We have noticed that some mornings, there aren't many birds at the feeder. Usually when that happens, the Blue Jays have announced that the Sharp-shinned Hawk is nearby. Sometimes we can't see the hawk, but the Juncos and Goldfinches disappear, and the Downy Woodpeckers remain frozen, hugging their branch or feeder for dear life! One day we watched the Red-breasted Nuthatch clinging upside down, motionless on the peanut feeder for 10 minutes. The chickadees are the first to sound the all clear as they flit nervously from the feeders to the shelter of the big lilac bush. Sometimes the titmice, nuthatches, and woodpeckers join in. It takes about a half hour of hawk-free skies before the birds fan out in a carefree manner throughout the yard and surrounding trees.

*Continued from page 6—Mortenson Mound Update*

A policeman stopped me when I was planting the seeds, brusquely asking, "What are you doing there?" I explained it was an Audubon project planting native plants; I told him I could use his help. He gruffed, "I'll pass." I mentioned that a sign would be erected in the Spring, explaining the area. "Good! I thought somebody forgot to mow!"

So – Keep watching Mortensen Mounds! It's getting better and better!

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

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



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## Board Happenings

*Mary Doud, Secretary*

On December 5, Board members met at Kay Niyo's house. BBAS will provide two scholarships to National Audubon Summer Camp. Applications will be distributed to Ames schools by January 15, 2000. If the camp proves to be successful this year and birdathon funds are available, we will extend this scholarship to other communities next year.

Birdathon 1999—BBAS was possibly the most improved chapter in the country. We have been receiving prizes from National for this year's results. The first priority will be education. If funds raised continue to increase, we hope to work towards habitat preservation.

Earth Day 2000 projects—We need ideas for cooperative projects with area schools, the city and/or the county. Two ideas given were improvement/clean-up workdays and birding on the city greenbelts.

City approved sign for Mortenson Mounds "Prairie in Progress." Jeanne Edwards has planted more seeds. There may be a dedication of the sign. Joe Kooiker recommended burning every 3 years.



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

The Ames Count was held on Saturday, December 18, Saylorville Count was Sunday, December 19, 1998 and the Boone Count was January 1, 2000. The organizers were Dave Edwards, Steve Dinsmore, and Mark Widrlechner, respectively. The results were as follows:

	Ames	Saylorville	Boone		Ames	Saylorville	Boone
Yellow-billed Loon	1*			Blue Jay	115	69	63
Pied-billed Grebe	1*	3		American Crow	8000	339	907
Double-crested Cormorant		2		Black-capped Chickadee	466	187	514
Black-crowned Night Heron		1		Tufted Titmouse	8	10	52
Gr. Wh.-front. goose	2			Red-breasted Nuthatch	29	1	13
Snow Goose	601			White-breasted Nuthatch	129	84	237
Canada Goose	810	1019	10	Brown Creeper	21	11	19
Wood Duck	1*	1		Winter Wren	3	1	3
Gadwall		1		Golden-crowned Kinglet	12	16	3
American Black Duck		18		Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1	1	
Mallard	43	9429	9	Eastern Bluebird		10	3
Northern Shoveler		28		Hermit Thrush		1	
Northern Pintail		7		American Robin	51	13	1
Green-winged Teal		43		European Starling	1456	5266	1732
Ring-necked Duck	1*	5		Cedar Waxwing	82	488	13
Lesser Scaup		3		Yellow-rumped Warbler	1		
Bufflehead		1		American Tree Sparrow	744	1550	511
Common Goldeneye		102		Field Sparrow		1	
Hooded Merganser	1	36		Savannah Sparrow		1	
Common Merganser		2135		Fox Sparrow	9	1	4
Ruddy Duck		3		Song Sparrow	28	98	63
Bald Eagle	7	27	23	Lincoln's Sparrow		1	
Northern Harrier	1	5	1	Swamp Sparrow		20	2
Sharp-shinned Hawk	14	4	4	White-throated Sparrow	13	21	12
Cooper's Hawk	2	3	1	Harris' Sparrow	47	25	30
Red-tailed Hawk	62	70	80	White-crowned Sparrow	1	3	1
Rough-legged Hawk			6	Dark-eyed Junco	1171	1097	1123
Buteo sp.			1	Lapland Longspur		1394	1
American Kestrel	16	25	25	Snow Bunting		30	
Ring-necked Pheasant	57	36	22	Northern Cardinal	192	350	260
Wild Turkey		60	52	Red-winged Blackbird	3	492	6
Northern Bobwhite		4	17	Meadowlark sp.		3	
American Coot	2*3			Rusty Blackbird	23	16	1
Killdeer*	17	14		Common Grackle	16		1
Common Snipe	1	5		Brown-headed Cowbird	3	13	26
Ring-billed Gull	1	3246	2	Purple Finch	6	18	60
Herring Gull	1	214		House Finch	64	1	58
Thayer's Gull		1		Pine Siskin	14		4
Rock Dove	461	121	249	American Goldfinch	108	172	189
Mourning Dove	48	76	5	House Sparrow	1223	436	1079
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	3	9				
Great Horned Owl	7	5	20				
Barred Owl	6	5	7				
Long-eared Owl		8					
Short-eared Owl			1				
Northern Saw-shet Owl			1				
Owl sp.			3				
Belted Kingfisher	7	3	8				
Red-bellied Woodpecker	67	56	109				
Downy Woodpecker	155	85	199				
Hairy Woodpecker	23	17	51				
Northern Flicker	5	19	10				
Northern Shrike	2	5	3				
Horned Lark	87	375					
				<b>NUMBER OF SPECIES</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>58</b>
				<b>TOTAL INDIVIDUAL BIRDS</b>	<b>16548</b>	<b>29582</b>	<b>7919</b>

\*Asterisked birds were new to the Ames count this year.

FROM JEANNE AND DAVE EDWARDS: THANKS!  
 Many thanks to all of those who brought extra cookie goodies to the Christmas for the Birds meeting of Audubon on December 16. Those creative delicious morsels were much appreciated by our hungry, tired, happy people at the end of a very successful Story County Christmas Bird Count!



## Stokes Birds at Home

There is a new, national, 13-part television series on birding called "Stokes Birds at Home" that will be shown on Sundays at 3 p.m. starting January 16. In our viewing area, Des Moines—KGIN (Ch. 11), Fort Dodge—KTIN (Ch. 21), and Waterloo—KRIN (Ch. 32).

The show is hosted by popular bird authorities, Don and Lillian Stokes, and will feature great birding tips, advice on how to attract birds, and travel to popular birding locales all across the country. In addition, there is a weekly "Mystery Bird" quiz and "Time Out to Watch" moment that captures the natural beauty of birds. Additional information is available at <<http://www.stokesbirdsathome.com>>. If you have questions, contact them via the website.

## NEWSLETTER DEADLINE— February 18, 2 p.m.

Continued from page 1—Coming Field Trips

### February

5—Tour de Feeders. We tour feeders at the homes of Kevin and Rosanne Healy and Karl and Carmen Jungbluth. Meet at the ISU Design Center west parking lot at 0800 to car pool. Trip leader—Kay Niyo (233-8803).

18-21—Great Backyard Bird Count. Help the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology define the status of birds for a new millennium! Log on to the BirdSource website at <<http://birdsource.org>> and click on the Great Backyard Bird Count button to report your sightings.

26—Eagles and gulls at Red Rock Lake. We will go to Red Rock to look for Bald Eagles and gulls. Meet at the Ballard Plaza on Highway 69 in Huxley at 0800 to car pool. Trip leader—Paul Bystrak (597-3926).

### 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-related products are purchased. Present this coupon with your purchase and a donation will be given to BBAS. Donations will fund habitat restoration; wilderness education; and *Audubon Adventures*, a bimonthly elementary classroom teaching program used in central Iowa schools.

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## 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.

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



# Birding Hot Spots—Dunbar Slough

by Joyce and Jon Bahrenfas

So you've got the after-Christmas blahs? Think spring! It's not too early to start mulling over birding trips you want to make when the weather warms up. Why not consider a trip to Dunbar Slough in Greene County?

Dunbar Slough is only about an hour west of Ames and loaded with birds in the spring. Head west out of Ames on Highway 30, stopping on the way to check out the shorebirds and waterfowl at Harrier Marsh by Ogden. Continue west on U.S. 30. About 3 miles west of Jefferson, make a short stop at Finn Pond on the south side of the road. This is a good place to see great-tailed grackles if you missed them at Harrier Marsh. Returning to U.S. 30, continue until you come to the town of Scranton. Turn south here on Highway 25. About 2 miles south of Scranton, turn west on E53. In about 3 miles, you will come to a long narrow body of water on the north side of the road and a marshy area south of the road—you have reached waterfowl paradise! Watch for flocks of slow-moving coots and occasional Canada geese on the road. Pull over and scan the open water for ducks and other water birds. Sometimes there are pelicans at the north end of this section. The diverse habitat at Dunbar Slough is favorable for a wide variety of birds.

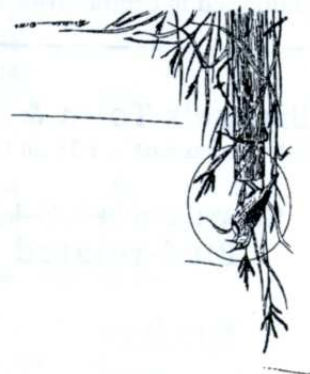
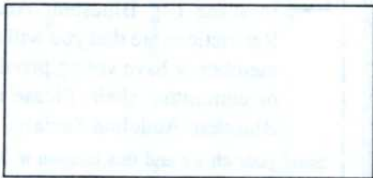
Now head west another mile and turn south on N58. In about 2 miles, on the east side of the road, is a refuge area that usually has good birding. Herons, mergansers, and lots of ducks can frequently be seen here. A note of caution: be careful where you park because the blacktop road is fairly busy and the shoulder is not very wide.

Continuing south a short distance to the next gravel road, turn east on 270th Street. You'll immediately cross a small creek. Check this out for snipe. The water pumping station just east of this creek may have snipe and teal lurking in the fresh, gushing water. Northern Harriers find the marshy fields good places to hunt.

Follow 270th Street east for about a mile, and turn north at the first gravel road. Follow this road for almost a mile to the Dunbar's main body of water. On the way to the lake, you will pass a grove of trees and brush on your right that is excellent for warblers in May. In summer, if there is water below the trees, you may spot wood ducks with their young in tow. As the road winds north, just before you reach the lake, you'll pass a tree-lined dirt road that follows the south shore. A short hike along this could turn up anything from an owl to a cardinal. At the lake, watch for snow and whitefronted geese and pelicans resting on the far north shores. You can usually find several ducks species along with other marsh birds. In warm weather, the boat ramp here is a good starting point for a canoe trip into the marsh. Don't be alarmed if you hear strange sucking noises or thumps on your canoe—it's just carp! On a canoe trip here a few summers ago, we saw a family of common moorhens. Yellow-headed blackbirds, muskrats, turtles, bullfrogs and all kinds of critters abound here. It's a great place to escape life's hustle and bustle!

Dunbar Slough is a public hunting area, so be cautious during the fall and spring. As you leave, follow 270th Street east for a couple of miles, and you will pass several small wildlife areas on the north side of the road that are also good waterfowl spots. If you have time, a side trip to Snake Creek Marsh, 20 miles east of Dunbar Slough, is worth stopping at on your way home.

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