

Big Bluestem Flyer

Volume 22 No. 7

March 1988

Monthly Meeting

MARCH

EAGLES OF ALASKA

Bob Livermore, Sioux City

Tuesday, 8th, Room 181, College of Design
(Refreshments by Peggy Johnson and Sandy Weber)

Field Trip

WATERFOWL Saturday, 19th
Bay's Branch, near Panora

Carpool from the Design Center Parking lot, 7:30 AM
Back at lunch; some may continue if the weather
and the birding are good

BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS

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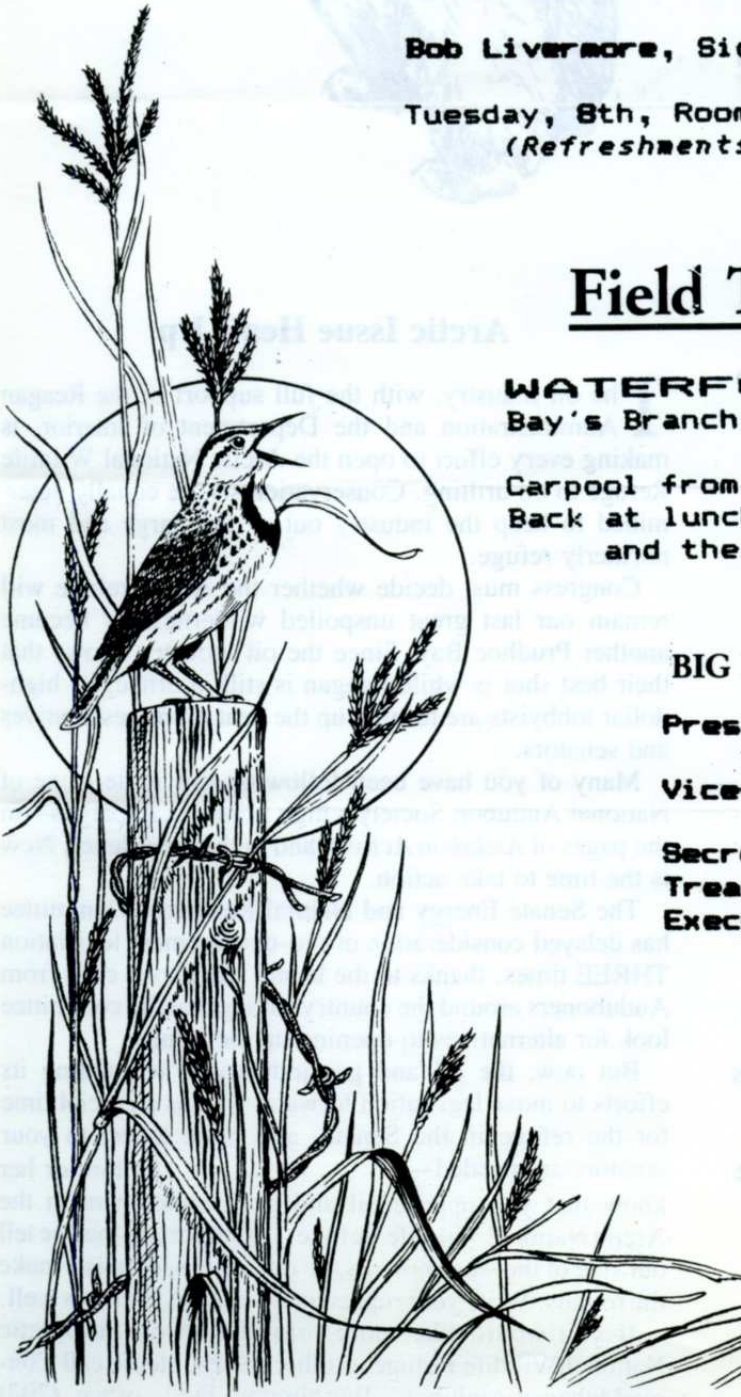
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Seabirds Add Nutrients To Florida Bay

AUDUBON RESEARCH ON SEABIRDS HAS just yielded a breakthrough advance in the esoteric field of nutrient cycling in tropical estuaries. Dr. George Powell, working in Florida Bay at Audubon's field research center in Tavernier, discovered that seabird defecations influence the type and density of marine plants growing in Florida Bay's shallow waters.

Scientists have labored for a long time to identify the role that nutrients play in estuaries. Marine plants form the base of major food chains in these bodies of water, in addition to serving as a primary source of protection and support for fish and invertebrates. Powell carried out an ingenious set of experiments that took advantage of double-crested cormorants' and royal terns' natural penchant for sitting on pilings and navigation markers. Powell constructed two types of artificial stakes: one like the navigation markers, on which birds could perch; the other too small for birds to land on. After a year he returned to see what effects the accumulated guano had on plants beneath the stakes.

Denser grass surrounded stakes that birds used as perches. Additionally, Powell observed around the bird stakes a grass that was rare except where birds had been roosting. His analysis of grass nutrient content showed that it was enriched by phosphorus from the guano.

These results reveal that nutrients limit seagrass growth in Florida Bay. This contrasts with what happens in more temperate waters, where nutrients are not the critical limiting factor. Powell's results have important implications for conservation management because they reveal that small changes in Florida Bay's nutrient balance, either through removal or addition, will have a pronounced impact on the habitat. If nutrient inflow is cut off by channelization, as is happening to Florida Bay, seagrass growth will decline. This will likely be followed by a decrease in wildlife that depends upon marine vegetation in the bay. At the other end of the spectrum, dumping excess nutrients into these waters may affect the species composition of grasses and induce dramatic changes through over-enrichment.

Thus a study of seabird defecation alerts us to the delicate ecological balance prevailing in tropical estuaries.



Arctic Issue Heats Up

The oil industry, with the full support of the Reagan Administration and the Department of Interior, is making every effort to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. Conservationists are equally determined to keep the industry out of this large and most northerly refuge.

Congress must decide whether the Arctic refuge will remain our last great unspoiled wilderness or become another Prudhoe Bay. Since the oil industry knows that their best shot is while Reagan is still in office, its high-dollar lobbyists are turning up the heat on representatives and senators.

Many of you have been following this issue—one of National Audubon Society's high priority campaigns—in the pages of *Audubon Activist* and in this newsletter. Now is the time to take action.

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has delayed consideration of pro-development legislation THREE times, thanks to the letters and phone calls from Auduboners around the country asking that the committee look for alternatives to opening up the refuge.

But now, the oil and gas industry is redoubling its efforts to move legislation forward. This is a crucial time for the refuge in the Senate, and more letters to your senators are needed—

let him or her know that you oppose oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. It's important that we tell our side of the story now, as the oil and gas lobbyists make the rounds. Write your representative in the House as well.

If you would like more information on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or other issues, please call Connie Mahan at Audubon's Washington, D.C., office, (202) 547-9009.

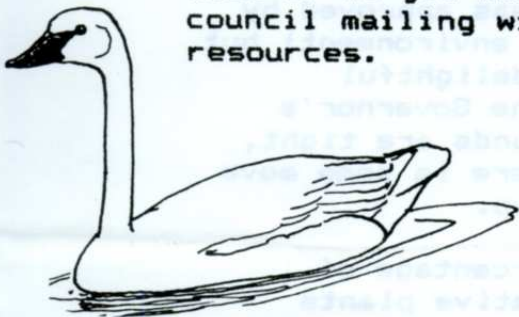
CHICKADEE CHECKOFF



The Chickadee Checkoff is the only source of funds for the Iowa nongame wildlife programs. Otters, raptors, bluebirds, prairie chickens and many other species are introduced, studied, aided, and protected by the Checkoff revenues. To help, contribute funds yourself on your Iowa Tax Form and encourage others to do so. Sometimes you can have a good effect just by defending the concept in a conversation.

IOWA AUDUBON COUNCIL FUNDRAISING LETTER

You should have received the first Iowa Audubon Council mailing a few weeks ago. This was sent to all Audubon members in Iowa, whether or not they are near to a local chapter. Several Big Bluestem Audubon Society volunteers stuffed the 3300 envelopes, including Barb Bettis, Jeanne Edwards, Cindy Hildebrand, Peg Johnson, Roger Maddux, Sandy Weber, and Mark Widrlechner. Sherry Dragula, BBAS Conservation Committee Chair and IAC vice president oversaw the construction and mailing of the materials. Most of us get many appeals for money, but the funds raised by our council mailing will be used in Iowa to work for Iowa's natural resources.



FEBRUARY OWL FIELD TRIP REPORT

On Saturday, February 20th, members of BBAS were joined by two visitors from northern Iowa in looking for Northern Saw-whet Owls at Ledges State Park. The group easily found two of the cooperative owls, and everyone was able to study the owls at leisure. The group then drove to Big Creek State Park where we flushed at least five Long-eared Owls. There were 14 birders in the group at this point, and 5 agreed to continue. They saw a Red-shouldered Hawk near Polk City before heading west to Bays Branch. At Bays Branch they saw about a thousand Canada Geese, three Snow Geese, several hundred Mallards, three American Black Ducks, a male Wood Duck, A Redhead, several Common Mergansers, and heard but didn't see a Northern Pintail. They also flushed several more Long-eared Owls from pines along the lake.

TRUMPETER SWANS IN DES MOINES

Since late January, four Trumpeter Swans from the Minnesota flock have been present on the Des Moines River on the southeast side of Des Moines. The four birds, presumably a family group, are being regularly seen near the Scott Street dam and near the 14th Street bridge. As the weather warms, the birds will probably move around a bit and become more difficult to find. By mid-March, the birds should have migrated to their breeding areas in Hennepin County, MN. Please use good judgement, and try not to disturb the birds if you look for them.



CURRENT IOWA AUDUBON COUNCIL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

The Iowa Resource Enhancement Program (REP) was introduced by many in their political caucuses last month. This proposed consortium of environmental interests, forces, and funding is still in the grass roots support-gathering stage. The basic message is that IOWA NEEDS TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF NATURAL RESOURCES.

The Iowa Ground Water bill passed last year faces no major overthrow, but there may be several attempts to "correct" different aspects. The Iowa DNR is holding public hearings on "standards" of groundwater pollution during this year. This is one way the intent of our protection may be subverted. If Iowans accept the point that some pollution is acceptable, we are accepting the premise that the source of our drinking water is a free, public sewer system. Much misinformation will be spread by chemical suppliers to maintain their vested interest in selling as much as possible, often under the disguise of labels like "Agricultural Professionals for Safe Water" (hosted by American Cyanamid Company). Hearings in our area will be on March 22, April 19, and May 17, all at 1:30 PM in the Auditorium of the Wallace Building, 900 East Grand in Des Moines.

The proposed dam at Brushy Creek near Fort Dodge was approved by the Iowa DNR (motorboating politics wins over the environment) but there is still optimism for preservation of this delightful reminder of what was once common natural Iowa. The Governor's budget holds no funds for the dam construction, funds are tight, and many legislators are opposed to the lake. There is some move to take legislation action to officially hold it up.

We hope to get an Iowa bill to mandate a small percentage of highway construction money be used to introduce native plants along the roadsides, something already present in federal construction. Native plantings are self-sustaining, require much less maintenance in the long term, and add the beauty of variety.

(Inspired by the newsletter of Cindy Hildebrand, IAC Legislative Chair)

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