



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 32 Number 3

January/February 1997

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS) 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. If you need directions, please call any of the BBAS officers or committee chairs. See you there!

Featured Speaker—January 16 meeting: *Bill Norris, “Northeast Iowa Neotropical Migrant Songbird Project: 1994-1996”*

Bill will talk about an ongoing study of the habitat preferences of forest songbirds in northeast Iowa woodlands. The focus of this study is to determine whether forests that have been recently grazed or logged are used by neotropical migrant songbirds during the breeding season. This project is sponsored by the Wildlife Diversity Program (Iowa DNR), the Iowa Nature Conservancy, and Iowa State University.

Featured Speaker—February 20 meeting: *Roger Hill, “Cranes on the Platte River”*

Roger Hill was a hunter of North American big game until 1982, when he traded his rifle for a camera and began a career as a wildlife photographer. In March 1996, Mr. Hill went to the Platte River to photograph sandhill cranes. His trip was memorable for two reasons: the outing was headed by prominent wildlife videographer Leonard Lee Rue, III, and Mr. Hill had the opportunity to record the devastating effects of a late spring blizzard on the migrating cranes. This program is a must, especially for those who plan to go on the March field trip to see the Sandhill Cranes. (See page 7 for details.)

If you would like to meet and dine with the speaker and the BBAS board before the monthly meeting, there are a limited number of reservations available. Please call Kevin Healy at 233-5914 to confirm space and location.

Coming Field Trips: January & February

Jon Bahrenfus, Field Trip Chair

January

18—Winter Bird Walk at the State Forest Nursery. Jon Bahrenfus (515-432-3396). Meet at the ISU Design Center parking lot at 8:00 a.m. or at the State Forest Nursery off South Duff around 8:15 a.m.

25—Omaha Zoo trip, weather permitting. Jon Bahrenfus (515-432-3396). A trip

to the Omaha Zoo is tentatively scheduled if the weather is good and if there is enough interest. We are still looking for a leader for this trip. If you are interested

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Quote of the Month: *Always do what you are afraid to do—Emerson*

As the Crow Flies . . .

Stan Cyran, President

It is traditional for BBAS at the December meeting for members to share slides, stories, seasonal treats (and bird seed with the Story County Conservation Center). Something new happened this year. The first *Friend of Big Bluestem Audubon Society* award was presented. This award is intended to recognize individuals who, through their efforts, have advanced the cause of conservation in Iowa. All of us share a love for the wild creatures (especially the birds) that inhabit the great outdoors, and we all also recognize that without preservation of habitat, our opportunities to enjoy these would not be possible. The BBAS board of directors intends that the recipients of the award will embody in themselves and in their work our mission, which is printed in the masthead of each newsletter. The selection of the first recipient by the board was not difficult. As Story County Conservation Board Environmental Coordinator, Cele Burnett has been involved in education of both children and adults. As state representative for District 61, Cele has not hesitated to involve herself in the thorniest of land use issues. As a BBAS member, Cele has contributed to programs and field trips. Big Bluestem Audubon Society congratulates Cele, and wishes her well in her future efforts.

Newsletter Deadline: Friday, February 28, 1997 at 2 p.m.

Big Bluestem Audubon Society Officers and Committees

Officers:

- President: Stan Cyran 292-4876 scyran@mem.po.com
- Vice-President: Kay Niyo 233-8803 kniyo@aol.com
- Secretary: Joyce Bahrenfus 432-3396
- Treasurer: Paul Ovrom 292-8862 nc7ao@ars-grin.gov

Board Members:

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- David Guy 292-8825
- Kevin Healy 233-5914 khealy@ames.net
- Karl Jungbluth 432-5057 karl.a.jungbluth@noaa.gov
- Rebecca Shivvers 292-0691 shivvers@ameslab.gov

Committee Chairs:

- Archivist: Hank Zalatel 382-5427 birdhank@aol.com
- Awards Chair: Stan Cyran
- Conservation Chair: Sherry Dragula 233-1532 mpwskd@aol.com
- Education Co-Chairs: Carol and Galin Berrier
- Field Trip Chair: Jon Bahrenfus
- Fund Raising Co-Chairs: Kay Niyo and Stan Cyran
- Membership Chair: Mark Widrlechner 233-1532 mpwskd@aol.com
- Program Co-Chairs: Kevin and Roseann Healy
- Publicity Chair: Mary Doud 296-2178
- Publications and Electronic Media Chair: Rebecca Shivvers
- Service & Special Projects Co-Chairs: Karl and Carmen Jungbluth

Web Site:

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

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

Notes From the Field

Jon Bahrenfus, Field Trip Chair

Notes From the Field is a collaboration by the various field trip leaders since the last newsletter. Bird records are kept for each field trip and are brought to the BBAS general meetings, if you are interested in looking at the species, etc., that were observed on the trips. If you are interested in leading or helping lead any of the forthcoming trips, please contact me.

November 23, Sherry Dragula and Mark Widrlechner, "Trip Report for DeSoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge." On the morning of Saturday, 23 November, seven BBAS members and three guests from Des Moines met at the Visitors' Center at DeSoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge along the Missouri River west of Missouri Valley, Iowa. Although the misty weather was not ideal for observing birds, large flocks of snow geese (estimated at about 600,000 birds by refuge personnel) made for a memorable excursion. A few bald eagles, a great blue heron, and various ducks and geese added to the interest. The evening before, a coyote was seen from the Visitors' Center stirring up the geese.

This trip was cut short by an impending storm of freezing drizzle, which arrived shortly after lunch. Other BBAS members visited the refuge in the days before Thanksgiving and, although the numbers of snow geese at the refuge decreased considerably, Wolfgang Oesterreich was able to view an immature golden eagle there, an impressive sighting.

October 26, Stan Cyran, "Waterfowl trip to the Runnells/Red Rock Lake area." A group of BBAS members led by Stan Cyran met with members from the Des Moines Audubon group near the wildlife refuge at Runnells. It was an overcast day with temperatures that were quite mild. The birders checked several areas around Lake Red Rock for waterfowl and shorebirds. They saw a number of species of waterfowl, along with several species of gulls and hawks. A black-bellied plover, pectoral sandpiper, and a long-billed dowitcher were highlights of the trip.

1997 Winter Bird Feeder Survey

January 23-26, 1997 marks the dates of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union and Iowa Department of Natural Resources annual Bird Feeder Survey. The survey is found on pages 6-7 of this newsletter. Please follow the directions on the form and help collect this valuable information. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. Thank you!



Birder of the Month

This is another in an ongoing series profiling the birders in our midst. Why are they birders? How do they spend their time? How do they contribute their talents to society at large?

Mike Meetz is not even sure why he got into birding except that it was a natural extension of his love for the outdoors. "I am interested in anything to do with nature," he states, "and birding is one way to get involved."

Indeed, it appears that Mike is about as "involved" in as many ways as one person can be. He has been in charge of a Kestrel nest box trail after helping Dr. Dan Varland with it in the late 1980s. He spends two weeks each summer at the Isle Royale National Park gathering information for an ongoing loon census. He was one of a group of volunteers who worked on the breeding bird atlas program. "The book should be published shortly," he thinks. Mike helps Erv Klaas doing winter bird surveys at Walnut Creek Wildlife Refuge, and he is currently working on the Story County Natural Resource Inventory. "Izaak Walton League is chairing the effort," he adds, "but a lot of people are interested in it, including Story County Conservation Board." Speaking of which, Mike is beginning his fifth year on the Story County Conservation Board. He is very excited about the new "Master Conservationist" program that he and others are working on. "Everything is falling into place, and the first class should be a full one."

Mike has had a long involvement with Big Bluestem Audubon Society. He started attending meetings in the mid-1970s and has held almost every position including president. One of the highlights for him was the time that BBAS sponsored a meeting at Camp Sunnyside in Des Moines, which the president of the National Audubon Society, Peter Berle, attended. Mike also helped out with the National A.O.U. meeting several years ago when it was held in Ames. Mike has given programs for BBAS, and will be the featured speaker in March, when he will give a presentation on his work with loons. He also has been a regular contributor to the popular "Bird of the Month" part of the monthly meetings. Many new birders probably recognize him from the 'beginning birder' course, which he organizes alternate years.

Mike has no trouble in naming his favorite birds. The osprey, "because I helped a neighbor rehabilitate an injured one when I was in junior high,"; the common loon, "because it was one of the first bird sounds I could recognize near our northern Wisconsin home," and the kestrel, because of his long association with the kestrel program. His favorite birding areas include his backyard and a nearby 40-acre pasture, where he and his wife, Linda, have documented well over 100 bird species.

Other interests? Mike has built his own cedar strip canoe, which he has taken to the boundary waters area eight times so far. He is a certified Iowa hunting safety instructor. And finally, as if this isn't enough, he concludes, "I like to tie everything together with photography." His photographs have been featured in periodicals and the Iowa Natural Heritage calendar. Mike has worked as a virologist at the ISU veterinary diagnostic laboratory for 20 years, where he has been involved in the development of animal vaccines.

Birders may come in all shapes and sizes, but it is rare to find one who wears as many hats and fills as many shoes as Mike.

Board Happenings

Joyce Bahrenfus, Secretary

Since the last newsletter, there have been two board meetings, November 17 and December 7. Excerpts from each follow.

November 17. Committee reports to the board included, Conservation, regarding Polk County Conservation Board and the Engeldinger Marsh issue. Mike Meetz described the proposed Master Conservationist program which he, Jim Pease, Cele Burnett, Mary Born, Rick Periot, and Deb Lewis have been developing, noting that it will be similar to Master Gardener and Master Forester programs already in existence. John Schmitz, director of the YMCA Camp in Boone County, asked to tap into BBAS expertise as plans are made for building design, plantings, and classroom programming for a bird feeding station at the camp.

December 7. Committee reports to the board included Conservation, which requested as many people as possible to attend the Polk County Conservation Meeting held December 11 in Des Moines to support not widening the road through Engeldinger Marsh. There was discussion about the possibility of a State Audubon office and what it could do for our chapter and what might be expected of our chapter. Board members discussed and reviewed our application for Federal tax-exempt status. Plans are in the works to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the BBAS.

If you would like to help on any committee, contact the chairperson, or if you have any concerns, issues, or information you would like brought before the Board, please give it to any Board member at least one week before the meeting so it will get on the agenda. Thanks.

Board Meetings—1996-1997: January 12 (8 p.m.), February 23, March 30, April 20. All Board meetings are on Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m. The January Board meeting will be held at Kay Niyo's home and the February Board meeting place has not yet been decided. Future locations will be announced in the newsletter.

Have you seen a banded house finch?

by Merrill Frydendall

House finches have been color banded in and around Mankato and North Mankato, MN. We ask that observers be alert to possible sightings of these birds at any time. Each bird wears a metal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band plus three colored bands, so there are two bands on each leg. The possible colored bands are as follows: red, orange, yellow, dark green, light green, dark blue, light blue, and white. It is important that we know the exact combination of the metal and colored bands carried on each leg. Please send observations with as much information as possible (such as date, location of the sighting, and sex) to Merrill Frydendall, Department of Biology, Box 34, Mankato State University, Mankato, MN 56001; e-mail: merrill_frydendall@msl.mankato.msus.edu.

Birds in Iowa

Birds in Iowa, by Thomas H. Kent and James J. Dinsmore (1996), 400 pages, hardbound, comprehensive coverage of the distribution and abundance of 398 species of birds in Iowa.

Birds in Iowa describes the frequency and distribution of species of birds that have been recorded in Iowa through 1995, including some data from 1996. The status including nesting status, a chart with relative frequency by thirds of months and early and late dates, and maps of county locations for selected species provide a convenient overview of common species. For rare species, more detail and maps of records by county are provided. For accidental species, all accepted records are listed. For casual and some rare regular species, the number of records by year and month are charted. The seasonal and geographic occurrence of each species are summarized in the text. Species' ranges and vagrancy patterns are described, and changes in abundance are provided when appropriate. Introductory chapters describe the state list, geography and birding areas, and history of Iowa ornithology. Appendices include information on species reported in Iowa that are not on the state list, a list of species that are not represented by specimens, and a list of first records by year for uncommon species. The intent of this book is to provide a thorough review of bird records in Iowa and serve as a framework for additional study.

The book will be available at the January 16th BBAS meeting from Dr. Dinsmore, or at the University Bookstore, or from Dr. T. H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, 52240. Cost is \$30 plus \$1.50 tax, and \$3.50 handling.

Remember—February 28 is the last day you can use the coupons (p. 11) to buy bird products. Help support your BBAS.

Did you know—a flying bird is streamlined like a jet airplane, with its body slender and tapering; but birds are proportionally lighter than planes? All the feathers from head to tail point toward the back of the bird. The wings have delicately curved leading edges and thin trailing edges. The legs of many birds can be drawn up under the body. There are no projecting ears on the head. Even the nostrils in some birds point toward the back of the bird. The air comes out of them like the exhaust from a jet, moving to the rear.

The bones are light in weight. Many of them are hollow and filled with air. In large soaring birds some of the hollow bones have internal braces like the struts in airplane wings. The frigate bird's wings measure 7 feet (2 meters) from tip to tip, yet its skeleton weighs only 4 ounces (113 grams). This is less than the weight of its feathers.

Instead of a jaw, with heavy bones, teeth, and muscles, a bird has a slender beak. The work of chew-

Bird Treats

These two recipes were taken off the WWW from the Northern Michigan Wildlife Rehabilitation Newsletter. For those who enjoy feeding the birds all year long, these treats are not only greatly appreciated during the cold winter months, but the birds (especially woodpeckers) love these treats in the spring and summer when their babies are out and about. *Caveat: never just put out peanut butter. Birds will choke on it! You always need to mix in some other seeds.*

Bird Cake #1

1 C. of melted beef suet

1 C. peanut butter

6 C. cornmeal

Melt suet. Mix in peanut butter and cornmeal. Spoon into paper-lined muffin tins and cool. Store in freezer until needed.

Bird Cake #2

2 C. bread crumbs

1 handful nuts (unsalted)

3 chopped apples (seeds too!)

2 handfuls raisins

1 C. sugar

1/4 C. cornmeal

1/2 pound ground suet

1/2 C. flour

1 8-oz. jar peanut butter

1 C. wild bird seed

Mix ingredients and add enough bacon drippings to hold it all together. Shape into balls or press into pine cones. Freeze leftover.

You can also make a simple suet feeder out of a milk carton. Just pour hot ingredients in to the carton, let cool then cut the sides out.

ing is done by the crop, in which preliminary food breakdown occurs, and by the gizzard, a part of the stomach where food is ground up. Certain bones, which are separate in other backboned animals, are joined together (fused) in birds to give them greater strength. The finger bones in the wing, for example, are fused. Some of the bones have high ridges for the attachment of muscles. The keel on the breastbone is an example.

The ribs are long, flat, thin, and jointed. Each rib overlaps its neighbor. Together with the backbone and the breastbone the ribs form a flexible cage that holds the heart, lungs, and other organs and makes a strong base for the attachment of the powerful wings. [Excerpted from Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia. Copyright 1994, 1995 Compton's NewMedia, Inc. All Rights Reserved.]

Conservation Corner

Sherry Dragula, Conservation Chair

Engeldinger Marsh Update

On December 11, 1996, a public meeting was held by the Polk County Conservation Board on the future of Engeldinger Marsh in Polk County. The Iowa Department of Transportation presented their preferred alternative to route two new lanes of Highway 65 through the marsh. About 120 people of all ages and walks of life attended the meeting, including 22 from Ames. Four Big Bluestem members spoke in support of protecting the marsh by routing the new road around the marsh. Emily Mize, a representative of Ames High School's ecology group, the 100th Green Butterfly, spoke as well. Nearly all of the public input was to direct the Conservation Board to endorse avoiding new lanes through the marsh. The Polk County Conservation Board still has not decided what to do on Engeldinger Marsh. Their next meeting is scheduled for February 6, 1997. You can contact them at Jester Park, Granger, IA 50109.

Book Review

by Rebecca Shivers

Carrol L. Henderson. *Wild About Birds. The DNR Bird Feeding Guide* (1995), State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources. (\$19.95)

Wild About Birds is an excellent book that explains everything about bird feeding—birds that come to feeders, unusual wildlife visitors at feeders, types of bird food, bird feeder construction and designs, and feeder selection, arrangement, protection, and sanitation. The section on birds that come to the feeders shows color pictures of the bird, explains its different characteristics (male/female), food preferences, and feeding habits.

The diagrams for feeder construction are very easy to follow. Feeder types include woven wire fence pheasant feeder, hanging 2-liter pop bottle feeder, window stick-on feeder, screen feeder, fly-through feeders, starling-proof suet feeder, hardware cloth feeder, and hanging chick waterer, oriole feeder, to name a few. I have made several of these feeders from wood scraps and hardware cloth found around the house. The variety of feeders and ease to construct them are astounding.

This book is a great aid for your winter bird feeder survey found on pages 9-10 of this newsletter. I highly recommend this book, which can be purchased at Brekke's Town & Country Store. A recipe to make suet for your new suet feeder can be found on page 4 in this newsletter.

Bird Chat

Dear B.C.:

Is it true that birds have air bags? And if so, is this for crash protection?

Click and Clack (the Tappet brothers)

Dear C. and C.,

You probably meant to say "air sacs" instead of "air bags." In addition to lungs, birds have five or more pairs of air sacs connected to the lungs by small tubes. Branches extend into the hollow bones, and even the bones of the skull and the small toes are air filled. The air sacs not only lighten the body, but also serve as a cooling system. Birds do not perspire, and instead, a constant stream of fresh air flows throughout the body by means of the air sacs.

B.C.

Did you know—some birds change their colors without molting by a process called feather wear? This occurs if the new feathers are edged with brown or gray. The overlapping edges hide the underlying main color of the feathers. Snow buntings change from brown in the summer to white in the winter simply by wearing off the rusty edges of their white feathers.

Bird Drop-ins

Have you seen a new or unusual bird? You may call Wolf Oesterreich at 232-3285 or Dr. James Dinsmore at 294-7669 for identification and consultation. We will get bimonthly reports from them and let you know what everyone is seeing.

On November 30, BBAS members Lloyd and Gaylan Crim of northeast Boone County observed a Pinyon Jay among the birds visiting their backyard peanut feeders. The bird is common to the coniferous forests in the interior mountains and high plateaus of the western United States. Contrary to the common blue jay, the Pinyon Jay has a short tail, no crest, and prefers pinyon pine seeds. The bird was observed for several weeks.

Another bird that dropped by in mid-December was the Palm Warbler. It stayed a few days in BBAS members Karl and Carmen Jungbluth's garage. This 5 1/2" warbler has a distinctive habit of wagging its tail. The Palm Warbler is one of the first warblers to arrive in the spring. Hopefully, this straggler made it south before the "big freeze."

MESKIMEN'S LAW—There's never time to do it right, but always time to do it over.

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

The Ames Count was held on Saturday, December 21, Saylorville Count was Sunday, December 22, 1996 and the Boone County Count was January 1, 1997. The organizers were Dave Edwards and Mike Meetz, Steve Dinsmore, and Mark Widrechner, respectively. The results were as follows:

	Ames	Saylorville	Boone		Ames	Saylorville	Boone
Canada Goose	72	1153	1	Cedar Waxwing	11	8	13
Wood Duck		7		Northern Shrike	2	2	CW
Green-winged Teal		1		Loggerhead Shrike		1	
American Black Duck		7		Shrike sp.		1	
Mallard	112	4760	8	European Starling	1980	2469	1290
Northern Pintail		5		Northern Cardinal	255	235	374
Northern Shoveler		1		American Tree Sparrow	150	1702	872
Great Blue Heron	1			Fox Sparrow	11		
Common Golden-eye	1	7		White-throated Sparrow	4		
Bald Eagle	5	35	3 adults	Song Sparrow	14	51	96
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	3	2	Common Merganser		46	
Cooper's Hawk	3	1	CW	Swamp Sparrow		4	4
Northern Harrier	1	3		White-crowned Sparrow		1	1
Red-tailed Hawk	27	45	40	Harris' Sparrow	36	10	24
Rough-legged Hawk	1	1	1	Dark-eyed Junco	585	801	749
Gadwall		3		Lapland Longspur		60	5
<i>Buteo</i> sp.			1	Snow Bunting			37
American Kestrel	10	16	6	Red-winged Blackbird	3	79	4
Hawk sp.			1	Rusty Blackbird		1	
Ring-necked Pheasant	88	36	104	Meadowlark sp.	2		1
Wild Turkey		11	31	Common Grackle	4	3	1
Rock Dove	256	159	135	Brown-headed Cowbird	1	2	1
Mourning Dove	58	10	61	Blackbird sp.			27
American Wigeon		7		Purple Finch	3		23
Ring-billed Gull		1		House Finch	99	25	271
Eastern Screech-Owl		3	11	Common Redpoll			CW
Great Horned Owl	1	14	5	Pine Grosbeak		1	
Barred Owl	2	4	5	Red Crossbill		11	
Long-eared Owl	2	1	3	Pine Siskin		1	3
Short-eared Owl		6		American Goldfinch	116	499	252
Northern Saw-whet Owl			1	House Sparrow	1432	824	730
Owl sp.			1				
Belted Kingfisher	2	2	3				
Red-headed Woodpecker	1	4	1				
Red-bellied Woodpecker	50	49	112				
Downy Woodpecker	149	182	216				
Hairy Woodpecker	24	21	34				
Northern Flicker	7	17	1				
Pileated Woodpecker			1				
Horned Lark	34	3	3				
Blue Jay	147	94	50				
American Crow	11700	1142	474				
Black-capped Chickadee	394	301	739				
Tufted Titmouse	6	14	52				
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	1	2				
White-breasted Nuthatch	105	81	272				
Brown Creeper	15	3	4				
Winter Wren		1	1				
Carolina Wren	1						
American Robin		2	2				
Gray Catbird	1						

Ames Results—Dave Edwards

About 40 volunteers observed 52 species—17,991 birds. The highlight was the Gray Catbird, a first for the Ames Christmas Count. The day was partly clear and hazy. The number of species was close to average.

Saylorville Reservoir Results—Steve Dinsmore

Twenty-one participants tallied 66 species, including 11 species of waterfowl. This was the lowest species total in the nine years of the count. Overall numbers of many birds, especially woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatches, and many sparrow species, were also low. The day was cloudy with a NE 10-20 mph wind.

Boone County Results—Mark Widrechner

There were 54 species identified on 1 January 1997 and another 3 (marked CW) observed during the count week period. There was a total of 7,162 birds. No species new to the count were observed; but for only the second time, a Pileated Woodpecker was seen (by two parties along the Des Moines River in the vicinity of Ledges State Park). Record high numbers of Mourning Doves, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, American Crows, Black-capped Chickadees, American Tree Sparrows, and House Finches were also counted. Forty people helped on the count under foggy conditions.

Sandhill Crane Field Trip Scheduled for March

After the exciting talk by Roger Hill, February 20, about the Sandhill Cranes, you will not want to miss out on this exciting opportunity to view and photograph them yourself. Tentative plans for the BBAS Nebraska Sandhill Crane trip on March 21-23 are to drive to Nebraska Friday evening. On Saturday morning, we will visit many of the large marshes in the Rainwater Basin Wetland area south and southeast of Grand Island, Nebraska to observe thousands of migrating waterfowl, eagles, osprey, etc. Saturday afternoon, we will observe thousands of Sandhill Cranes feeding in the corn fields south of Grand Island. At dusk, we will see hundreds of thousands of Sandhill Cranes fly in to roost in the Platte River west of Grand Island. Sunday morning, we will visit a few marshes on the return trip to Ames, arriving home in the afternoon. Motel reservations will be made in advance, so call Kay Niyo at 233-8803 if you are interested in participating.

Editor's Note: Please call Kay as soon as possible, since this is prime viewing time. Hotels close to the sites will be hard to come by if you wait until the last moment!

Platte River Region

The Platte River is located in the Central Flyway, where approximately 80% of the continent's Sandhill Cranes depend upon wetlands as staging areas. These wetlands, which include the Rainwater Basin and Sandhills of central Nebraska, are vital to migrating waterfowl. Approximately 2.5 million ducks and geese stop over in these wetlands. An endangered species you may see during your visit this March is the Whooping Crane.

These sand dunes, exposed to groundwater lakes in the valleys and mineralized lakes on poorly drained soils, have declined in recent years due to increased irrigation and drainage. About 90% of the marshes have been drained and irrigated for corn production. Because of this, the original 94,000 acres and 4,000 marshes have declined to about 22,000 acres and 374 marshes. Still, large concentrations of waterfowl use this area during spring migration to rest and prepare for their long journey to the Arctic.

Some Sandhill Crane Facts:

Grus canadensis

Height—34-48" (86-122cm); length 41"; wingspan 73"

Adult is gray overall, with dull red skin on the crown and lores; whitish chin, cheek, and upper throat; and blackish primaries. Immature lack red patch; head and neck vary from pale to tawny; gray body is irregularly mottled with brownish-red. Plumage often appears rusty because of iron stains from the water of tundra ponds.

Flies with neck outstretched and the upstroke faster than the downstroke.

Shrill bugle-like trumpeting rattling *gar-oo-oo*, audible for more than a mile.

Breeds mostly in the remote Arctic.

Migrates through Great Plains via Nebraska to Texas/Arkansas.

Lives in fresh water prairie pools and marshes; prairies and grainfields during migration and in winter.

Two brown-spotted buff eggs in a large mound of grass and uprooted plants in an undisturbed marsh.

Sensitive to human disturbance. Draining of marshes has reduced nesting populations in the United States.

Eats aquatic invertebrates, insects, worms, small mammals, and young birds and eggs. Also eats seeds, berries, grain, and aquatic plants.

"Fossil evidence indicates the scarlet-crowned Sandhill Cranes, . . . inhabited the planet for 26-27 million years, longer than any other living vertebrate. But by 1939, there were fewer than a thousand, their numbers devastated by overhunting and habitat loss. Their resurgence has been a triumph of conservation and concerned naturalists. . ." [Audubon.org/audubon/wings/crane.html]

[This information has been adapted from Roger Tory Peterson's *Eastern Birds* and *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds*, Wild Wings: Heading South, from the Internet.]

This Crane photo is taken from the National Audubon Society's WWW page. Unfortunately, we can't afford color, so check it out on



<http://www.audubon.org/audubon/wings/crane.html>

Six Ways You Can Help Conserve Birds In Your Neighborhood

1. Join Project Feeder Watch. Counting birds is the key to helping scientists monitor their status.
2. Join the National Audubon Society and take part in your local Audubon Chapter. There are many opportunities to participate in citizen-science programs that help bird conservation, such as the Christmas Bird Count and Birdathons.
3. Create a bird-friendly environment in your backyard by landscaping with native plants that flower and fruit; hang bird feeders and nest boxes, and provide water in simple bird baths; place hawk decals or reflective streamers on windows to prevent bird collisions; keep your cat indoors.
4. Take note of wildlife habitat in urban areas, help protect woods and wetlands that are homes for birds.
5. Support your state and local government wildlife programs and public officials who are committed to conservation.
6. Get the word out about bird conservation.

Some Basics of Landscaping for Birds

You can help slow the decline of many birds by following the nine basic principles for landscaping—food, water, shelter, diversity, four seasons, arrangement, protection, hardiness zones, and soils and topography. Every bird species has its own unique food requirements, and these may change as the bird matures and as the seasons change. Learn the food habits of the birds you wish to attract. Then, plant the appropriate trees, shrubs, or flowers that will provide the fruits, berries, grains, seeds, acorns, nuts, or nectar. You can probably double the number of bird species in your yard by providing a source of water. A frog pond, water garden, or bird bath will get lots of bird use, especially if the water is dripping, splashing, or moving. Birds need places where they can hide from predators and escape from severe weather. Trees (including hollow ones), shrubs, tall grass, bird houses provide excellent shelter. The best landscaping plan is one that includes a wide variety of plants. This helps attract a greater number of bird species. It is necessary to provide birds with food and shelter during all four seasons of the year. Plant trees, shrubs, and flowers that will provide year-round food and shelter. Habitat components need to be properly arranged. Consider the effects of prevailing winds (and snow drifting) so your yard will be protected from harsh winter weather. Birds should be protected from unnecessary mortality. When choosing the placement of bird feeders and nest boxes, consider their accessibility to predators. Picture windows can be death traps for birds. A network of parallel, vertical strings spaced 4 inches apart can be placed on the outside of windows to prevent this problem. You also should be cautious about the kinds of herbicides and pesticides used in your yard. They should be applied only when necessary and strictly according to label instructions. When considering

plants not native to your area, consult a plant hardiness zone map (they are in most garden catalogs). Make sure the plants you want are rated for the winter hardiness zone classification of your area. Consult with your local garden center, university, or county extension office to have a soil test done for your yard. Plant species often are adapted to certain types of soils. By knowing what type of soil you have, you can identify the types of plants that should grow best in your yard. [Taken from *Landscaping to Attract Birds*, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service pamphlet.]

The WatchList Birds 1996

The National Audubon Society has published a list of approximately 90 species of birds nationwide with either numbers in decline or their habitats in danger. Some of the birds are sometimes seen in Iowa. Seabirds: Black-capped Petrel, Black-vented Shearwater, Ashy Storm-Petrel, Black Storm-Petrel and Xantus' Murrelet; Long-Legged Waders: Reddish Egret, American Bittern, Limpkin; Waterfowl: Emperor Goose, Steller's Eider; Birds of Prey: Swallow-tailed Kite, Short-tailed Hawk; Rails: Black Rail; Shorebirds: Mountain Plover, Black Oystercatcher, Long-billed Curlew, Hudson Godwit, Red Knot, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Franklin's Gull, Black Tern; Pigeons and Doves: White-crowned Pigeon, Band-tailed Pigeon, Common Ground-Dove; Cuckoos: Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo; Owls and Nightjars: Short-eared Owl, Chuck-will's-widow; Swifts and Hummingbirds: Black Swift, Chimney Swift, Lucifer Hummingbird, Rufous Hummingbird, Allen's Hummingbird; Lewis' Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker*; Songbirds: Olive-sided Flycatcher, Western Wood-Pewee, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Island Scrub-Jay, Brown-headed Nuthatch; Veery, Bicknell's Thrush, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Bendire's Thrasher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Le Conte's Thrasher, Sprague's Pipit, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell's Vireo, Gray Vireo, Dickcissel, Abert's Towhee, Bachman's Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Black-chinned Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, Sage Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Baird's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Golden-winged Warbler, Colima Warbler, Lucy's Warbler, Hermit Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Palm Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Swainson's Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Canada Warbler, Painted Bunting, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, McCown's Longspur, Smith's Longspur, McKay's Bunting, Bobolink, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Orchard Oriole, Audubon's Oriole, Lawrence's Goldfinch.

***Red-headed Woodpecker**—a bird of open park-like woods and farms, has steadily declined in numbers by as much as 40% since the mid-1960s. Requiring dead and dying trees in which to excavate their cavity nests, the Red-headed Woodpecker is becoming increasingly scarce as mature forests are cut and standing dead trees are removed from managed woodlots throughout its breeding range in south central Canada, and the northeastern and southeastern United States.

BIRDFEEDER SURVEY—JANUARY 23-26, 1997

Please fill out carefully. Feel free to copy the form for friends and patrons. Thank you and enjoy yourselves!

1. Name _____
- 2A. Address _____
- 2B. County _____ 2C. City _____ 2D. Zip _____
3. The feeder survey period this year runs from Thursday, January 23 to Sunday, January 26. Count birds on two consecutive days only. Please record which days you counted birds for us in the space below.
Check one: Thursday (1/23) and Friday (1/24),
Friday (1/24) and Saturday (1/25), or
Saturday (1/25) and Sunday (1/26).
4. Is your feeder in town (including suburbs) or in the country? Circle T or C.
5. Check the ONE description which best describes the area within a 2-block circle around your feeder:
 suburban, houses with shrubs and small trees but few trees wider than 20 inches.
 suburban bordered by (circle 1) timber, grass, field or row crop.
 town, neighborhood has many mature shade and street trees
 downtown with mostly buildings, sidewalks, roads, parking lots, high rises
 pasture
 row crop (corn, beans, etc.)
 timber
 farmstead with mature trees and shrubs around house.
6. Type and number of feeders: Thistle, sunflower (only), fruit, safflower, peanuts, mixed seed, peanut butter, suet, cracked sunflower, corn, millet (only), unfrozen water, other _____
7. On what date did you start feeding during 1996-1997? (About)
8. Comments or additional description of your feeder or yard:

HIGHEST NUMBER SEEN FOR EACH SPECIES DURING TWO CONSECUTIVE DAYS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ring-necked Pheasant | <input type="checkbox"/> Tree Sparrow (American) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rock Dove (Common pigeon) | <input type="checkbox"/> Song Sparrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Dove | <input type="checkbox"/> White-throated Sparrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-headed Woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> White-crowned Sparrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-bellied Woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> Harris' Sparrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Downy Woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> Dark-eyed Junco (All races) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hairy Woodpecker | <input type="checkbox"/> Red-winged Blackbird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flicker (All races) | <input type="checkbox"/> Grackle (Common) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blue Jay | <input type="checkbox"/> Brown-headed Cowbird |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crow (American) | <input type="checkbox"/> Purple Finch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black-capped Chickadee | <input type="checkbox"/> Common Redpoll |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tufted Titmouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Pine Siskin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-breasted Nuthatch | <input type="checkbox"/> Goldfinch (American) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White-breasted Nuthatch | <input type="checkbox"/> Evening Grosbeak |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brown Creeper | <input type="checkbox"/> House (English) Sparrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Robin (American) | <input type="checkbox"/> House Finch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cedar Waxwing | <input type="checkbox"/> (other) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Starling (European) | <input type="checkbox"/> (other) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cardinal (Northern) | <input type="checkbox"/> (other) |

___ TOTAL DIFFERENT SPECIES SEEN

___ I would like to receive the free *Wildlife Diversity News*. (NEW SUBSCRIBERS ONLY).

___ I would like information about the Iowa Ornithologists' Union which is a statewide bird organization. If you see a rare or unusual bird, please report it to the Iowa birdline 319-338-9881.

1997 WINTER BIRDFEEDER SURVEY

SPONSORED BY THE IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION
AND THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES NONGAME
PROGRAM

On two consecutive days during January 23-26, 1997 observe your feeder and, using this form, describe your feeder and record the birds that visited you. In the space provided, list the highest number of each species that you saw together at any one time. For example, if you saw 10 juncos at 9:00, 11 at 12:00, and 7 at 4:00, the number you should record is 11. If males and females can be distinguished (cardinals, downy woodpecker, etc.) record the combined total. For example, if you saw 3 male cardinals at the 11:00 then 1 male and 2 females at 2:00, record 5 cardinals—the combined total. Count only on the two consecutive days and record only the birds that you see at your feeder, under your feeder, or in the trees around your feeder. DO NOT count birds which just flew past your house and did not use your feeder area. We want information only about birds influenced by your feeders. If you cannot get an exact count, record your best estimate. An honest estimate is far more useful than 'umpteen' or 'too many to count'.

Mail the completed form to me by February 12, 1997:

R. J. Hollis
3351 Lower West Branch Road
Iowa City, IA 52245

If you would like a personal reply, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope and be patient; it may take 12 months before I can get back to you. Look for results in *Wildlife Diversity News* and the *I.O.U. Newsletter*.

Iowa Audubon Council to Meet February 1
by Sherry Dragula

The Iowa Audubon Council, an association of Iowa's eleven chapters of the National Audubon Society, is in the process of drafting a strategic plan for the Council focusing on the creation of a state office for Audubon in Iowa. Our Chapter Board has had initial discussion and input on what we would like a state office to do. The next step is the release of a draft plan at the next Iowa Audubon Council meeting. The meeting will take place at the Grinnell Community Center, Grinnell, Iowa, on Saturday, February 1. **John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society, and Don Arnosti, Director of the Minnesota state office for Audubon, will both be present.** Audubon members are welcome. For further information on the meeting time and place contact Sherry Dragula at 515-233-1532 or e-mail: mpwskd@aol.com.

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 • **Did you know**—feathers wear out, as clothes do, and need to be replaced? This change is called molting. All birds molt all their feathers at least once a year, in summer or early fall. Most birds shed only one pair of feathers at a time from wings and tail. The feathers always drop in a definite order. A second pair does not fall until the new pair is almost fully grown. Thus, the bird is never handicapped in flying.
 •



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.

Name _____
 Address _____
 Town _____ State _____ Zip _____
 e-mail _____ Phone _____

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

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Donate Dollars to Your BBAS by Buying Bird Products

Two major businesses generously offer Big Bluestem Audubon Society (BBAS) a donation when bird seed and other bird products are purchased. Bring in these coupons 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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 Hours: 8-6 M-F, 8-4 Sat. (515) 232-7906

<u>Purchase</u>	<u>Donation</u>
up to \$15	\$1.50
\$15 and over	\$3.00
\$35 and over	\$5.00
over \$70	\$7.50

Offer good until February 28, 1997

in going, be sure to contact Jon by Thursday, January 23 as this trip is still in question. Plans call for the trip to leave the Design Center parking lot at 7:30 a.m.

February

8—YMCA Camp in Boone County. Stan Cyran (515-292-4876). BBAS has been asked to provide input for a planned birdfeeding station at the camp. We will provide suggestions for location, feeders, viewing areas, plantings, optical equipment, and resource materials. The trip will leave from the Design Center parking lot at 8:00 a.m. **This field trip is being held instead of the previously scheduled raptor road trip**

22—Red Rock Eagle Watch. Jon Bahrenfus (515-432-3396). Meet at the Design Center parking lot at 7:30 a.m.

There will be four field trips during January/February; all will leave from the parking lot behind the ISU Design Center at the northwest corner of campus. Most field trips are over by noon or earlier, but some may last until late afternoon if we go to a more distant location. For questions about a particular trip, please contact the person leading the trip.

Audubon Adventures

by Sherry Dragula

This year marks the eleventh year our Society has sponsored the *Audubon Adventures* learning program in selected fourth through sixth grade classrooms in central Iowa. Area educators are very pleased with the program. Bimonthly, twelve selected classrooms in Ames and Story County receive thirty-two student newspapers and a teacher's guide on a natural history topic. The four-page newspaper presents information in a fun way. Examples of topics are spiders, endangered species, conifers, mammals, bird migration, soil invertebrates, and pelagic fishes.

It costs our Chapter \$35 per classroom subscription. We need your help to fund this worthwhile program. Contributions for any amount will help. Please make your check payable to Big Bluestem Audubon Society and send to Paul Ovrom, Treasurer, BBAS, 507 Hayward Ave, Ames, IA 50010. Indicate that your donation is for *Audubon Adventures*. Thanks for helping educate young folks about the natural world.

Editor's Note: Today, more than 600,000 children a year in grades 3 through 6 learn about ecology through Audubon Adventures. This unique classroom program brings a wonder and appreciation of nature to elementary school children. They appreciate our continuing support.

If you have an "X" after your name on your mailing label, this will be your last issue of the Fiyer unless you renew.

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