

# Big Bluestem Flyer

Volume 22, No. 2

October 1987

## Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, October 20, 1987, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Room 181-1, College of Design, ISU Campus

"Prairie Wetlands:

Birdlife & Waterfowl"

Ted LaGrange, Clear Lake Unit, Iowa DNR

(Refreshments: Joan Huse & Cindy Hildebrand)

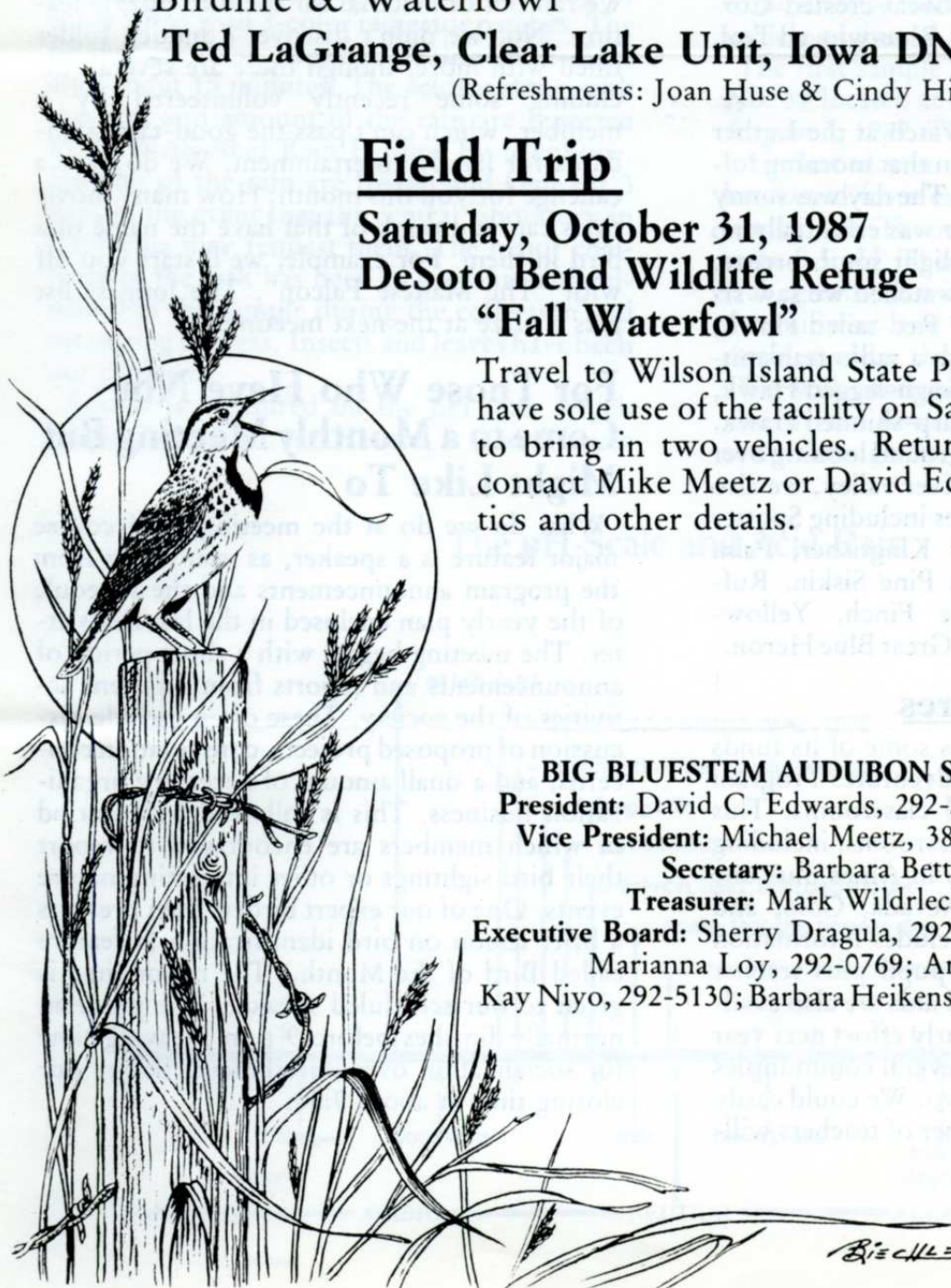
## Field Trip

Saturday, October 31, 1987

DeSoto Bend Wildlife Refuge

"Fall Waterfowl"

Travel to Wilson Island State Park on Friday. We will have sole use of the facility on Saturday with permission to bring in two vehicles. Return late Saturday. Please contact Mike Meetz or David Edwards to arrange logistics and other details.



### **BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY OFFICERS**

**President:** David C. Edwards, 292-3790, Membership Chair

**Vice President:** Michael Meetz, 382-2534, Program Chair

**Secretary:** Barbara Bettis, 232-4863

**Treasurer:** Mark Wildrlechner, 292-4014

**Executive Board:** Sherry Dragula, 292-4014, Conservation Chair

Marianna Loy, 292-0769; Andy Fix, 296-7554

Kay Niyo, 292-5130; Barbara Heikens, 296-2999, Education Chair

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## Field Trip Reports

There have been two field trips since our last meeting. Our September 19th trip to the Ledges to see migrants and wildflowers included eight people. The weather was not good for birding with winds at 15 to 25 mph and temperature near 50 degrees, but those in attendance enjoyed the event and completed it with a spontaneous lunch together in Boone. Twenty-six birds species were seen, but few were the expected migrants. The list, excluding the very common, showed Eastern Bluebird, Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Phoebe, Broad-winged Hawk, Eastern American Egret, Kildeer, Great-crested Cormorant, Greater Yellowlegs, Blue-winged Teal, Wood Duck, and Osprey.

The October 3rd Hawk Watch at the Luther bridge attracted 28 people on that morning following our first hard freeze. The day was sunny and rapidly warming. There was essentially no wind at first shifting to a slight south breeze. In the two hours or so we watched we saw six different "hawk" species: 7 Red-tailed Hawk, 1 Bald Eagle (immature with a radio transmitter), 5 Turkey Vulture, 1 Rough-legged Hawk, 1 Cooper's Hawk, and 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk. While standing on the high ground looking over the wooded and shrubbed river valley, we also saw or heard 19 other species including Spotter Sandpiper, Kildeer, Belted Kingfisher, Palm Warbler, Eastern Bluebird, Pine Siskin, Rufous-sided Towhee, Purple Finch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and many Great Blue Heron.

## Audubon Adventures

Every year our society uses some of its funds to sponsor the Audubon Adventures Program for area elementary school classrooms. This year we have supplied 13 classrooms, including all eight elementary schools in Ames plus one each in Gilbert, Boone, Nevada, Colo, and Story City. The package includes information sheets bimonthly for each pupil plus teacher material. Other displays and aids are also available. We hope to make an early effort next year to solicit businesses in the several communities to support a classroom or two. We could easily find triple our present number of teachers willing to take on the material.

## Spotting Scope

The only physical property of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society is its spotting scope. The scope is a Bushnell Spacemaster with 22 power and 40 power viewing lenses, plus a tripod. The scope has traditionally been kept by the society president and loaned to members as requested. This note is to remind you of its availability, subject to prior request and scheduled field trips.

## Entertainment

Readers from last year recall with sadness that we ran out of material for the bird puzzle feature. No, we didn't discover a hidden folder filled with more, though there are several, including some recently volunteered by a member, which can't pass the good-taste standards for family entertainment. We do have a challenge for you this month: How many movie titles can you think of that have the name of a bird in them. For example, we'll start you off with "The Maltese Falcon". The longest list gets a prize at the next meeting.

## **For Those Who Have Not Come to a Monthly Meeting But Might Like To**

What do we do at the meetings? Of course major feature is a speaker, as you know from the program announcements and the schedule of the yearly plan enclosed in the last newsletter. The meeting begins with a short period of announcements and reports from different activities of the society. These often include discussion of proposed projects, conservation concerns, and a small amount of necessary organization business. This is followed by a period in which members are encouraged to report their bird sightings or other interesting nature events. One of our expert birders then presents a brief lesson on bird identification (a feature called Bird of the Month.) The major time is given to our scheduled speaker. The program normally finishes before 9 p.m., leaving time for socialization over refreshments before our closing time at about 9:30.

## Acid Rain Monitoring by Audubon Members

The National Audubon Society has established network of about 220 volunteers nationwide to monitor the acidity of rain and snow. The purpose is to demonstrate that acid rain is a national problem and to raise public awareness of the issue. Our society has joined that effort with a monitoring station about 3 miles east of Ames. A second site is under construction.

Rainfall is carefully collected in clean polyethylene bags at the site. The acidity is measured with a simple test kit consisting of paper strips with 3-color indicator patches. The patches are then compared with a color chart after about 15 minutes. The acidity along with the time and amount of the rain are reported to the NAS Acid Rain Hotline by telephone. Samples of the rain are frozen and kept for 3 days in the event that the central laboratory in California may request them. The major challenge of the task has been to prevent contamination of the sample during the collection and measuring process. Insects and leaves have been our problem.

Acidity is measured on the pH scale which ranges from 0 to 14. Neutral is 7 and lower

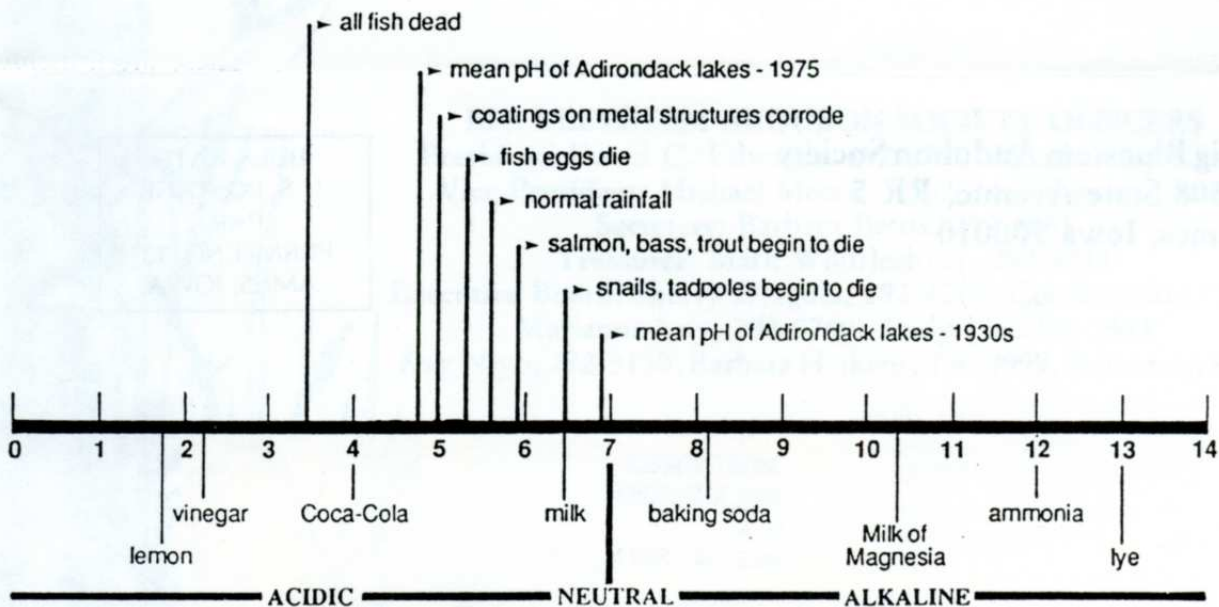
readings are acidic. Normal rain is expected to be 5.6 due to natural impurities, primarily carbon dioxide and ozone. The pH scale is logarithmic and this means that each whole number shows a ten-fold change in acidity. Thus 4.6 means the rain is ten times more acidic than normal.

Abnormal acidity in rain comes from sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide which are released during the combustion of coal, fossil fuels, and similar sources. These pollutants combine with water to form sulfuric acid and nitric acid, respectively. Over 90 percent of these pollutants come directly from power plants, industry, and vehicle engines.

The first sample was collected at our station, No. 82 located at the home of Mike Meetz, on August 3, 1987. To date there has been 16.38 inches of rain on 28 "rain events." The pH has varied from essentially normal at 5.5 to as low as 4.0. The margin of error is estimated to be 0.5 pH. These readings have been in general agreement with those of other stations in the midwest and with those of the network established by the federal government.

We will continue to report our readings to you in the newsletter, including those from snow through the winter.

## The pH Scale and Acid Rain



## **Big Day in Central Iowa**

On Saturday, September 5, Jim Sinclair, Andy Fix and I (Steve Dinsmore) did a Big Day in Central Iowa. The day began at 6 a.m. at Ledges State Park. We played our owl tapes at several spots, but had only a couple of Eastern Screech-Owls respond. Three more hours of birding in lower Ledges produced 64 species including a Sharp-shinned Hawk, three Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, 13 species of warblers including Golden-winged, Mourning, a female Black-throated Blue, and a Scarlet Tanager. On the way to our next stop at Saylorville we add, among other things, our first European Starling and House Sparrow. Too bad we have to see them at all! Also on our way to Saylorville, we see a few shorebirds at a pond south of Luther, including two Western Sandpipers. At the Saylorville Dam, there are more boats than birds, but we do see our first Double-crested Cormorant and Ring-billed Gull. At the Oak Grove Beach are several Forster's and Caspian terns and more gulls. At the Big Creek spillway we see an imm, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (which had been there for a month), and four Black Terns. In some weed patches north of the spillway we find a few birds, including our first Olive-sided Flycatcher, Connecticut Warbler, and Rufous-sided Towhee. As we are leaving, a Cooper's Hawk flies over and adds another species to our list. Big Creek State Park is wall-to-wall boats, but we do see a Snow Goose at the beach. Our list is now up to 94 species.

Our next stop is some flooded fields in Polk County, known as Moeckley Prairie. Here we hit a shorebird bonanza and quickly add Black-bellied and Lesser Golden Plovers, Sanderling, Baird's Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper, and Wilson's Red-necked phalaropes. We also see our first Northern Shoveler and Bobolink. Next, we make a quick stop at the State Forest Nursery in Ames where we add Osprey, Cape May Warbler, and Indigo Bunting. Our list is now at 117 species and we are on our way to Big Wall Lake where we will end the day.

On our way to Big Wall, we see our first Great Egret at Hallett's Quarry north of Ames. We arrive at Big Wall at 4:30 p.m. and quickly begin adding new species: American Bittern, Green-Winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and Marsh Wren. We spend about an hour canoeing the marsh and add several more birds: Black-crowned Night-Heron, Virginia Rail, hundreds of Soras, Common Nourhen, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. As we are driving the gravel roads around the marsh, we flush several Gray Partridges and see our first Savannah Sparrow. Our list is now up to 135 species. We decide to return to Ledges to try for Great-horned and Barred Owls, but we arrive at the park during a thunderstorm and decide to call it quits. We saw 135 species of birds in fifteen hours of birding over a 145 mile route. The weather was nice, the birds cooperated, and we have a good time.

**Big Bluestem Audubon Society**  
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