

Big Bluestem Audubon Society, Ames, Iowa
February, 1984
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Bluestem Flyer

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Tom Davis, Vice-Pres. 292-1869
Laura Marek, Sec. 292-9762
Judy Shearer, Treas. 292-4430
Judy van der Linden, Ed. 232-3450

FEBRUARY MEETING

WHEN: Tuesday, February 14, at 7:30 p.m.

WHERE: Room 205, Bessey Hall, ISU campus. Please note room number change.

WHO: Peter Lowther, University of Northern Iowa

TOPIC: "The Love Life of House Sparrows"

UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Field Trip -- Jim Murdock will lead a bird-watching field trip on Saturday, Feb. 18, leaving from the parking lot south of C.Y. Stephens Auditorium at 9 a.m. Destination of the morning field trip will be announced at the society's February meeting. Jim would like anyone knowing where to find Saw-whet Owls, crossbills or other winter residents of special interest to contact him in the evenings at 233-3185.

Board Meeting -- The next meeting of the Bluestem society's executive board will be April 4 at 7:30 p.m. in room 210, Bessey Hall, ISU campus.

Deadline -- The deadline for submitting articles for the March Bluestem Flyer will be Thursday, March 1, at 5 p.m. Send any copy to Judy van der Linden.

Earthlore -- A Project Eco teacher for Ames area schools will attend our February meeting to ask for money to help finance a scheduled local "Earthlore" presentation described in the January newsletter. Society members agreed in January to postpone a decision on the donation until they heard more about the presentation and an updated treasurer's report was available.

BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

The Iowa Ornithologists' Union and the Iowa Conservation Commission are starting a 5-year project to produce an atlas showing the breeding distribution of Iowa birds. This will be done by establishing about 1000 3x3 mile blocks in Iowa and attempting to search each block during the 5-year period and determine which birds nest in that block. Most likely, a given block will be searched during only one of the five years, although within that year, the block should be searched a number of times so that nests of birds that breed at different times of the year can be located.

(Cont.)

8-10 Story, Boone } Any sps. that nests }
late May }
+ g. }
3x3mi. }
-2- }

4-6
wks.

Counts of nests are not needed -- it will only be necessary to locate one nest for a species to add that bird to the block's list.

Regional coordinators have been appointed to lead efforts in local areas throughout the state. Locally, Hank Zaletel (eastern Story County, western Jasper County, northwest Jasper County) and Jim Dinsmore (Story and Boone counties) are doing this. Both Hank and Jim are anxious to find volunteers to help with the project. They can be reached at: Hank -- office 239-1200, home 377-2889; Jim -- office 294-7669, home 292-3152. Some sort of orientation meeting will be provided before the field season to get atlas teams going. There undoubtedly are birds nesting locally that we don't even suspect are around (a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher nest was found in 1979). Let's see what we can find!

CONSERVATION/THE ENVIRONMENT

Nongame Certificate -- An 8½" by 11" numbered collector's print of an Eastern Chipmunk in full color is the 1984 Nongame Support Certificate offered by the Iowa Conservation Commission. Funds from the sale of the certificates will be used for nongame wildlife programs. Each certificate costs \$5 and may be ordered directly from the commission or through Dave Newhouse or Cindy Hildebrand. The ordering deadline is March 31.

Environmental Coalition -- Bluestem society members will be asked at the February meeting if we want to endorse the Iowa Environmental Coalition (IEC).

The IEC is a new alliance of energy and conservation groups throughout the state of Iowa working to educate the public on environmental issues, coordinate activities among organizations and individuals and promote public participation when environmental concerns are addressed by policy-making bodies. It is similar to environmental coalitions already operating in several other states.

If the Bluestem society should want to join the IEC sometime in the future (Dubuque Audubon is a member now), the annual dues for membership would be \$.10 per member, or about \$20 for our chapter. Individual memberships are also available for \$5 per year.

The IEC is currently working on a hazardous waste project called Caucus '84, which is explained in the enclosed brochure. Society members who attend their local caucuses have an opportunity to help call state and national attention to the problems of hazardous waste and feasible proposed solutions.

Hazardous waste legislation has already been introduced in the Iowa Legislature this year by several representatives and senators. Their bills deal with the right to know about hazardous substances in communities and workplaces, the transportation of hazardous substances and a state superfund for Iowa. Chapter members who want to support this legislation can do so by signing and circulating the enclosed petition and returning it to the IEC. Persons interested in learning more about the bills, caucus procedures or the IEC may contact Cindy Hildebrand.

Upcoming Legislation -- On Jan. 14, two Bluestem members attended a legislative and lobbying workshop in Des Moines sponsored by the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club. Legislative and bill processes and a number of important environmental bills to be considered by the Iowa Legislature this session were discussed. For more information, come to the February meeting or contact Sherry Dragula (292-4014) or Cindy Hildebrand (232-3807).

Ames School Tax -- When deciding how to vote on the proposed school tax, Ames residents should consider the tax's impact on Iowa's Fish and Wildlife Protection Fund, the so-called "Chickadee Check-off." The check-off is giving a much-needed boost to the conservation of birds and other non-game wildlife by providing money for habitat acquisition, research and other programs. (Cont.)

Nearly three-fourths of the proposed school tax would come from a surtax on Ames' residents' Iowa income tax. If the school tax is adopted, persons who would ordinarily receive an income tax refund will find this refund eliminated or reduced. The money these persons could contribute to the check-off, a voluntary program for taxpayers owed a refund, would be correspondingly reduced. (Peter van der Linden, Chairman, Conservation Committee)

THOUGHTS AFIELD -- a monthly column by Tom Davis

An Owl Night

Listen to it. The silence is spectacular. The amber moon like a distant movie spotlight casts mysterious shadows through the fragrant pines. The crystal, February stillness is reflected statue-like on the glassy lake ice. Throughout central Iowa, along the deserted river bottoms, the air is cold, suspended, waiting. Tonight is an owl night.

The calm, crisp air, moonlit countryside and ghostly, leafless trees allow for maximum communication between love struck owls. Valentine's Day is actually several months long for these feathery creatures of the night. This long courtship time occurs now so that the young hooters can be hatched into a world of warmer temperatures and adequate food in the spring.

By mid-winter, the males have formed their romantic territorial retreat. The female is attracted by the male's nightly serenade. Because of these invisible but boisterous owl love antics, any night listener can attempt his own love call and play acoustic matchmaker. On a true owl night, all that is needed is a little patience.

Five minutes after we stepped into the shadows, our patience was rewarded. We traced the lonely call of the Great Horned Owl. From the gnarled branches of an elm, across snowy fields, to the top of our neighbor's barn, the sound was mystically repeated. Another call floated to us from an old maple snag down at river's edge. We heard six horned owls in the distance. We wondered what each owl had learned.

We waited for another familiar call. Finally it came. The Barred Owl had returned again. "Who calls for you, who calls for you all," he said. I answered with my own rendition of his call. Five minutes of anticipation passed. I called again. The owl called, but closer this time. Suddenly a second owl joined, revealing his observation post at the edge of a dark woods one snowy mile distant. I called several more times. Both owls replied once more. Again the bone-chilling blackness encircled us. I wondered what foreign owl language I had created.

Suddenly across glowing fields, the sound of owl war crashed against our ears. Like someone taking a quick bath in a mountain stream, the chaos of WHOOOS and WHAAAS subsided as quickly as they had started.

We remained spellbound, completely entranced by this natural spectacle for several minutes. We wondered about the outcome of this Barred Owl showdown. We fixed that thrilling set of sounds into our memories.

Aldo Leopold told of the stimulating sounds of goose music. He recognized its importance, its necessity to all of us. On clear February nights, we are all invited to hear another kind of natural music. A sound, like the laugh of the loon, like the gurgle of the crane, like goose music, that seems to represent the essence of the wild outdoors. It is the music of an owl night.

ETCETERA

Brochures describing the 1984 Audubon Camp program have arrived and may be obtained from John Stampe. Audubon offers four ecology camps -- in Maine, Wisconsin, Connecticut and Wyoming -- for adults and special ecology sessions for young people and families. There are also a number of field seminars, (Cont.)

during which skills like photography and canoeing are taught, and "Wildcountry" trips to 17 wilderness areas in North America and Hawaii. Camp fees have been reduced this year. Consult the brochure for more information and a registration form.

Everything bird feeders need to know about which seeds birds like can be found in a new booklet published by the National Wildlife Federation, "Wild Bird Feeding Preferences." The booklet lists preferred foods of over two dozen birds and rates seeds according to their appeal to 13 types of wild birds. It is available in single copies or in bulk at the following prices: One copy, \$1; 2-25 copies, 60¢ apiece; 26-50 copies, 45¢ apiece; 51-999 copies, 35¢ apiece, and over 1,000 copies, 25¢ apiece. Write to: Wild Bird Feeding Preferences, Dept. 157, National Wildlife Federation, 1412 16th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. (From the Iowa Conservationist.)

A Bluestem education committee member who gave a program on bird identification in January to a class of third graders received a folder of thank you notes from the students. The boys and girls had been given an assortment of stuffed birds, including a hawk, an owl, a crow and six smaller species, to take to their desks, examine and characterize. Some of the comments in their thank you notes: "I liked the birds they feel soft;" "I liked how you can identify there shape, there beaks and there names;" "The owl was big and furry. All the birds were neat;" and "I had a fun time. I like to hold the dead birds!"



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