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 4 March/April 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—March 20 meeting: *Mike Meetz, "Loons on Isle Royale"*

Come take a trip to Isle Royale, an island archipelago with over forty lakes, that stretches for forty-five miles along Lake Superior's northern shore. The Ojibway people named it Minong, meaning "the Island." In 1976, the island park was designated part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, protected under the Wilderness Act. Once the home of the woodland caribou, the last wilderness area found in the United States east of the Mississippi River is now home to the timber wolf, moose, and common loon. In 1981, the island was designated an International Biosphere Reserve. For the last seven years, Mike has surveyed the population of juvenile Common Loons on Isle Royale.

Featured Speaker—April 17 meeting: *Dr. Carol Vleck, "Reproductive behavior and physiology of Adelie penguins on the Antarctic Peninsula"*

Don't miss this exciting study about the hormonal control of aggressive and parental behavior in Adelie penguins. Dr. Vleck will discuss her two years of field work at the Palmer Station, including how one gets to Antarctica to do science!

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: March & April

Jon Bahrenfus, Field Trip Chair

March

21-23– Sandhill Crane trip. This trip will leave Friday to Grand Island via the marshes of the Waterfowl Production Areas of the Rainwater Basin Wetland Management District. This will be an interesting weekend trip to the Grand Island area to see the numerous cranes and other waterfowl. Trip leader, Kay Niyo (515-233-8803).

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In this Issue:

Quote of the Month: ***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does. -Margaret Mead***

As the Crow Flies . . .

Stan Cyran, President

The days are getting longer, and puddles and moist brown earth and bits of green are appearing where there was once snow. Red winged blackbirds are staking out their roadside territories, cardinals and chickadees are singing. The goldfinches are changing into their summer colors. It won't be long before we start seeing migratory birds returning from their winter homes to the summer nesting areas.

International Migratory Bird Day is the annual hallmark event of Partners in Flight, the international coalition whose mission it is to reverse the declines of migratory birds. This year is the 5th anniversary of this event. The Big Bluestem Audubon Society will be celebrating with a combined trip with the Des Moines Audubon Society to the Ledges State Park to observe the warbler migration on Saturday, May 10. Afterwards, Karl Jungbluth has invited everyone to his home in Boone for a little bit of post-migratory activities. He especially invites new members and novices. Please see the forthcoming May/June newsletter for details.

Hope to see everyone at the upcoming field trips. Happy birding!

Did you know?

In mid-October 1995, 7 captive bred sandhill cranes flew 800 miles from Idaho to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico ending their first winter migration by following an ultralight aircraft! This project is an attempt to establish new migration routes for the critically endangered whooping crane, by testing it out on non-endangered sandhills.

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:

- Carol Berrier 965-8242
- 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 Zaletel 382-5427 madowl@nevia.net
- 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

State Forest Nursery

On January 19, 14 brave souls endured below zero temperatures for a short morning of birding at the State Forest Nursery. No one wanted to leave their warm cars, but by using a cattle prod, the field trip leader was finally able to get everyone out into the frigid tundra where there were not very many species of birds to be seen. The highlight of the trip was the sighting of two Cooper's hawks and also a glimpse of a fleeing red fox. Most of the group later visited a feeder in the north part of Ames where red crossbills had been appearing, but our luck was not with us and none was seen.

YMCA Camp—Proposed Bird Feeding Station

On this quiet February 8th morning, a dozen BBAS members and Jane Clark from the DSM Audubon met with several Des Moines area YMCA Camp personnel to discuss a proposed bird feeding station at the camp. Participants enjoyed walking in the deep snow, saw the sun for the first time in days and exclaimed "ooh-ah" as an adult bald eagle soared past at close range. John Schmidts showed two possible locations for the bird feeding station, which will be funded by grants from Pioneer Seed and REAP, among other possibilities. Both locations were evaluated for natural cover, access routes for the birds, views, and chances for disturbance by other camp activities. The upper athletic field site was deemed less desirable, being somewhat exposed to the elements requiring considerable landscaping, and close proximity to several noisy camp activities. The second area was a favorite of the bird enthusiasts for its excellent river views, proximity to natural grassy, shrubby and tree habitats, and a quieter location west of the Scenic Valley Railroad tracks. A prairie planting is also planned in the area this spring. A weedy patch was visited by goldfinches, a downy woodpecker, and a common redpoll as our group discussed building plans. Ed Mahlstadt of the Y-Camp showed preliminary building plans, which he is very willing to modify to meet bird watchers' recommendations. The building would be heated and include many windows for easy viewing. Landscaping would be "for the birds." Participants recommended a water source, a desire to keeping plantings such as a butterfly garden as naturalistic as possible, and even suggested installing a modern composting toilet to keep utilities and construction impact on the site minimal. Near by, there is known evidence of Native American campsites from years gone by.

There is still plenty of room for input into this project, but the YMCA Camp is ready to move forward shortly. A summary of BBAS recommendations will be sent to Y-Camp personnel early in March. Please provide your input soon to Karl Jungbluth (515-432-5057).

(continued on page 3)

Birder of the Month

(This is another in an on-going 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?)

Kay Niyo knows prairies the way most of us know our backyards. Because, you see, Kay had a prairie for a backyard for eighteen years. She started her own prairie shortly after she moved to Ames in 1969. "It was a phenomenal environmental education," she notes. "I noticed a dramatic increase in the numbers of birds, butterflies, insects, and mammals."

At the same time she was developing her expertise in prairie management, Kay also got interested in birding. "I had been a birder since my childhood, but after I went back to school, my interest really increased," she explains. Kay got a bachelor's degree in zoology, and later got her master's and a PhD in immunology and medical mycology. During that time, she was active in Big Bluestem, serving as a board member and participating in local field trips. Her prairie provided many memorable birding moments. "I remember the remarkable irruption of redpolls that occurred in the 1970s. The area under my feeder was filled with them." She adds, "one rainy day, I witnessed 17 goldfinches on a single Rudbeckia triloba plant." She also recalls one winter when she fed apple halves to a robin that over-wintered in her yard. "I have many pictures of the robin, standing on my kitchen windowsill, begging for food."

Kay moved to a townhouse 2 years ago, and had to plow under her beloved prairie. All's well that ends well, however, and two weeks after she moved into her new townhouse, she discovered a remnant prairie less than 100 yards from her home. The homeowners' association made her chair of the prairie restoration committee, and they have gone on to restore four more acres.

Kay has also been caretaker of a bluebird trail for Story County for 9 years. "It was interesting to watch the fluctuating populations of bluebirds and the variables that affected them." She has also been to Nebraska to see the Sandhill Cranes seven times. "Watching a half million cranes flying in at dusk to roost on the Platte River is a spiritual experience," she has found. In 1995, she birded in Costa Rica, which whetted her appetite for international ecological experiences.

Although not everyone may see beauty in the diversity of a prairie, it is not hard to see the excitement that Kay feels when she is exploring the natural world around her.

Newsletter Deadline: ***Friday, April 4, 1997 at 2 p.m.***

Board Happenings

Joyce Bahrenfus, Secretary

The BBAS Board met Sunday, January 12 at Kay Niyo's home with a short meeting. Highlighted committee reports include a letter writing campaign for increased REAP funding. The REAP Coalition plans to push for funding at the $20 million level. A special project at this time is the Boone YMCA Camp site and input to the proposed bird-feeding station location. April 25, 1968 is the BBAS founding date. It is hoped that a BBAS 30th Anniversary Celebration could begin next year with a special speaker to kick off a year long celebration. The not-for-profit tax status is still under review by a volunteer lawyer. John Flicker, National Audubon President, will attend the February 1, IAC meeting at the Grinnell Community Center. A representative from the Minnesota state office plans to attend also.

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 next meeting so it will get on the agenda. Thanks.

Board Meetings—1996-1997: March 2, April 6, May. All Board meetings are on Sunday evenings at 7:00 p.m. The March 2 Board meeting will be held at Kay Niyo's home. The April 6 Board meeting will be held at Sherry Dragula's home. Future locations will be announced in the newsletter.

Continued page 2—**Field Trip Report**

Eagle Watch

On Saturday, February 22, a group of 8 people went on a trip to the open water area just below Lake Red Rock. There was a dusting of snow left from the day before, the sky was fairly clear, and it was cool out. We saw a magnificent sight as we entered the parking area below the dam—**eagles were everywhere!** We counted between 70 and 100 eagles along the 1-mile stretch of river we were on. We also saw goldeneyes, a lesser scaup, a redhead duck, and several flocks of common mergansers, sure signs that spring can't be too far off!

Learn more about me on page 6!

Conservation Corner

Sherry Dragula, Conservation Chair

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

Senator Kempthorne (R-ID), chair of the Drinking Water, Fisheries, and Wildlife Subcommittee, and Senator Chafee (R-RI) chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee, have released a draft ESA reauthorization bill. Some concerns with the bill are:

- Agencies would be permitted to "self-consult" regarding the impact of their actions on endangered and threatened species. Current law requires that agencies consult with Fish and Wildlife Service or National Marine Fisheries Service biologists before undertaking an activity that may impact listed species. Many of these agencies have a poor record of conserving listed species and few have the scientific resources available to FWS and NMFS.
- State water laws, which often do not take wildlife values into account, would override the federal ESA. Conservation of aquatic and water-dependent species such as salmon and cranes would be more difficult.
- Recovery planning and implementation authority could be delegated to the states. Piecemeal, state-by-state recovery planning and implementation could result in inconsistent and poorly coordinated plans for wide-ranging species, such as migratory birds.

Senators Kempthorne and Chafee will begin discussions with ranking committee Democrats Baucus (D-MT) and Reid (D-NV) soon. Here's how to contact the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee leadership:

The Honorable John Chafee
(Chairman)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-2921
senator_chafee@chafee.senate.gov

The Honorable Max Baucus
(Ranking Minority)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-2651
max@baucus.senate.gov

The Honorable Dirk Kempthorne
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-6142
(202) 224-5893 (fax)
dirk_kempthorne@kempthorne.senate.gov

The Honorable Harry Reid
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3542
(202) 224-7327 (fax)
senator_reid@reid.senate.gov

This article was excerpted from the "Audubon Advisory," the National Audubon Society's weekly legislative update. To subscribe to it, via e-mail send a message as follows:

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To subscribe via regular mail, contact: National Audubon Society, 1901 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20006 (202-861-2242)

Iowa Audubon Council Report

On February 1, 1997, forty Audubon members from 10 Audubon Chapters gathered in Grinnell, Iowa, to discuss a draft plan for an Iowa Field Office of Audubon. Don Arnosti, Director of the Minnesota Field Office, provided insight into the value and operation of a state office. John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society, also joined the group, adding focus to the plan from a national perspective. The Iowa Field Office draft plan consists of six sections: Chapter and Member Services, Advocacy (on Environmental Issues), Education, Communication and Outreach, Development (Fundraising), and Governance (of the Field Office).

The plan proposes that a State Director be hired perhaps including an administrative assistant. Later, a Development Director (Fundraiser) could be hired. Startup costs would be provided by the National Audubon Society, but the Iowa office would need to eventually achieve financial independence. Audubon Chapters in Iowa would remain autonomous under the draft plan. The state office would assist chapters by training and developing leaders, assisting in membership development, and by providing information and assistance to chapters and Audubon members. The state office would also support National Audubon Society priority campaigns. The Iowa Audubon Council, made up of representatives of Iowa Audubon chapters, would establish a committee to oversee the operation of the state office.

Chapters have been asked to offer their comments on the draft plan. A revised version of the Plan for an Iowa Field Office of Audubon will be presented at the next meeting, April 5, 1997 in Grinnell.

If you would like further information about this plan, contact Karl Jungbluth (Ph: 515-432-5057, e-mail: karl.a.jungbluth@ noaa.gov) or Sherry Dragula (Ph: 515-233-1532, E-mail: mpwskd@aol.com).

First day of spring—March 20!

Did you know?

The various wetlands across the nation provide habitat for myriad fish and wildlife. Some 5,000 species of plants, 190 species of amphibians, and one-third of all bird species in the U.S. inhabit wetlands. Among the species that depend on wetlands are migratory waterfowl and songbirds, mammals, freshwater game fish, and crayfish. More than 12 million ducks breed annually in U.S. wetlands, and millions more overwinter in these areas. Thirty-five endangered and threatened species also depend on wetlands, and more than one-half of marine sport fish caught in this country rely on wetland estuaries.—from *Oases for Wildlife: Small and Farmed Wetlands*, National Audubon Society (1996, p. 11).

The Feral Domestic Pigeon

Columba livia

by Wilmer J. Miller[1]

Birds that we see in their natural habitat may be beautiful, interesting, thought provoking, and delightful. There is one species, the domestic pigeon, now spread world-wide that has been long domesticated, perhaps for 4,000 years or more! It has provided food, fertilizer, entertainment, message delivery, and an increase in biological knowledge. Its genetic variability is rivaled by few other species among the higher animals (Drosophila, mice, chickens, . . .)

For bird watchers such as Clube de Observadores do Aves (COA) and Audubon groups, these escapes from breeder's pens that we call feral (wild, but from domestic stocks) are ever present in those artificial canyons we call cities and in those smaller cliffs and caves called towns. Such feral pigeons should not be ignored, but should be noted in counts and listings. Where else can you find such instructive variability in a wild bird?

Size is not always a trustworthy clue for sex in pigeons. But the sex of mature individuals often can be noted by their behavior. In courtship, the male will prance about the female, usually with an inflated crop and cooing with some head bobbing. Often he will suddenly drag his tail in a sudden move foreward. If she is "ready" she also will prance in smaller "mincing" steps and some head bobbing. Ritual-like partial preening of the feathers between the wing tip and the rump can also occur, especially in the male as a prelude to copulation just before the female goes into a sex-crouch with shoulders raised. In display flight the male will clap his wings rather loudly. Usually the male leads the female in flight.

COA and Audubon members should learn the colors and patterns evident in pigeons. What are these variations often seen?. . . Red, blue, black, white, gray, grizzle, pied. . .are all commonly seen colors plus the much more rare yellow and many more that are more difficult to describe. But let's be more exact.

Patterns[2] of pigment distribution are most immediately evident. The wild type is blue bar (2 black bars in the bluish wing). In the hand, or through binoculars, you should also note the whitish rump and perhaps you can see the whitish outer tail feathers on each side of the spread tail, which has a near terminal black band. The genetically dominant black or spread pattern is self evident black all over, including flights and tail feathers.

Another pattern type is the gazzi white pied with a colored head, upper neck and wings and tail, but a white back, breast, and ventral color. It is recessive to the wild type and rare in ferals. White flights is rather commonly seen in feral pigeons. It is sometimes associated with a white ("bald") head, and has a bit more complicated inheritance.

White pigeons can be seen feral (one kind is recessive); but most often feral white birds are pied (piebald) with scattered patches of pigmented feathers. While the inheritance is complex, it is some kind of partial dominant in effect. Grizzle is a codominant with white streaks on the head and neck and often elsewhere when one dose of the mutant is present.

Colors: There are 2 kinds of red. One is a recessive red with dark gray edges about the tail and rump and a bit in the wings. It covers up (hides) pattern types and some of the other colors. So it is called epistatic in genetic terms. This recessive red is uncommon in the feral state as are most of the recessive mutants. Rather common is the sex-linked dominant ash-red. The otherwise bluish "ground" color is gray-like with reddish tones. The bars are red. When ash red is combined with spread, the entire bird is gray or ash color with only very faint red showing sometimes in the mongrel birds.

Allelic to ash-red is brown (called chocolate when combined with spread). Brown is recessive to ash-red or blue. [Female birds have only one dose of sex-linked genes (are hemizygous). Males heterozygous for ash-red and blue have black specks especially in the tail and flights. So, if you see such an ash-red pigeon with black flecks, you know it is a male. Males heterozygous for ash-red and brown have brown flecks.]

Also sex-linked, but at another locus, is dilute. It is recessive. Combined with either type of red, it is called yellow (and ash-yellow).

Still another locus on the sex-chromosome is almond (or magnani). This is a codominant, and as a single mutant drastically mixes red, brown, blue, black, and white specks and patches. Two doses of this gene is detrimental with bulging eyes and poor vision, as well as near white plumage. Almond is not common in feral pigeons.

Two other color mutants in feral pigeons are smoky and dirty, but they have small effects more difficult to notice. For example, smoky gives a paler base to the blackish bill plus no white in the outer tail vanes.

These are the colors most likely to be noted in feral pigeons. Many others can be seen in fanciers lofts. Some of these are faded (allelic to almond), pale (allelic to dilute), reduced, opal (dominant and recessive types), indigo, milky, pearl eye, and more. On rare occasions you might see also a crest or grouse legged bird.

Combinations of color mutants yield many more interaction colors, with many beautiful effects. Visit one of the pigeon shows or fairs to see some of these.

Now, what are the colors and patterns in your neighborhood? What is their frequency? Such data could result in a scientific paper! [For example: Frequency of colors and patterns of feral pigeons in Belo Horizonte or Des Moines.]

[1]Pesquisador Visitante, Depto Zootecnia EV-UFMG, Caixa Postal 557, 30161-970 Belo Horizonte-MG, BRASIL
e-mail: wjmiller@oraculo.Lcc. ufmg.br
w_miller@molebio.iastate.edu

[2]I obtained most of my genetic information about pigeons from Dr. W. F. Hollander, now retired from the Genetics Department of Iowa State University. I confirmed much of this information in my own experiments at the Univerisities of Wisconsin, California and ISU. Dr. Hollander and I have published several scientific papers together.

Recent Reference: Johnston, R. F., and M. Jani, 1995, *Feral Pigeons*, Oxford University Press, p. 320 [good bibliography, etc., but poor genetics]

Editor's note: Dr. W. Miller is one of the founding members of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society and is spending a 3-year sabbatical in Brazil. Some of the technical jargon was deleted. If you are interested in checking out feral domestic pigeon colors and patterns, please contact Dr. Miller in Brazil.

Did you know?

Some owls have fringes on their primary feathers to enable silent flight. But, this isn't so its prey won't hear the owl, but so the owl can hear its prey!

Build a Bat House for Spring!

Now is the time to ready your bird houses for spring. As mentioned in *As the Crow Flies . . .* , spring is showing signs of being just around the corner. This year, why not do something different? Build a bat house. Everyone knows that purple martins are very important for the insects, especially the 1,000-plus mosquitoes they consume daily. However, the bat can eat between 3,000 to 7,000 mosquitoes each night! And, they can live up to 18 years! Here are some more facts about bats.

- They are the only mammal capable of flight.
- Bones of the lower skeleton are reduced in size and thickness to lighten the load a bat must carry in flight. This is part of the reason why bats hang upside down.
- The best time to view bats is around one-half hour after sunset in the summer months, and the best locations are around ponds and lakes, or around street lamps where insects concentrate.
- Most bats do not carry rabies; attacks by bats are extremely rare, even when the animals are provoked; bats are not blind, nor are they interested in anyone's hair!

All bat houses should be at least two feet tall, 14 inches or more wide, and have a 3-6-inch landing area extending below the entrance. Most houses have 1-4 roosting chambers. Roost partitions should be carefully spaced 3/4 to 1 inch apart. All partitions and landing areas should be roughened. Wood surfaces can be scratched or covered with durable plastic screen (1/8 or 1/4-inch mesh, available from your local hardware store). Include vents six inches from the bottom of the house to be used where the average July high temperatures are 85F or above. Front vents are as long as a house is wide, side vents are 6 inches tall by 1/2-inch wide. A combination of exterior plywood and cedar is best, nails should be galvanized. Caulk all seams, especially around the roof. At least six hours of direct daily sun are recommended for all bat houses where daily high temperatures in July average less than 100F. Most nursery colonies choose roosts within 1/4-mile of water, preferably a stream, river, or lake.

Greatest bat house success has been achieved in areas of diverse habitat, especially where there is a mixture of differing agricultural use and natural vegetation. Bats find houses mounted on poles or buildings more than twice as fast as on trees, which are also less preferred. Mounting two bat houses back-to-back, 3/4-inch apart on poles, both covered by a tin roof, helps protect them from overheating in hot climates. All bat houses should be mounted at least 10 feet above ground; 15-20 feet is better. Bat houses should not be lit by bright lights. Houses mounted on sides of buildings or high up on poles provide the best protection from predators.

Wasps can be a problem before bats fully occupy a house. Use of 3/4-inch roosting spaces reduces wasp use. If nests accumulate, they should be removed in late winter or early spring before either wasps or bats return. Open-bottom houses greatly reduce problems with birds, mice, squirrels, or parasites, and guano does not accumulate inside. Bat houses can be installed at any time of the year, but are more likely to be used their first summer if installed before the bats return in spring.

NOTE: This information has been taken and adapted from the Bat Conservation International; Michael Mulheisen, The Regents of the University of Michigan; and Wildlife Notes, Ohio Division of Wildlife

"A BIRD CAME DOWN THE WALK"

Emily Dickinson
c.1862

A Bird came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around—
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought—
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home—

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam—
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, splashless as they swim.

Engeldinger Marsh Update

Sherry Dragula

The Polk County Conservation Board has approved the widening of Highway 65 through Engeldinger Marsh. Mitigation will be required with new lands being added to the marsh complex to halt some erosion into the marsh. An environmental impact analysis will need to be completed and permit will need to be issued by the Corps of Engineers before the widening can begin.

Nominations Sought for the Big Bluestem Audubon Society Officers and Board

A nominations committee has been formed by President Cyran to find nominees for all Officer positions and 2 expiring Board member positions. The committee consists of Kevin Healy, Karl Jungbluth, and Sherry Dragula. The Nominations Committee will submit a slate of Officers and Board Members for consideration at the annual election held at the May meeting. If you have nomination suggestions or would like to serve in one of these capacities, please contact a committee member before April 4, 1997. If you would like to join or head any of the other committees and/or like information about the duties of the committees, contact the name by the committee listed on page 2 of this newsletter.

Paul Ovrom is head of the budget committee. If you have any suggestions for the 97-98 budget, please contact him before April 4, 1997.

Bird Chat

Dear B.C.:

I've just experienced my first winter and am looking forward to spring. However, I notice some of my facial feathers are turning black. Even my beak is changing color. My once semi-dull gray feather coat is starting to turn a bright red. Dad is now picks fights with me and mom ignores me. The girl next door is watchin'. What's happenin' to my life? *N. Cardinal, Jr.*

Dear Jr.:

Don't be alarmed. You are going through bird puberty. It happens to all birds sooner or later. Most birds reach adulthood when they are one or two years old, but some may take as much as 10 years. The most obvious change for most species is their change from the plumage they wear during their first year of life to the "adult" plumage. Less obvious, but perhaps more important, are the changes going on inside their bodies. Their gonads (ovaries or testes) undergo a tremendous growth spurt as they mature and become ready to form the ova or sperm needed to form a new generation. At the same time, these new adults also change greatly in behavior, often singing or in other ways trying to attract the attention of a bird of the opposite sex as they begin their courtship behavior. Don't worry. Go meet that girl next door! *B.C.*

Book Reviews

Now is the time to build, repair, and clean your birdhouses before the spring migration comes. The bluebirds will be arriving very soon. I noticed about 250 red-winged blackbirds flying over February 28, looking for their summer sites. In anticipation of the migration, the following books are excellent for instructions on building birdhouses. These books can be purchased at Brekke's Town and Country. Have fun!

Woodworking for Wildlife. Homes for Birds and Mammals, by the Minnesota Department of Nataural Resources, (nd).

This book is my favorite and the least expensive of the two. It includes very careful directions for building nest boxes and platforms for backyards, small deciduous woodlots, extensive deciduous or coniferous forests, lakes, rivers, marshes, ponds, and adjacent upland habitats. Not only does it explain how to build and place your newly built habitat, but it also gives some background about the birds or mammals who will inhabit them.

The Complete Birdhouse Book, by Donald and Lillian Stokes (1990).

This book has beautiful, glossy pictures of both birds and their houses. It describes how to attract nesting birds, construct birdhouses, and the birds you can attract. This book is limited to birds only and has various types of birdhouses for the novice to advanced wood worker to build.

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 Widrlechner, Membership Chair, 2121 Burnett Ave., Ames, Iowa 50010.

Name_____

Address_____

Town_____ State____ Zip_____ Phone_____

e-mail_____ fax_____

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

Continued page 1—**Coming Field Trips**

29– Kevin and Rosanne Healy will lead an early spring birding trip to local areas to see waterfowl, shore birds, and other early migrating birds at Little Wall Lake, Tiegs, and Bjorkboda marshes. Plan on seeing lots of species! Meet at the ISU Design Center at 8:00 a.m.Trip leaders, Kevin and Rosanne Healy, (515-233-5914).

April

12– A waterfowl birding trip will visit Harrier Marsh near Ogden and also Dunbar Slough near Scranton. Both of these areas usually have excellent populations of waterfowl at this time. Meet at the ISU Design Center parking lot at 7:30 a.m. The trip leader is Jon Bahrenfus (515-432-3396).

26—A shorebird field trip will be held in the Story County area. There are several good places that may be visited, depending upon water level, weather, etc. This is an excellent chance for those of you who want to brush up on shorebird identification as Hank is excellent at identification of this troublesome group of birds. **This trip will leave from the front of the Story County Courthouse in Nevada at 8:00 a.m. Hank said he will be by the cannon!** The courthouse is on 6th Street. Hank Zaletel will be the trip leader (515-382-5427).

There will be four field trips during March/April. Check the newsletter for the meeting location. For questions about a particular trip, please contact the person leading the trip.

Chickadee Checkoff

Don't forget to make a contribution on your Iowa Income Tax Return for a contribution to the Fish and Wildlife Protection Fund. The Chickadee Checkoff finances the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. By marking the chickadee checkoff, you can help support management and enhancement of the 400 plus nongame species in Iowa. Please consider helping Iowa's cause.

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

Rebecca A. Shivvers, Editor
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