

Ross's Goose 1  
2 Mar 1990  
Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA  
T. Kent  
IBL 60:66, 62:21, Kent 1991

Record Number: 90-02  
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Thomas H. Kent

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:66

Records Committee: 62:21

Kent, T. H. 1991. A county big year. IBL 61:65-68

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: Both good documents, not unexpected that these geese are spreading their range eastward. Snows and White-fronteds are also moving eastward.

A-D: Adequately described.

A-D: Detailed description of bill size, shape and color and general size comparison of bird are completely convincing.

A-D: Good description.

A-D: I am glad the observer took the time to establish size since Snow Goose was not present. All key field marks are accounted for making this a strong A-D.

A-D: Good description adequately eliminates other species. Combination of small size, bill shape, lack of grin mark, short neck all indicate Ross' Goose beyond reasonable doubt.

A-D: Good description of a Ross' Goose.

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FRONT COVER: Mississippi Kite, Clive, Polk County, July 1991. Photo by Reid Allen.

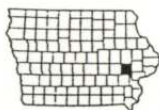
INSIDE BACK COVER: Editorial Staff, Subscription/Membership Information, Instructions to Authors, Officers, Board of Directors, Standing Committees.

BACK COVER: Meeting Dates, Report Deadlines, Birdline, Materials Available.

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## A COUNTY BIG YEAR

THOMAS H. KENT



Many birders like to play games that involve finding species of birds in defined areas over defined periods of time. Games are a strong motivator of human behavior and tend to stimulate research, planning, and intensive activity. Personally, I get much more out of my birding activities if I have a plan or game involved. For 1990, I chose a project for which I could make maximum use of the time available and for which I could best use my own abilities. I set out to find as many species as possible in Johnson County in one year.

My first step in planning was to divide potential species into four categories and then estimate the number of each that I was likely to find: (1) expect to see, most without any special effort (181 species, all of which I should see); (2) good chance to see (35 of 52 species); (3) possible, but unlikely (10 of 46 species); (4) outside possibility (2 of 15 species). My goal was set for 228 species. Next, I plotted my available time against the dates that I could look for the 98 species in categories 2 and 3. This gave me a month-by-month plan for species to look for. In order to add additional intensity to my efforts, I planned for a Big Day each month (two in May) and a week's vacation in May at the peak of migration. After the year began I added an additional goal: to drive all of the roads in the county.

January started out well. On a Big Day, alone, I found 45 species including six owls, six waterfowl, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Harris' Sparrow. During the rest of January and February, I covered about three-fourths of the roads and was rewarded by finding Northern Goshawk, Northern Shrike, and Gray Partridge. The latter species turned out to be present in all quadrants of the county. Intensive efforts to find Common Redpoll failed, but others (Tom Shires, Chuck Fuller) discovered Red and White-winged crossbills near my office in the Medical Laboratories.

March also started out with a bang when I found a Ross' Goose with Greater White-fronted Geese near the Coralville Reservoir dam. Late in the month, high water brought large concentrations of waterfowl including Tundra Swan, American Black Duck, and Greater Scaup. An early Franklin's Gull and Lesser Golden-Plover were a welcome sight, and a large flock of Smith's Longspurs returned to the same field they were in the previous two years.

After a Big Day on 31 March, I went out on the afternoon of 1 April to look for and found Loggerhead Shrike and Brewer's Blackbird, the latter a difficult bird to find in Johnson County. On 7 April, I took a long, dull walk to Sand Point and was rewarded when a Sandhill Crane flew over. On 14 April, I finally flushed a Winter Wren after many hours of searching. On 15 April, my son-in-law's two dogs helped me flush a Le Conte's Sparrow from a grassy field. I usually find the sparrow in late April, but this year I would be birding in Texas at that time. On 16 April, it was raining when I got home from work, but I went out anyway and was rewarded with my first Osprey, American White Pelican, and Cattle Egret. My sister called about a wounded Cooper's Hawk the day before I was to leave for Texas, so after checking it out, I took her to the reservoir where we found 14 American Avocets and to Lake Macbride where we found three Eared Grebes.

May is usually my big birding month, and this year was no exception. I found 192 species in the county during the month. Some of the more unusual ones were

90-02



Western Grebe, Clay-colored Sparrow, Northern Mockingbird (several locations), Ruddy Turnstone, Mississippi Kite, Alder Flycatcher, Connecticut Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Peregrine Falcon. By the end of May, my year's list for Johnson County stood at 234 species, 6 more than my original goal. I set a new goal of 240 and reset my time priorities for the species that remained.

Summer is usually slow for new species, and I have less birding time. I added no new species in either June or July and only one in August, Little Blue Heron on the first. Water levels, which had been at flood levels in June and July, began to fall in August, leading to excellent fall habitat for shorebirds and herons.

Birding picked up in September, which turned out to be spectacular even though I took an 8-day birding trip to Newfoundland. Francis Moore and I found 104 species on 1 September, including Sanderling, which was new for the year. On the 2nd, when a passing car disturbed my shorebird watching, I noticed warblers moving in the roadside bushes. The first one in my binocular was a Black-throated Blue Warbler, only my second one for the state (another was in my yard later in the month). Encouraged by the warbler movement, I went to Oakland Cemetery to look in the conifers for Cape May Warbler. Just as I was about to leave, I found two of them when I stopped to look at a flock of Chipping Sparrows. Later that same day, Jim Fuller reported Buff-breasted Sandpiper, which I was able to find the next morning. On the 8th, I added Snowy Egret, Red-necked Phalarope, and American Bittern at the Coralville Reservoir; a Merlin was there early the next morning. On the 22nd, I finally found my first American Pipit. One afternoon Jim Fuller suggested that we look for Sharp-tailed Sparrow. I picked the spot that seemed most likely and sure enough, it was there along with my two missing sure-fire species (Virginia Rail and Sedge Wren) as a bonus. Twelve new species for September brought my total to 246. Was 250 possible?

In October I had planned to look for rare diving ducks at the end of the month, but the warm weather delayed the migration to November. The excellent water conditions at the Coralville Reservoir, however, produced the most spectacular finds of the year. After a Big Day on the 13th, which included a Western Sandpiper, I went out on the 14th to look over the Pectoral Sandpipers with the remote hope of finding a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. Much to my surprise, I found a likely candidate and confirmed the field marks after it flew to a nearby pond. Fortunately, it was relocated late in the day and seen by many people. On the 27th, I listened to the second half of the Iowa football game while watching gulls at Babcock Access. I was about to leave when I saw a first-year gull that I thought would be my first Herring Gull of the fall, but repeated study over the next two hours convinced me that it was a first-year California Gull, a species that I had been able to study the week before in California. The bird was seen by many the next day. I was now at 250 for the year.

The first weekend in November produced one of the most spectacular fall fronts that I can remember. On Friday the 2nd, Dick Tetrault and I did a Big Day and found 10 shorebird, 10 sparrow, and 12 waterfowl species, the later heralding the first big influx of the fall. The front was stalled on Saturday with more waterfowl present. I anticipated Sunday would be better. The morning started out unexpectedly with a Red-throated Loon at the Coralville Lake dam area, and an hour later I found three White-winged Scoters at Mehaffey Bridge. The thousands of scaup were accompanied by many mergansers of all three species and all of the other common waterfowl. Even more impressive to me were 210 Common Loons in one sweep of the scope at Jolly Roger. This day also produced my luckiest bird of the year. Late in the afternoon, I was trying to relocate the Red-throated Loon for Ann Johnson and Beth

Brown, when Jim Scheib came by and told us of a Varied Thrush found by Jim Fuller at the Macbride Nature Recreation Area. After driving around and re-evaluating the directions we had, I flushed the bird off the road, but it soon flew and was not seen again. Although the rest of November had nice weather, and I searched intensively, the only other new bird for the year was Snow Bunting.

In December I continued searching for a few missing species, but was only able to add Glaucous Gull, a bird that I found at Babcock Access by watching the gull flock for several hours. That brought my year's total for Johnson County to 255 species, 27 more than I had predicted. I finished the month driving the remaining roads that I had missed.

For the year, I found all of the 181 species that I had listed as expected. More surprising was my finding 49 of 52 species that I had listed as good possibilities. These are birds that I do not encounter every year, but with intensive effort and good water conditions I was able to find almost all of them. Among the possible, but unlikely species I found 19 of 46. As predicted, I got 2 of 15 outside possibilities (Varied Thrush, Prairie Warbler), but also added four accidental species that I had not listed (Mississippi Kite, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, California Gull, and Red-throated Loon).

There were 30 species that I saw only once (or the same bird over 1 to 3 days). Eight of these were found during my many trips (sometimes two or three in one day) to Babcock Access and would have been missed without persistent coverage. Several of these single sightings occurred when I made an attempt to overcome negative thinking. "There is nothing at Sand Point and it is a long walk" (Sandhill Crane). "Sandy Beach is a long drive and it is almost supper time" (Western Grebe). "I have not seen anything at Macbride lately" (Eared Grebe). Other sightings were due to a strong hunch and previous experience: White-winged Scoter with first big influx of diving ducks, Alder Flycatcher and Connecticut Warbler in Hickory Hill Park in late May, Cape May Warbler in conifers in fall. Some, but relatively few species were found by others (both crossbills, Prairie Warbler, Varied Thrush).

I was lucky to have an excellent year for shorebird and waterfowl habitat and good waves of warblers in both spring and fall. The year was only average for winter finches and rare waterfowl. I covered several large wooded tracts in an effort to find several species known to nest in wooded areas near Johnson County (Amana Woods and Palisades-Kepler State Park), but I could not find Acadian Flycatcher, Worm-eating Warbler, and Hooded Warbler and had only single sightings of Cerulean Warbler and Louisiana Waterthrush. My biggest miss was Yellow-breasted Chat, a bird often found in Hickory Hill Park. A pair was found at William's Prairie by Jim Fuller, but when I got there they were gone.

The biggest side effect of my Big Year in Johnson County, besides having a lot of fun in a relaxed atmosphere, was creating some new lists. I reviewed all my daily field lists back to 1949 and my father's notes (F. W. Kent kept a birding diary from 1949 to 1973) in order to create my county list, my list of early and late dates for Iowa, and my newly created monthly lists for Iowa. In Johnson County in 1990, I added two species to my state list (Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, California Gull). Five of 7 new species for my Johnson County list appear to be first records for the county (Red-throated Loon, Ross' Goose, Mississippi Kite, California Gull, and Varied Thrush). I saw 44 birds in months that I had not seen them before in Iowa. Personally for the state, I had 9 new early and 19 new late spring dates; 18 new early and 30 new late fall dates; and 24 new first calendar and 44 last calendar dates. Record early or late dates for the state included 3 first, 6 second, and 1 third.



County birding can be a lot of fun. Time can be used efficiently, because distances are not great. I can get to the best birding spots in 5 to 20 minutes. This makes early morning and late evening birding feasible. One of the most satisfying aspects of a county Big Year was that I found almost all of the birds myself. Included were many species I consider rare in the county and four accidental species. Although I have birded Johnson County all of my life, I found some good spots that I was unfamiliar with or had not visited in many years.

Dick Tetrault was my most frequent companion, especially on Big Days. Jim Fuller got me out several afternoons and kept me informed of what others were finding. Carl Bendorf and Francis Moore helped me with Big Days. Ken Lowder (an audiologist) lent me his ear in the deep woods for a couple of important finds. I thank these people and others who I met in the field during the year. My wife Ann was very supportive on the home front. The combination of goal setting and ease of access to local birding spots got me into the field a lot for relaxed, enjoyable birding that produced a number of good finds.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

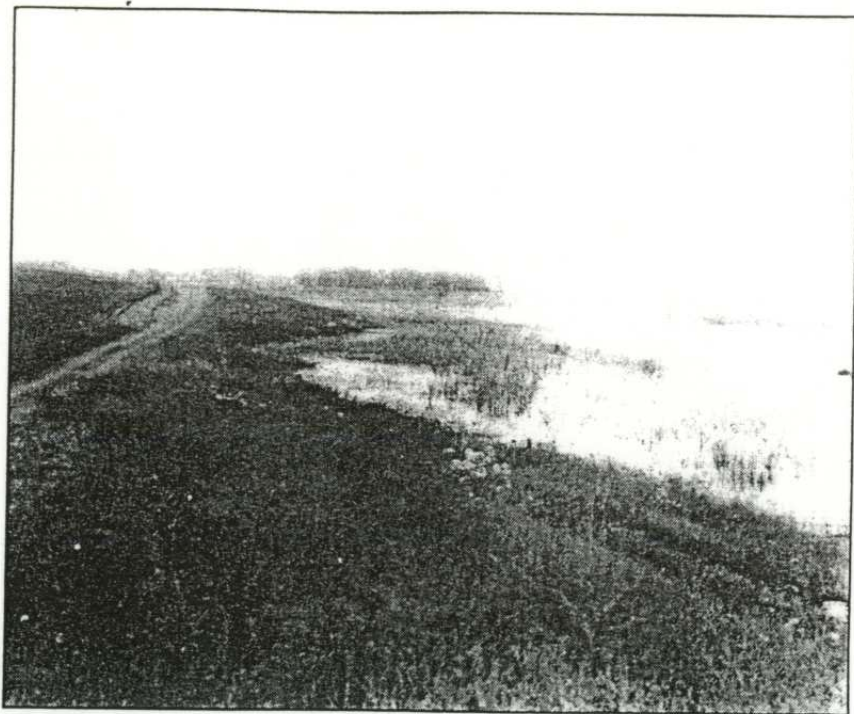


Figure 2. Road along the west side of Little Wall Lake. The road is now Highway 69 and the trees in the background are in the Hamilton County park. Photograph taken in 1916 and currently in photo collection at the Iowa Department of Transportation, Ames.

## BIRDING LITTLE WALL AND ANDERSON LAKES AND TEIG'S MARSH

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE AND HANK ZALETEL

Little Wall and Anderson lakes in Hamilton County and Teig's Marsh in Story County are typical of the prairie pothole habitat that covered central and north-central Iowa before this region was settled. These areas are not home to a great diversity of birds, although more than 230 species have been recorded here in the last 10 years. Some of the better finds include Pacific Loon, Red-necked and Western grebes, Little Blue Heron, ibis species. Oldsquaw, Black Scoter, Common Moorhen, Sandhill Crane, Pine Warbler, and Prothonotary Warbler.

Begin at the intersection of highways 69 and 175 in the center of Jewell (see Figure 1). Drive east on highway 175 for approximately 1.0 mi and turn left (north) on the first gravel road. Continue north on this road for 0.4 mi. Anderson Lake (1), formerly known as Goose Lake, is west of the road. The best viewing is from the shoulder of the road. This is a 135-acre, privately owned marsh and trespassing is not permitted. Migration is the best time to visit this area. Summer birding is best when water levels are high. Breeding species include Pied-billed Grebe, Least Bittern, Green-backed Heron, American Coot, Marsh Wren, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Sora, Virginia Rail, Ring-necked Duck and Common Moorhen nest here some years. For a better view of the south end of the marsh, return to the railroad tracks located immediately north of Highway 175 (2). You can park along the shoulder of the road and follow the tracks west for approximately 0.2 mi. This is the best place to see migrating waterfowl and herons. American White Pelican and Virginia Rail are seen here occasionally. When water levels are low (usually every 2-3 years), a wide variety of shorebirds may be seen here, including Black-bellied Plover, Hudsonian Godwit, and Wilson's Phalarope. Bell's Vireo may breed in the scrubby areas along the railroad tracks. Winter birding is often very slow, although Short-eared Owl may occasionally

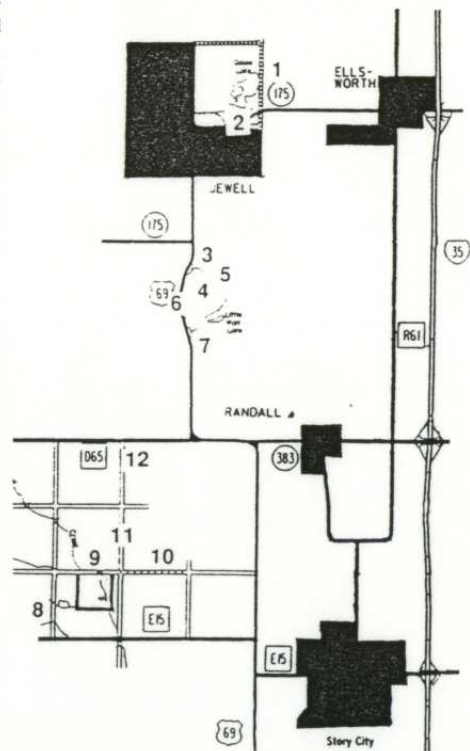
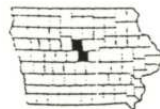


Figure 1. Map of the Little Wall and Anderson lake area. Numbers refer to areas discussed in text.

20-02

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

90-02

What species? Ross' Goose How many? 1

Location? Westoverlook, Coralville Res, Johnson Co., Iowa

Type of Habitat? reservoir above dam

When? date(s): 2 March 1990 time: 4:15 to 4:45 p.m.

Who? your name and address: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St, Iowa City, IA 52246

Others with you: none

Others before or after you: \_\_\_\_\_

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A small all-white goose except for black primaries and dark bill.  
Slightly larger (length, body) than female Common Merganser. About half height of ~~greater~~ great Canada Goose. Smaller than White-fronted Goose - closer in size to Merganser. Rounded head with sharp angle between bill and forehead. Eye about level of bill in mid-face. Small triangular bill in front gorm mark. Couldn't tell if blue at base of bill.

Bird standing and separating on a spit with other geese and ducks.

3 March 8:15 a.m. Goose swimming with white front.  $\frac{3}{4}$  as long as body - size  $\frac{2}{3}$  that of white-front. Bill only about as big as distal  $\frac{1}{2}$  of white-front's bill. Short neck. Bill orange. With good light and right angle, I saw blue base to mandible. No gorm mark.

Similar species; how eliminated: Size, bill shape and size, head shape used to separate from Snow Goose.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
Clear, sun mostly behind me. About 200 yards (est). 20x scope and Questar

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen a number in Iowa.  
I know of no other records for Johnson Co.

References and persons consulted before writing description: None. Look at *Nature Geographic* guide after making notes.

How long before field notes made? White View this form completed? 2 hours

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).