

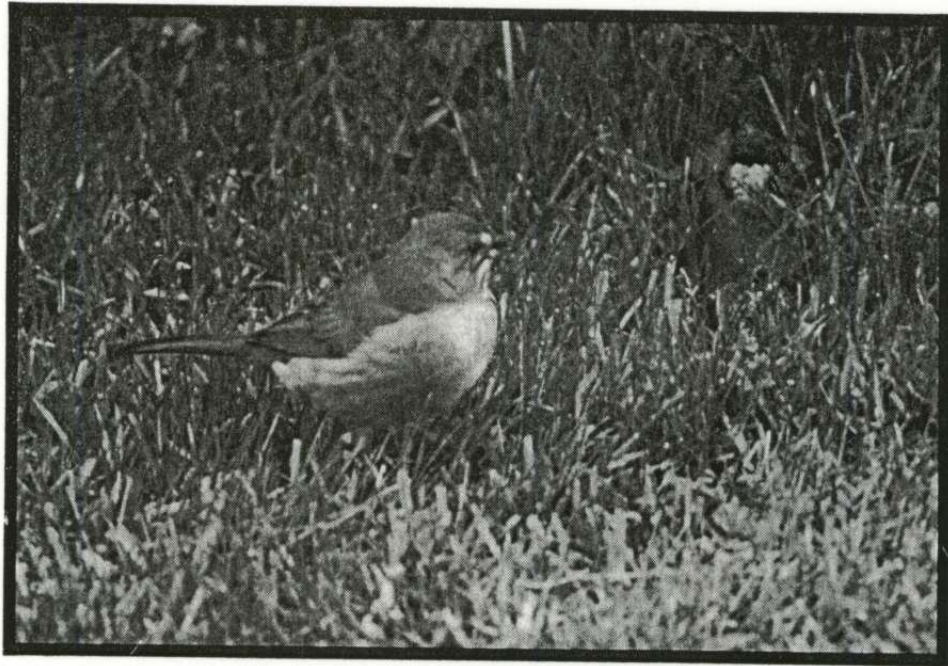


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# IOWA BIRD LIFE

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Summer 1990 Volume 60 Number 3



IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

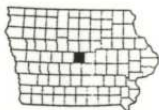
white Warbler, Northern Parula, Cape May Warbler, and Mourning Warbler. Most birds (90%) passed so high or swiftly that I could not identify the species.

Warblers were abundant all about the lake the rest of the day. I found thirty species, total, including one Connecticut. The next day I found only a few scattered flocks.

A heavy thunderstorm had passed to the north of the lake the previous evening. The morning was cool (60s), cloudy, and with a strong south wind that slowly switched to the north as a weak front passed late in the day. Since such flights often lead to heavy mortality among migrants, I checked one of the TV towers near Alleman but found only two birds dead there. Just as amazing as the tremendous numbers of migrating birds was the fact that this large flight was flying in the face of a strong south wind. I cannot readily account for this unusual behavior.

6492 James Francis Place, Johnston, IA 50131

### BIRDING MADNESS AT BROOKSIDE PARK, AMES



ANDREW S. FIX

Sunday, 20 May 1990, produced the best passerine birding I have encountered in almost five years of residence in central Iowa. Although Brookside Park is usually known for its beauty and pleasant footpaths, recent storms and flooding had transformed it into a wooded swamp that reminded me of areas I had birded along the Canadian shore of Lake Erie, including the famous Point Pelee. Many of the usual paths had to be crossed in knee-deep water or avoided entirely. About 40% of the park was physically inaccessible. The following account describes sightings from 7:00 to 10:30 a.m. and from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Actual counts are given where available, with estimates given in parentheses. In all, I estimated that 4,500 to 5,000 individuals representing 87 species were present.

Warblers dominated the findings, with 21 species sighted. Estimates of the most numerous were Blackpoll (1,500), Ovenbird (300), Wilson's (300), Nashville (250), Common Yellowthroat (200), Black-and-white (200), American Redstart (200), Tennessee (100), Yellow-rumped (100), Chestnut-sided (60), and Yellow (50). Additional warbler species seen, but in fewer numbers, were 27 Mourning, 21 Magnolia, 15 Northern Waterthrush, 12 Orange-crowned, 11 Palm, 6 Black-throated Green, 4 Canada, and 2 Blackburnian. Several Golden-winged Warblers and Northern Parulas were heard, and about 200 waterthrushes were seen at too great a distance to identify to species.

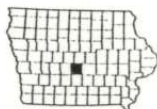
Significant influxes of flycatchers, thrushes, and vireos were also observed. Flycatchers present included Least (800), Willow (100), and Yellow-bellied (40), 12 Eastern Wood-Pewees, and 6 Olive-sided Flycatchers. An Acadian Flycatcher was also heard. Willow Flycatchers along with Common Yellowthroats were numerous in small trees at the forest fringe. Large numbers of Swainson's (250) and Gray-checked (250) thrushes were seen. Vireo sightings were dominated by Solitary Vireos (75), plus 21 Yellow-throated, 15 Red-eyed, 8 Philadelphia, and several singing Warbling vireos.

Many other common spring migrant species were seen, including all six swallow species along adjacent flooded fields. Other noteworthy findings included Rose-breasted Grosbeak (200), 15 Clay-colored Sparrows, 15 Lincoln's Sparrows, and 2 Yellow-billed Cuckoos.

Birding Brookside that day produced an ornithological sensory overload that I had not experienced since birding Point Pelee, Ontario in the mid-1980's. Interestingly, I found out later that a friend of mine had traveled from central Iowa to Point Pelee the same weekend for a Big Day. In an ironic twist of fate, he found only 58 species.

1532 Kellogg Avenue, Ames, IA 50010

### LITTLE GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR



STEPHEN J. DINSMORE, PAM ALLEN, AND REID ALLEN

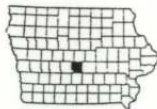
At approximately 9:30 a.m. on 8 October 1989, while birding the Sandpiper Beach area of Saylorville Reservoir, we observed an adult Little Gull feeding along the shoreline with several Ring-billed Gulls. We watched the bird until 9:34 a.m. as it flew north along the east shore of the reservoir.

The Little Gull was noticeably smaller than the Ring-billed Gulls, perhaps half its size. It appeared slightly smaller than several nearby Bonaparte's Gulls. The upper wing was light gray with a broad white trailing edge and white wing tips. The underwings were white, except that the undersides of the flight feathers were black. The tip of the underwing was white. The dark underside of the flight feathers contrasted strongly with the rest of the wing and the white belly. The wings on the whole appeared very rounded and the bird flew with deep wingbeats, reminding us of the flight of a Short-eared Owl. The mantle was white. The tail was also white and was square-tipped. The head was also white except for the dark eye and a small, dark spot directly behind the eye. The bill was small, thin, and looked dark. Leg color was not seen. We took two distant photos which confirm our identification.

This is the first accepted record of a Little Gull in Iowa. Little Gulls have been reported around the Midwest with increasing frequency in recent years. There are recent reports from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri, and North Dakota.

4024 Arkansas Dr., Ames IA 50010 (SJD), 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines IA 50265 (PA, RA)

### GREEN-TAILED TOWHEE IN WEST DES MOINES



CHRISTINE A. QUINN

Toward the latter part of May as I was gardening in my backyard (which is a certified wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation), I heard an unfamiliar bird song but could not locate the bird. Around 22 May 1990 I was standing on my back porch watching the finches at the finch feeder when I saw an unusual looking bird about 25 feet away underneath the quince bushes next to this feeder. The bird was

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foraging using a hopping/scratching technique. The most distinctive markings were on the bird's head: a white neck and throat bib, a black stripe above and on either side of the throat, and then a white stripe on both sides and above that. I also noted a faint black stripe on the outside of the the last white stripe. The bird also had a large rust-colored cap on the top of the head and white eyebrows. The overall color of the bird was gray with some greenish tinges along the neck, wings, and tail.

In size and shape, this bird reminded me of a Gray Catbird. It was about catbird size and had a distinctive long tail that was rounded at the end. I watched this bird for several minutes before it flew away. Later that week I saw this bird using the birdbath in the backyard. It then flew over to the quince and sat and sang for quite a while before hopping down to the ground and scratching around for food. I was able to get several photographs of the bird at that time. I later determined that the bird was a Green-tailed Towhee. I placed this information on the Iowa Bird Line and then learned that this was a rare bird in Iowa. Only one or two other individuals, including Robert Naisbitt of Colfax, Iowa were able to see the bird before it left the area. Nevertheless, it was a thrill to witness this beautiful visitor to my backyard.

This is only the second record for this western species in Iowa. The first was one seen in Storm Lake on 5 May 1975 (Crocker, *Iowa Bird Life* 45:61, 1975).

605 5th Street, West Des Moines, IA 50265

## I. O. U. BUSINESS

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

Williamsburg, 7 April 1990, 10:00 A.M. - 2:30 P.M.

ANN M. BARKER, SECRETARY

Members present: Jim Dinsmore (presiding), Eugene Armstrong, Ann Barker, Bob Cecil, Francis Moore, Diane Porter, Mark Proescholdt, and Carol Thompson. Also present: Eloise Armstrong. Minutes: Minutes for the meeting of 18 November 1989 had been distributed to all members. They were approved with one correction (motion by Armstrong, seconded by Moore). The correction was that the minutes for the spring 1989 business meeting (already approved) contained an error: under Treasurer's Report 1988, the lines reading "Assets 31 Dec 1986" and "Assets 31 Dec 1987" should read "Assets 31 Dec 1987" and "Assets 31 Dec 1988", respectively.

#### Reports

Treasurer: Moore distributed financial statements for the year ended 31 December 1989, which included a fund balance breakdown. The board unanimously agreed that it was a superb accounting. It was moved (Barker, seconded by Thompson) to accept the report. Motion passed.

Education Committee: Dinsmore reported for Linda Zaletel, Beth Brown, Rick Hollis and Laura Jackson that the booklet of exercises on birds is close to completion. The committee intends to circulate a draft at the spring meeting in May. The Iowa Conservation Education Council will help with its distribution, which hopefully will be done by fall. Proescholdt suggested that it be done after the fall semester begins.

Publications Committee: A call for proposals for the editorship of *Iowa Bird Life* was issued in the fall newsletter, following Tom Kent's resignation. The committee also contacted several potential candidates. Voting by mail ballot, the committee, composed of John Fleckenstein, Pete Petersen, Dave Edwards and Ann Barker, approved Jim Dinsmore as the new editor. Dinsmore has resigned from the Publications Committee and has asked Pete Petersen to serve as acting chair. Petersen agreed. Copy is prepared for the Winter issue, and it should be mailed by the end of April. The board commended Dinsmore on his progress, and questioned whether the editor should shoulder the

entire cost of a new computer to prepare the journal. It was suggested that he consider using recycled paper.

On another matter, a request was received from another state journal to reprint Ann Johnson's article, "The Fine Art of Documentation", published in *Iowa Bird Life*, Vol. 59, No. 3. The board had no problem with this and left the decision should be left to the editor and the author.

Records Committee: Tom Kent resigned as secretary of the committee. Tanya Bray has been nominated to fill the position to be vacated by Ross Silcock, whose term expires in May. It was moved (Moore, seconded by Cecil) to approve the nomination. The motion passed. Eugene Armstrong has been nominated to fill the position of Steve Dinsmore, who resigned. It was moved (Thompson, seconded by Cecil) to approve the nomination. The motion carried. Bendorf has been asked and has agreed to become secretary of the committee. Mark Proescholdt has been nominated to fill the position of Carl Bendorf.

Nominating Committee: Carol Thompson, Pete Petersen and Jim Sinclair have prepared a slate of officers and board members to be presented at the spring meeting. They are: Hilda Sickels, secretary; Wayne Livermore, treasurer; Eloise Armstrong and Rick Hollis, board members. Additional nominations will be sought from the floor at the spring meeting.

Breeding Bird Atlas Committee: Thompson reported that the committee, composed of Laura Jackson, Bob Cecil, John Fleckenstein and herself, met in March, with Jim Hansen and others from the Iowa D.N.R. A map of completed and vacant blocks will be presented at the spring meeting. Their goal is to complete all priority blocks and at least one standard block for each county this year. Fund raising for publication of the results is being researched. The nongame program of the Iowa D.N.R. is helping with data processing; some software problems need to be worked out yet. This is the last year for the project and all I.O.U. members will be strongly encouraged to participate so that the study will be as complete as possible.

Big Day Committee: Armstrong reported that Ray Cummins has mailed out forms and encouraged all to participate.

Membership Committee: Dinsmore reported for Jim Sinclair that the mailing to interested feeder survey participants netted around 50 new members.

#### Old Business

At the fall business meeting, Jim Hansen had inquired whether the I.O.U. help fund the D.N.R.'s Peregrine Falcon release project. To date, 10 peregrines have been released in an attempt to encourage this species to nest in Iowa cities. It was moved (Cecil, seconded by Porter) to recommend to the membership that I.O.U. make a donation to the project. In the discussion that followed, specific amounts were considered, and a decision was deferred until after the budget has been approved. At that point, the board agreed to suggest that the donation be \$250.

#### New Business

Dinsmore reported that Jim Fuller is doing an outstanding job with the birdline. Fuller prepared a statistical report on birdline usage for the year 1989, as follows:

Total calls	4,767	
Mean calls/week	92	
Range by week (low)	49	(30 May-4 June)
(high)	239	(13 Feb-19 Feb)
Total reports	320	
Mean reports/week	6	
Range by week (low)	1	(19 June-25 June)
(high)	19	(20 Nov-26 Nov)

Eugene Armstrong suggested that the telephone company should give us rebate on line costs as a result of the revenue generated by the birdline.

Future meetings: Plans are set for the Tri-state meeting at LaCrosse on May 18. PM Sunday morning, the field trip leaders will take Iowa members on a one-way trip into northeast Iowa. The board set plans for a luncheon and compilation to be held at Yellow River Forest at noon.

The fall 1990 meeting is an early one, planned for Council Bluffs' Iowa Western Community College on the weekend of August 24-26. Barb Wilson has investigated facilities, and details were discussed. The board unanimously approved the date and location.

Francis Moore has been investigating the possibility of holding the spring 1990 meeting in Waterloo on the third weekend in May, hosted by the Prairie Rapids Audubon Society. The location will be an unspecified hotel. Moore will also check into a county-owned area just north of town. The board approved the date and location.

A suggestion was made that the fall 1991 meeting be held in the south-central part of the state.

(POSS) What species? GREEN TAILED TOWHEE How many? 1 (MALE)

Location? 605-5<sup>th</sup> WEST DES MOINES IOWA (RESIDENTIAL CITY)

Type of habitat? OPEN BACKYARD WILDLIFE HABITAT - UNDER/AROUND QUINCE BUSHES

When? date(s): LAST WEEK OF MAY 1990 time: EVENINGS AND 1 MORNING

Who? your name and address: CHRISTINE A. QUINN 605-5<sup>th</sup> WDM, IA

others with you: ROBERT J. WALSBITT RR 2 COLFAX, IA

others before or after you: N/A

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, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

SEE ATTACHED

YARD IS CERTIFIED WITH NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION AS BACKYARD WILDLIFE HABITAT #8337

Similar species and how eliminated:

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NO

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

ABOUT 30' FROM BACK DOOR BY FINCH FEEDER - MORNING + EVENING  
GOOD LIGHTING IN THE OPEN (SEE PHOTO)

Previous experience with species and similar ones: HAVE OBSERVED RUFOUS-SIDED TOWHEES IN EASTERN IOWA WHILE CAMPING - SIMILAR BEHAVIOR

References and persons consulted before writing description: NONE - CALLED BIRDLIVE LATER TO ASCERTAIN HOW TO GET THIS BIRD PROPERLY IDENTIFIED WHICH LED TO THIS WRITTEN INFO.

How long before field notes made? IMMEDIATELY this form completed? A MONTH

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240  
JIM FULLER, 6 LONGVIEW KNOLL, RR #6

Christine A. Quinn - 605 5th Street, West Des Moines, Iowa 50265  
residence of sighting, last week of May 1990.  
(photos enclosed of bird taken under finch feeder)

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Toward the end of May I heard an unusual bird song in my yard area that I could not identify. Later (a day or so) I spotted a very unusual looking bird by the quince bushes. He (as he would sit in the quince and sing so I thought it might be a male) was somewhat gray in color with a lighter under belly color. He had a dusting of greenish yellow color down his neck along his wings and on his tail. He had a most unusual face: white neck/throat bib, a black stripe next to this on each side of his face, then a white stripe next to the black stripes and then another set of <sup>FAINTEST</sup> black stripes (one on each side of face). He had a thin eye stripe and a short white eyebrow over each eye. On the top of his head he had a cap of fuzzy rust colored feathers that were erect (reminded me of a fuzzy cotton ball). These feathers did not lay flat nor were they akin to a cardinal crest. This cap was quite noticeable & large (much larger than a catbird's cap). The bird seemed to be a little larger than a catbird (I have a pair nesting in my yard to I see them a lot) and not as large as a robin. He had a sleekish body and what looked like a rounded tail (rather longish). He put me in mind very much of a catbird in size and contours.

This bird would sit in the quince bushes and sing, and then hop down onto the ground underneath and scratch his way out to the birdfeeder. He would scratch & dig furiously with his feet (at times with one foot, other times with both feet with a hopping in place motion) under the thistle feeder (for finches) and continue around under the quince digging up old leaves and grass. He seemed to spend quite a bit of the time under the finch feeder area (possibly eating the dropped thistle seeds). He would also be at the birdbath which is under a small redbud tree a ways southeast of the thistle feeder. I could hear him singing in various parts of the yard. I have a lot of medium height shrubs and I imagine he was making the tour of these bushes.

I saw this bird on several occasions in the yard (mostly under the feeder and quince, but also at the birdbath) throughout that week and the first week of June. Then we started getting all those terrible rains and, of course, West Des Moines flooded out south and east of my residence. I don't know if these storms had anything to do with his disappearance, but I haven't seen my strange little bird since. My fiancée, Robert Naisbitt from Colfax, also saw this bird on the last weekend in May (while being in WDM for the weekend/holiday). I saw the bird out under the feeder and called Bob to come and look at him (as another witness!).

We would very much like to get this bird accurately identified. After the flooding receded I received the Non-Game News Letter and called the Hot Bird Tips phone line hoping to get some help with identification. Jim from Iowa City put me in touch with Bob Cecil of Des Moines. Prior to this I hadn't the faintest idea who to call. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future regarding this bird. Thank you for all your help.

*Christine A. Quinn*

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