

THE BULLETIN

Iowa Ornithologists Union

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IOWA'S CHRISTMAS CENSUS

Bird Lore, the official organ of the National Audubon Societies, has printed, for thirty years, a census of the birds found on or about Christmas day in many different localities of the United States, and of late years has added some of the other countries.

Iowa has been contributing records since Christmas 1903, and the first year Decorah was the only city to send one in. Sioux City began with 1909. These records are published in the Jan-Feb. number each year and a careful study is very interesting. The 1930 records are sent from eight different cities in Iowa; Des Moines, Keokuk, New Hampton, Ogden, Pierson, Sigourney, Sioux City, and Winthrop.

Des Moines easily takes the lead in number of species of birds seen (30), in number of individuals (1825), and in number of observers (17). It is remarkable to find so many observers willing to leave their firesides at this time of year for the study of winter birds. In the whole of the United States, even in the mild climates, there is no census that shows as many observers as Des Moines except Essex County, N. J., which reports 22 observers. No other town in Iowa has more than five and three have only one. In number of species seen, all fall far behind Des Moines, 30, although Winthrop, with only two observers, makes a grand record with 24 species. Sigourney with only one observer comes next with 22, then Pierson, 18; Ogden, 16; Keokuk and Sioux City, 14 and New Hampton, 11.

As to number of individual birds seen, Des Moines far surpasses all the rest with 1825, Pierson comes next with 486 and Sigourney with 337.

I think, however, that we can all say that there were other birds in the vicinity which should have been on the list, but either did not appear on that day or were reported too late for publication. In Sioux City, the number of individuals and number of species also would have been longer if all who went could have gone on the same day, but of course only one record could be sent in. Also a Blue Jay and a pheasant were seen and should have been added to the list but they were not reported until after the list had been sent in.

We were glad to know that our own Phil Du Mont was able to send in a list from along the Atlantic coast as he observed them from the Steamer Olympic.

The only birds found on all the lists were the Downy, Crow, Nuthatch, Chickadee, but the Hairy and Junco were

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SOME OLD RECORDS

When I was a small boy there were some oddly marked ducks on High Lake early one fall. My older brothers shot a few of them and we had never seen any such ducks before. Years later when I saw illustrations of the Herring Duck I easily recognized the markings as being the same. They were seen early in the fall, perhaps about Sept. 1st, but I do not know the year.

When I was a little older an Albino Coot was shot near High Lake. It was entirely white. It was warm weather and there was no one near who mounted birds and the specimen was not preserved.

In 1911 an American Egret was observed on High Lake during the month of August. It was seen almost every day in a shallow part of the lake. Due to a very dry season, the lake was very low and the bird stayed well out in the lake among the rushes. In the summer of 1926 some kind of a white Heron was reported from a lake in the same neighborhood but I could not find it when I looked for it so it was not identified.

A Surf Scoter was found at Mud Lake on April 25th, 1916. The bird was injured or sick and was taken home but was dead the next morning. The specimen was mounted by C. F. Wolden.

The largest number of Swans seen at one time in this vicinity since early years was seen in April, 1916, when a flock of thirty stayed in the High Lake vicinity for several days. They were a grand sight and aroused much interest.

B. O. Wolden, Estherville.

During the late autumn of 1928, while on the golf grounds near Rock Rapids, I observed a migratory flight of Robins. It was some time after 3 P. M. and how long the Robins had been passing before the flight came to my attention, I cannot state. However, after seeing the flocks go by every few minutes, I was impressed and began to notice the numbers. They were flying in flocks which spread out in a more or less horizontal line varying in length from one hundred yards to three hundred yards or more. The flocks came by frequently. At one time there would be as many as five flocks within my view. They were passing my position with a few hundred yards between flocks. I observed this flight for about an hour before I left the grounds, and the birds were still flying past when I left.

A. C. Miller, Rock Rapids.



A young Cedar Waxwing and Joyce, daughter of our I. O. U. president, Walter W. Bennett. The picture is an enlargement of a movie taken at Sioux City and shows Joyce with a raspberry in her mouth. Note how the Waxwing differs from others in that he will go after the food himself while a young Robin must have it brought and placed in his mouth. Mr. Bennett has taken much pride in teaching nature to his daughters, Marilyn and Joyce, who are enthusiastic students.

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EDITORIAL NOTES AND COMMENTS

¶ In the current edition of the Auk, Phil Du Mont reports finding, in the Dwight collection of bird skins, a typical Northern Water Thrush, collected at Hillsboro, Iowa, in 1897.

¶ The meeting at Omaha with the Nebraska ornithologists will probably be Friday and Saturday, May 16th and 17th.

¶ New members of the Union are: Mr. B. J. Horchem, Davenport, Tom A. Brindley, Ames; Mrs. George Hull, Muscatine; John B. Slate, South English.

¶ I saw a Meadowlark south of Boxholm on December 21st.

¶ Dr. Lynds Jones, past-president of the Wilson Ornithological Club, came to Iowa at the age of three months and lived near Grinnell from 1865 until 1892, when he went to Oberlin College to take up teaching work. He writes: "I have never ceased to think of Iowa as my real home state. I have visions of returning to the old farm and grove north-west of Grinnell, to again count the birds there so that comparison can be made with the earlier days.

I note your editorial mention of the invasion of the Starling into Iowa, and yours and Miss Sherman's plea that they be killed as fast as they arrive. It is good advice, but I fear it will not check them. We have them by the thousands now, whereas five years ago almost none were seen anywhere. Their nestings were not detected nor suspected until they became too numerous to be dealt with."

¶ W. M. Rosen, former president of the I. O. U., was elected treasurer of the Wilson Club at the convention in Des Moines. Dr. Stephens was re-elected editor of the Wilson Bulletin. Miss Althea Sherman was elected to honorary membership.

¶ The following Iowans appeared on the program of the Wilson Club: Mrs. J. E. Stewart, A. J. Palas, Dr. L. H. Pammel, Althea R. Sherman, C. E. Ehninger, R. O. Malcolmson, W. M. Rosen, Wm. Youngworth, W. F. Kubichek, and Walter M. Bennett.

¶ Dr. L. H. Pammell would like dates of Hummingbird migrations.

¶ Dr. Ehninger reported, at the Wilson Convention, seeing a Western Meadowlark across the river from Keokuk, in Illinois.

¶ It certainly is bad manners at a convention to talk longer than one's allotted time and encroach upon another's time. At the Wilson Convention in Des Moines, a speaker was asked to desist. Someone should invent a "convention clock" which could be set for a desired interval and which would ring every three minutes after that interval was passed. This would remove all responsibility from the presiding officer. He would not let a speaker go on and on nor would he have to be embarrassed by asking one to cease.

¶ William Youngworth reported a Least Tern nesting

near Sioux City.

¶ Mr. Palas was appointed to serve on our board of directors to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Mr. Whitney.

¶ Every member of the Iowa Ornithologists Union should immediately send to Davis Quinn, 3548 Tryor Ave., Bronx, New York City, for a copy of "Framing the Birds of Prey". It will be sent free as long as copies last. In general, bird lovers have proven to be indifferent to the fate of our birds which we pretend to love. We allow ammunition makers and organizations of gunners to dictate public opinion and laws. We even form our opinions from lying data, put out by those who wish to sell ammunition or wish to propagate a few forms of bird life so that they themselves may have the "pleasure" of killing. Are we so slothful that we will not even read the reports of scientists who have, in an unprejudiced study, determined that most hawks and owls are beneficial? Have you carefully read and considered "Hawks and Owls from the standpoint of the Farmer," which can be obtained free from the Government Printing office?

¶ Phil Du Mont formerly of Des Moines, is now in Madagascar on an ornithological collecting expedition for the American Museum of National History.

¶ Our next edition will be the Pre-Convention Edition. We will not have time this year to solicit advertisements for it. Will somebody volunteer to do this? It will take several hours. I will explain the work to anyone who will give the time.

I should not attempt to define the boundary line between *Sturnella magna* and *Sturnella neglecta*. I am sure it does *not* follow the line of the Wisconsin glacier. *Neglecta* occurs here at Mt. Vernon, though *magna* is the rule; thirty miles west of here, at Norway, *neglecta* is now the rule according to observations on several recent trips. At Cedar Falls, the two seem about equally numerous. Not one of the places named is near the edge of the Wisconsin glacier.

Charles R. Keyes, Mt. Vernon.

From every section of the state comes the report that on the last two nights of October evidently millions of wild geese passed over the state. Electric lights in towns and cities greatly confused the fowls and they made noise in proportion to their confusion. Some of them flew so close to the earth that they could be seen by the glare of the lights. The fact that the geese on these nights were heard at the same time in all parts of the state would indicate that there was a general exodus for the southland and a blanket of state wide dimensions measured the vastness of the aggregation.

Spirit Lake Beacon.

One time I saw a little bird whose name I have never read in the various lists of birds seen in Iowa—a Canadian Warbler.

We had an old plum tree in our yard at Tama whose fruit did not amount to much, but the tree was spared because it was such a wonderful attraction for birds. Each migrating season it called many black and white warblers, nuthatches, vireos, and kinglets. The real treat for us came late in May, 1924, when one lone Canadian Warbler feasted in the old tree for two hours. He paid no attention to us, altho many times my husband could have reached up and touched him. He quickly darted up and down and around the limbs and twigs in his search for insects. It was probably the best feed

he had had since leaving northern South America for his summer home in northern Michigan, and he intended to "fill up" while the getting was good. We have never seen a strange bird of whose identity we were so absolutely sure. The black spots on his tiny yellow throat looked exactly like a necklace of jet beads.

Mrs. Bertha Buzby, Boone.

1. Bluebirds have been seen near Des Moines, Mr. and Mrs. W. C. Nelson saw some on Feb. 1st on the way to Winterset.

2. Many horned larks have been seen in Des Moines and environs. Flocks of from seven to twenty have been reported in various directions; gratifying, when one thinks of the deep snows and severe cold which made last winter another hazardous one for our winter birds.

3. Seventeen members of the D. M. Audubon Society on the Christmas Census saw thirty species of birds, 1825 individuals, exclusive of English sparrows, which we never consider. The more outstanding species were American Merganser, Mallard Duck, Belted Kingfisher, Red-winged Blackbirds, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren and Robin. The Mallard ducks have enjoyed the open water in the new reservoir in Waterworks Sanctuary in varying numbers all winter; two were seen on this day, Dec. 22nd.

The Mergansers were lured by the open water near the electric company's plant. A stream of warm water keeps the north side of the river open at this point for a short stretch, as it was on this day, with the temperature varying from zero to 10 above.

3. At the meetings of the Wilson Ornithological Club, at Des Moines, the registrar reports 207 people registered. (More were in attendance, as quite a number entered the hall by a rear door and failed to give their names.) Of these 207, 52 were from outside the state and 155 from Iowa, of whom 108 were from Des Moines.

There were visitors attending from Massachusetts, Washington, D. C.; Alabama, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania; South Dakota, Tennessee, Wisconsin and Iowa.

The entire list will be printed in The Wilson Bulletin, so Dr. Stephens informs us.

The large number of local people attending proved very gratifying to the officers and members of the W. O. C., as at some of their conventions the townspeople have left them "utterly alone."

Toni R. Wendelburg, Des Moines.

The wild goose migration was noted generally in this community the whole nights of October 28 and 29. I heard some in the late evening of the 29th also. Two Brown Thrashers remained until September 27th. I have seen but one Mockingbird here tho another was reported to me the same summer. I have known a pair of mourning doves to hatch a second pair of young from the same nest. I helped free a fledging Baltimore Oriole from a loop of horse-hair in which it had become caught upon trying to leave the nest. The wing flesh had been cut to the bone. We observed it the first and second succeeding days, and noted improvement, so presume it healed successfully. Other members of my family found a Kingbird nest on the top of a post in a sort of cavity. There was no protection, it was a hot day, and they saw the mother bird protecting her young from the sun's rays with her own body and spread wings.

Mrs. Maud L. Moser, Dallas Center, Iowa.

Here in Vanderveer Park, Davenport, for many years, grackles gather late in the summer or early in the autumn, the numbers increasing constantly until the time comes for the excursion to the south. "Great numbers" fails entirely to suggest the magnitude of the assembly. When dawn comes they begin to let the neighborhood know it is time to wake up. Following the almanac, this is about a minute later each day. Then they disperse in companies along radiating lines, regular streams of traffic apparently following definite courses in all directions. In the late afternoon or early evening they return. It seems clear that these daily flights are foraging expeditions and the night assembly is partly an expression of their gregarious instinct and partly to make the most of an approved roosting place for the night. Then when the nights get frosty enough they are off.

Robins gather in similar groups, but nowhere near so large nor so well organized, and they feed nearer at hand. The Vanderveer Park robin assembly is a small affair compared with that of the grackles. It would seem that, like the grackles, they like company in the great adventure of their migration to the south for the winter.

In the old days the English Sparrows had their lodging houses and tenements in selected trees or vines and on buildings unintentionally constructed for their convenience. They, too, went on regular foraging expeditions. The late J. H. Paarmann, curator of the old Davenport Academy of Sciences, now the Davenport Public Museum, made an intensive study of their habits, following them from their roosting places to their feeding grounds in the freightyards and elsewhere. Davenport was once, thanks to Mr. Paarmann, fairly well freed from the sparrows, but their population has been increasing again. Many of these scavengers hang around the grackle assembly.

Edward K. Putman, Davenport

The Passenger Pigeon as it lived just across the Iowa line in Wisconsin was recently recalled by Dr. R. R. Williams of Manning, Iowa, who is now over eighty years of age. He says: "I recall seeing the Passenger Pigeon by the thousands in Southwest Wisconsin not far from the Iowa line. We lived on a high hill. One morning I looked north and could see them flying for several miles, then I looked to the south and they were coming as far as I could see. After a few minutes the south end of the flock went by. The flock was about a block wide with birds flying very close together."

Thousands of wild ducks which would ordinarily come south through Iowa were reported starving on Heron Lake, Minn., not twelve miles from the Iowa line the last of January. It is reported hunters and sportsmen during last fall regularly put out corn and other food on the ice. After the close of the hunting season the practice was discontinued and the birds left to shift for themselves. They did not go south as usual, hence are said to be badly in want of food. There were about four thousand ducks present in January at one time. The Izaak Walton League assumed charge of the situation, and consideration is being given to a suggested new law prohibiting the feeding of birds during the hunting season unless provision is made to keep it up afterwards.

Redpolls were reported seen by Mrs. H. M. Bailey and Mrs. J. A. Dales at Sioux City during January, 1930.

W. W. Bennett, Sioux City.

You wanted data regarding snakes. I have only two actual records and they are as follows—On June 27th,

1926, I photographed the female Maryland Yellowthroat on her nest of five eggs on the ground in a strawberry patch right by the timber. The next day the farmer who owned this patch saw a great commotion over there and going over he found a "bull snake" just swallowing the last of the five eggs. The snake escaped, so I could not verify the classification and only have the farmer's word for it. The bull snake is considered a harmless snake and very useful, so I would hardly like to condemn them all for this one.

On August 3, 1927, I tried for a couple of hours to get a photograph of a female Western Meadowlark feeding her young, which were full grown and fully feathered. She would not come to the nest so I went up to get my camera and give it up as a bad job when I found that, while I was waiting for this mother bird to come up, a garter snake had crawled into the nest and had started to swallow one of these full grown young birds. He had its head down his throat until his jaws were up against the shoulders of the bird. That was as far as he could go.

Instead of getting a picture of the female feeding the young, I secured what I considered a much better picture, namely, the garter snake trying to swallow this young Meadowlark. The young bird was dead, of course, and we dispatched the snake, thinking that perhaps he might try that on another nest. This is also another useful and harmless snake, but I caught him at the job and my photograph is not faked but genuine. This is my only experience with garter snakes bothering birds and may be the only one that I will ever see.

I would feature cats and squirrels as enemies of birds much more than snakes, but these are actual happenings that have come under my observation and I thought that I would pass them on to you.

I usually spend nearly 250 hours a year in field work and this has continued over a period of nearly ten years; so you see this is not common or I would have run across incidents of that kind more often.

W. M. Rosen, Ogden

Dr. Clifford F. Jones of Odebolt, Iowa, writes that he saw a Golden Eagle seven miles north of Odebolt on November 17, 1929. At a distance, he estimated that the wing spread was about five feet.

T. C. Stephens, Sioux City.

On January 20th, 1930, Ralph Hanlon of North Liberty found two European Starlings frozen under a cedar hedge. These birds were brought to the University High School and Miss Winifred Gilbert, the science teacher, in turn brought them to me in the museum.

The finding of these birds varifies a report which my son, Herbert, made the latter part of last April. He saw a flock of about twenty startlings about three miles north of Coralville, Iowa, on the Iowa River. There seems to be no question but that the European Starling is rapidly working its way westward and no doubt will soon be found in large numbers throughout Iowa.

All of us who are interested in protecting our wild birds should make every effort to educate the farmers relative to the nature of this bird. It seems to me that the evil day might be put off somewhat if each one would kill as many of these early arrivals as possible.

Recently we received a letter from Mrs. J. Z. Howard of West Branch, Iowa, asking us to identify a specimen which she was sending us, and which she said was a species which had appeared in her neighborhood but a short time ago. The bird arrived and we found it to be

a Starling, so that its presence in this locality is further established.

Homer R. Dill, Iowa City.

Mrs. Florence A. Steunenberg, in an article in the Omaha World-Herald of August 30, lodged a timely protest against the recently enacted open season on Mourning Doves in Nebraska. She said, in part: "As the hunting season for 1929 is about to open, may I be permitted to offer a few words in behalf of the Mourning Dove? Every bird has its day—but it is indeed a sad 15 days coming to the Mourning Doves—not only to the adult birds, but to the young doves still in the nest unable to leave them until after September 15, the close of the season upon doves. Thousands of young doves will starve in the nests. Even should we find a few of these young, we will be unable to save them as they live solely upon "pigeon milk" regurgitated from the parents' crops. Will the Mourning Dove suffer the fate of the now extinct Passenger Pigeon? Unfortunately, Nebraska has placed the Mourning Dove among the birds to be hunted during an open season this year, September 1 to September 15. Nearly all grown-ups and growing-ups are familiar with its soft, sweet call, but few are aware of its usefulness as a destroyer of weed seeds. I recently had the pleasure of meeting T. Gilbert Pearson, president of National Association of Audubon Societies, while attending the American wild life school at McGregor, Iowa. He said the Mourning Dove should be given complete protection as they were of great value to the farming interests of the country. (Here Mrs. Steunenberg quotes at length on the economic value of the Mourning Dove from Educational Leaflet No. 2 of the National Association of Audubon Societies). The National Geographic society says, 'The dove should be protected in every possible way.' Let us protect the doves and permit them to perform the work that the Creator designed them to do."

Letter of Information, Nebraska Ornithologists Union.

IOWA'S CHRISTMAS CENSUS

(Continued from page 25)

found on all but one list. The Goldfinch, Bluejay and Flicker were found on all but two lists.

The birds found on one list only were more numerous on the Des Moines list and were as follows: Des Moines listed Red Shouldered Hawk, Am. Merganser, Kingfisher, Red-wing Blackbird, Brown Thrasher, and Carolina Wren; Keokuk had Herring Gulls; Ogden, Horned Lark (not Prairie); Sigourney, a song Sparrow and a Swainson's Hawk marked with a question mark; Winthrop, a Great Horned Owl; and Sioux City, Bohemian Waxwing. Of the birds found on only two lists, Des Moines and Sigourney had Barred Owl and Purple Finch, Des Moines and Winthrop had Red-headed Woodpeckers and Robin, Des Moines and Pierson a Coopers Hawk, Pierson and Winthrop a short eared owl, Winthrop and Sioux City a Red-breasted Nuthatch, and New Hampton and Sigourney a Red-poll.

Perhaps we can all make more of an effort next year to raise our numbers. If we can find enough observers to cover the whole of the surrounding territory, as Des Moines did, we might all increase our lists, but as the winter settles down our enthusiasm wanes, so here's three cheers for Des Moines and their enthusiastic Audubon Society! But how about that Brown Thrasher, Des Moines?

Robins have been found here at Sioux City all winter and, since Christmas, several flocks of Redpolls, several Bluebirds, and some Cedar Waxwings have been seen.

Mary L. Bailey, Sioux City.