

# THE BULLETIN

Iowa Ornithologists Union

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## A NEW EDITOR FOR THE BULLETIN

Fred J. Pierce, of Winthrop, who in the last edition made his bow to the readers of THE BULLETIN as assistant editor, will assume the duties of editor with the coming edition. Mr. Pierce is a capable and enthusiastic young man and is an experienced ornithologist, and the officers of the Iowa Ornithologists Union are to be congratulated for having procured such an able editor. Even the present edition, while still bearing my name as editor, is largely the work of Mr. Pierce, for he is doing all of the work of seeing the edition thru the press and mailing it. This duty which he has willingly assumed must not be thought of as a small task. In order to completely cover the bird news of the state it is necessary to write dozens of letters, to spend hours of editing copy, hours of proof-reading, and more hours in folding, enclosing and mailing editions. Everything must be condensed, every article must be closely scanned and all unnecessary words and phrases pruned out. THE BULLETIN, tho small in size, carries to you a surprisingly large amount of information. Very little space is used for headlines. Even the spaces between articles in the editorial section were removed and ¶ marks substituted. As it appeared last time, our BULLETIN contained more than a third as many words as the September edition of the *Wilson Bulletin*. This should not be taken as a criticism of the *Wilson Bulletin* for it would be extremely desirable, if we could afford it, to make our BULLETIN as attractive and readable as that of the Wilson club.

While it has always been a great pleasure, a privilege even, to edit THE BULLETIN, I find I can no longer devote to it the necessary amount of time. It is with deep regret that I pass the work on to another, for THE BULLETIN in its present form was brought into being by me. At the time I began editing it, the Iowa Ornithologists Union had very few paid-up members. I do not suggest that THE BULLETIN has been the cause of the present flourishing condition of our association, for the sincere and loyal effort of our officers, especially of A. J. Palas, who was then president, has been the real reason for our growth. But I do believe that without THE BULLETIN their efforts would have been greatly handicapped. And so I think with pride of what THE BULLETIN has been and my regret at having to leave the helm is only relieved by the thought that in Fred Pierce we have a very able editor to continue the work.

I hope to remain active in the affairs of the Union in some capacity which will require less time than editing THE BULLETIN does. I will continue to furnish the biographical sketches that were begun in the last issue and will contribute articles and news notes.

DR. F. L. R. ROBERTS, Iowa City.

Below are the migration dates for the following species at Sioux City, Iowa:

| Spring arrival  | Fall departure   |
|---|--|
| 1. Ruby-throated humming bird,<br>May 5, 1928, earliest date. | September 26, 1926, latest date.   |
| 2. Kingbird, May 2, 1930                                      | September 4, 1930.   |
| 3. Indigo bunting, May 9, 1930.                               | September 27, 1930.  |
| 4. Scarlet tanager, May 14, 1929.                             | No late records at Sioux City. (Seen August 23 and 24 at Pilot Knob State Park.) |
| 5. Purple Martin, April 4, 1930.                              | September 29, 1930.  |
| 6. Killdeer, March 17, 1930                                   | November 5, 1929.  |

WILLIAM YOUNG WORTH, Sioux City.

## OBSERVATIONS ON QUAIL AT SIGOURNEY, IOWA

On October 6, 1930, my niece, Blanche Knox, was helping her father gather a load of corn on his farm near here. Tossing an ear a little too far, it flew clear over the wagon. As she went to pick it up she was surprised to find it lying across a quail's nest containing eleven eggs. None of them had, however, been touched by the ear of corn. A closer examination showed that the eggs were warm and the shells of three of them were already perforated. Little telltale peeping sounds came from all of them. The noise made by the rattling corn-stalks and the moving wagon had prevented Miss Knox from hearing the sudden start the mother bird must have made to keep from being struck by the ear of corn.

Going back to the place next day (October 7), she found the nest full of egg shells and the birds, both old and young, had left the place. This is the latest date for incubation of these birds of which I have any information. We have a record some years ago of twelve inches of snow in this county on October 23. But as the weather during the autumn of 1930 was exceedingly mild these birds no doubt became nearly fledged before bad weather set in.

On the glorious anniversary of Peace, November 11, 1930, as I was walking in Legion Park, within the city limits, I saw a flock of thirty-two quails, all full grown and showing no great fear. What a beautiful sight for a lover of nature!

What remarkable powers of recuperation these birds possess! Many of them perished in the past winter during periods of severe cold (30 degrees F. below zero) and very heavy snow. Yet, with proper protection against the shot-guns, we now see many fine large coveys.

E. D. NAUMAN, Sigourney.

## A LETTER FROM NEW YORK

Podunk Holler, N. Y.  
October 27, 1930.

Dere mister Edditer:—

I got yore letter about what I owe you. Now be panchunt. I aint fergot you. When sum fools pays me I pay you. So please wait. If this wuz judgement day and you wuz no more prepared to meet your maker as I am to meet your account, you shure wood haff to go to Hel. Trusting you will do this, I am

yores truly,

HIRAM WHIFFLETREE.

The above important letter has been received by the editor and duly considered. Since we cannot find Mr. Whiffletree's name on the mailing list, we are not quite sure why the letter came to be written. The most interesting part of it is the characteristic writing, and we are sorry that our readers cannot see this also. The gentleman from Podunk Holler writes a very good hand with his foot; but maybe it was only his left hand that did the work. The letter was mailed at Canastota, N. Y., and we are strongly inclined to suspicion Charley Spiker as being its author. The literary style and original spelling seem to strengthen this suspicion. It may be that Spiker is planning to become a writer for "True Confessions Magazine" or is going to become a movie actor and Whiffletree is his *nom de plume*.

# THE BULLETIN

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IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS UNION  
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DR. F. L. R. ROBERTS, Editor  
419½ S. Governor IOWA CITY, IOWA

## EDITORIAL NOTES AND COMMENTS

¶ In a letter dated October 24, Miss Ruth Habeger of Marshalltown says: "My biology classes have shown a keen interest in your quarterly publications, which I borrow from G. A. Mote. I am anxious to keep them interested and to have a subscription for the classes. Kindly send me your subscription rates."

I was sorry to tell her that no arrangement had been made for affiliation of groups with the Iowa Ornithologists Union. However, she personally became a member of the Union and later sent in a list of birds observed by her class. The list appears elsewhere in THE BULLETIN.

¶ Only one person, William Youngworth of Sioux City, cooperated by sending in migration data as requested in the last edition by W. M. Rose. I cannot add records as I have had very few field trips this year.

¶ In a recent copy of "Bird Banding Notes" are found lists of those who have banded various numbers of birds in the past year. Iowans included are: Mrs. Marie Dales, Sioux City, 500 to 800; Oscar P. Allert, McGregor, 300 to 500; Mrs. F. L. Battell, Ames, 100 to 200; Joseph N. Beck, Remsen, 100 to 200; Major Montgomery Meigs, Keokuk, 100 to 200; and Chas. J. Spiker, Sioux City, 100 to 200.

¶ Prof. F. J. Lazell of the Journalism Department gave an illustrated lecture on birds to the Botany Club at the University of Iowa on Nov. 20.

¶ After considerable difficulty, I have obtained the following list of pigeon racing associations. When pigeons are found wearing celluloid bands, the owners can usually be traced thru one of these associations.

American Racing Pigeon Union, F. R. Wordell, Secretary, 911 President Ave., Fall River, Mass.

National Association of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers, A. T. Nelson, Secretary, 114 N. Luzerne Ave., Baltimore, Md.

National Association of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers, L. E. Miller, Secretary, 460 Cleveland Ave., Trenton, N. J.

National Pigeon Association, Harry P. Baldwin, Secretary, Box 5025, Kansas City, Missouri.

¶ Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Trewin of Dubuque are spending the winter in the south. We hope they will submit a list of the birds they observe this winter which they had not seen in Iowa.

¶ Fred J. Pierce of Winthrop has a fine paper on "Birds of Buchanan County, Iowa," in the last edition of the *Wilson Bulletin*. He lists 215 forms. Some of the forms recorded were from the records of Mrs. Robert I. Bordner and from other sources.

In the *Wilson Bulletin* will also be found notes under the following titles: "Snowy Egrets in Des Moines County, Iowa," by H. M. Holland, of Galesburg, Ill.; "A Starling Killed by Lightning," by Chas. Spiker, of Canastota, N. Y., formerly an Iowan; "A Robin Roost Close to Home," by Mrs. J. Frederick Clark, Fairfield, Iowa; "The Nesting Habits of the Baltimore Oriole," by E. D. Nauman, Sigourney, Iowa.

¶ The following news note from the "Spirit Lake Beacon" illustrates the type of law enforcement we are receiving from our State Fish and Game Department:

"During the summer two small Charles City boys found six motherless baby skunks, which they took home. They became great pets and grew to large size. Then trouble started, not from the pets, but the game wardens heard that the boys had these furbearing animals and they were

taken from them. Their father, who did not know it was unlawful to raise such animals, was arrested and fined \$60 for permitting the game laws to be violated."

¶ Mr. D. H. Talbot, of Sioux City, Iowa, donated his private library to the University in 1894 as a special collection to be kept intact in the University Libraries. The original gift was one of about 4,000 volumes, but unfortunately about one-half of these were burned in a fire in 1897. In 1911 Mr. Talbot presented an additional 300 volumes which he had collected since the time that he made his original gift to the University Libraries.

The Talbot Library contains books relating to many fields. In its present condition it seems to be strongest in the natural sciences and in travel and history. In sciences, zoology, medicine and agriculture are the strongest, though the zoological and medical books are mainly of a general nature. The agricultural material specializes on the breeding and care of horses, cows, sheep, swine, poultry, dogs, bees, and fish. There is a good deal of material on history and travel, most of it being of early date. The literature section has little in foreign languages, though some Latin and Greek.

The bulk of the collection is made up of works published in the nineteenth century. There are a few published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and one volume goes back to the sixteenth century.

Among the many important works on ornithology are the following:

Owen's Survey; DeKay's "Natural History of New York," with wonderful lithographs; Audubon's monumental works; Baird, Cassin and Lawrence; Dresser's important "History of Birds of Europe," in eight immense volumes; Coues' "Key," "American Ornithology," and "North American Birds;" all editions of the A. O. U. Check List; Gentry's "Life Histories;" Newton's "Dictionary of Birds;" Nuttall's "Manual of Ornithology;" Ridgway's "Manual of North American Birds;" Wilson's "American Ornithology" in twelve volumes and in two volumes; two sets of Wilson & Bonaparte; Wood's original "Natural History;" several of the early volumes of The Auk; Swainson & Richardson's "Birds," which is one volume of "Fauna Boreali Americana;" Baird, Brewer and Ridgway's five-volume "Birds of North America;" Buffon's "Natural History," of which ten volumes are on birds.

These are all rare and exceedingly valuable old editions. I have been granted permission to take some of these fine old volumes to Cedar Rapids to display at the annual convention.

A female flicker was a surprise visitor at my suet-feeder this noon (December 2). Another event that was new with me was the sight of eight brown creepers together on October 15. I do not remember seeing more than one on one tree until this occasion.

WALTER L. BURK, Vinton.

I have had very little time to look for birds but two have been so obvious that I have had no trouble in adding them to my list. They are the blue-gray gnatcatcher and the scissor-tailed flycatcher. Of course, we are overrun with mocking birds and buzzards.

HARLOW B. MILLS, College Station, Texas.

We are feeding a brown thrasher. We keep a specially prepared feeding-place under some bushes just south of the kitchen windows, where we can easily watch him. We saw him twice to-day. We fed a pair of cardinals all last winter.

MRS. S. ANDERSON, Ogden, Dec. 13, 1930.

The official magazine of the Avicultural Society is a very well printed and interesting monthly publication. The Society was organized for the purpose of studying foreign birds in captivity, for disseminating information for the care and proper feeding of such birds, and for the perpetuation of those species that are threatened with extinction. *Aviculture* is indispensable to those interested in such matters. The success of the Society is attested by the fact that, while it is but two years old, it already has five hundred members. The Society's advertisement appears in this issue.

## OUR NOTE BOOK

While in the field, Doctor and I carry copies of Reed's "Bird Guides," and into these we write identification notes. Some of these are original notes and others have been copied from various sources. They are not meant for complete information or identification, but as odd bits of information that seem important to us. The first installment of these notes appeared in the last edition of THE BULLETIN.

The grasshopper sparrow can be recognized by the unstreaked buffy breast and flanks, the unforked tail, the yellow on the bend of the wing and lesser wing coverts and a little yellow above and in front of the eye. After its song has once been recognized, it will be easy to identify the bird.

W. M. Rosene of Ogden aptly speaks of the head of the lark sparrow as having a bridled appearance. The white markings on the tail form "stair steps."

Study the illustrations of the fall plumage of the Harris sparrow. This large sparrow is a fairly common migrant in all parts of the state.

We have found the Gambel's or intermediate sparrow about as abundant as the white-crowned. The males are fairly easy to distinguish because the black line in front of the eye of the white-crowned is absent in the Gambel's. Taverner's "Birds of Western Canada" has a cut that distinctly shows this difference.

The white-throated sparrow may be easily distinguished from the Gambel's sparrow by the yellow spot before the eye.

The unstriped breast, line thru the eye, and chestnut crown proclaim the chipping sparrow. It might be confused with the clay-colored sparrow, but note that the last has not line thru its eye though it has conspicuous dusky brownish ear coverts. The crown of the clay-colored is sharply streaked with black, but don't confuse it with the crown of the young chippy, which is finely streaked with black.

The general pinkish color, and especially the pink bill, set off the field sparrow from the last two named species.

The tree sparrow is the "winter chippy." However, it wears a policeman's star on its breast.

There are a number of geographical races of juncoes, especially in the west, and a resemblance to the pink-sided junco may be noticed in some individuals of our slate-colored junco.

Have you ever passed up a Savannah sparrow, thinking it was a pale song sparrow?

If one has a good look at the Lincoln sparrow, it may easily be distinguished by the brown-spotted, buffy band across the breast. Cuts of the bird seldom show this distinctly.

The swamp sparrow bothered us for a time and we wrote in our Bird Guides the following notes, gleaned from various sources:

Bill black above, brownish yellow below. Forehead black. Crown sometimes streaked with dusky (Barrows.) Reed says, "Crown chestnut with a gray median stripe." Barrows says there is "sometimes" a gray median stripe. Line above eye gray, chippy's white. Dark line thru eye curves down, chippy's goes back. Sometimes obscure dusky streaks on breast and sides (Barrows). Square whitish throat patch, less conspicuous than pure white of the white-throat (Hoffman). No white wing bars. Less slender than chipping sparrow. Found in swamps, etc., where chippy would not be.

And the fox sparrow. If you wonder if the bird you are seeing is red enough for a fox sparrow, it isn't; for when you do see it, it will be so big and so red you will not have to wonder.

MARY PRICE ROBERTS, Iowa City.

In a recent talking picture a killdeer's notes were plainly heard during the showing of an outdoor scene, thus adding a touch of realism obviously not intended by the producers.

The larger our membership is the larger and better BULLETIN we can have. If you know some one interested in birds who is not a member, show him THE BULLETIN and invite him to join us. There are doubtless many people in the state who would be glad to become members if they knew of our organization and its work.

## A NOVEMBER BIRD LIST

| Date    | Class | Name of Bird                 | Where seen             | First seen by |
|---------|-------|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Nov. 1  | I     | Golden-crowned kinglet       | Caught in screen porch | H. M.         |
| Nov. 2  | I     | English sparrow              | Near school bldg.      | A. K.         |
| Nov. 2  | I     | Meadowlark                   | Cornfield              | M. W.         |
| Nov. 3  | I     | Red-bellied woodpecker       | On tree                | R. H.         |
| Nov. 6  | I     | Crow                         | In country             | C. C.         |
| Nov. 6  | II    | Bluebird                     | In elderberries        | F. M.         |
| Nov. 6  | II    | Bronzed grackle              | In willows             | F. M.         |
| Nov. 7  | II    | Cardinal                     | In backyard            | A. F.         |
| Nov. 7  | II    | Bluejay                      | In timber              | A. F.         |
| Nov. 7  | II    | Red-headed woodpecker        | In apple tree          | A. F.         |
| Nov. 7  | II    | Cooper's hawk (young female) | In tree                | A. F.         |
| Nov. 7  | II    | Flicker                      | Backyard tree          | R. C.         |
| Nov. 7  | I     | Hairy woodpecker             | On tree trunk          | I. H.         |
| Nov. 7  | I     | Screech owl                  | In tree                | C. C.         |
| Nov. 9  | I     | Robin                        | In tree                | M. W.         |
| Nov. 15 | II    | Downy woodpecker             | On tree                | J. M.         |
| Nov. 15 | II    | Great horned owl             | In tree                | R. C.         |
| Nov. 16 | I     | White-breasted nuthatch      | On tree                | D. T.         |
| Nov. 16 | I     | Chickadee                    | In tree                | D. T.         |
| Nov. 17 | II    | Slate-colored junco          | In cornfield           | F. M.         |
| Nov. 17 | II    | Brown creeper                | On tree                | F. M.         |
| Nov. 27 | II    | Mallard                      | In cornfield           | R. W.         |
| Nov. 27 | II    | Cedar Waxwing                | In tree                | R. W.         |
| Nov. 28 | II    | Barred owl                   | In woods               | F. M.         |
| Nov. 30 | I     | Red-tailed hawk              | In air                 | D. T.         |

I use this method to create competition between individuals and classes. On my lists the full name of the observer is given. We have started a new list of December birds.

RUTH HABEGER, Marshalltown.

On November 27 I drove over to Mud Lake which is a few miles from Lysard. There were a few Canada geese, scaup ducks and black ducks there. My bird list for this year now numbers 201 species, my latest additions being American golden-eye and baldpate.

CHAS. J. SPIKER, Canastota, N. Y.

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We wish to call attention to the Iowa Ornithologists Union's FIELD CHECK LISTS. These lists are printed on convenient 3x4-inch folded cards and contain, in A. O. U. order, the names of 260 Iowa birds, with space at the end for the names of rare or accidental species or for the notes of the observer.

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## THE BIRD'S-EYE VIEW

By Fred J. Pierce

During winter, when the temperature is at a low point, and the wind swoops down from the north, piling snow into huge drifts about the countryside, there is a dearth of bird life and our interest is somewhat lax as a result. The evenings are long and as we sit about our firesides with leisure hours at our disposal, it is a fine time to delve into the past and learn what old books have to tell about the birds of other days.

Always more or less interested in things having historical significance, I have found much pleasure in this sort of casual research during the course of general reading. One will often be astonished when he discovers what has been written many years ago about the birds of his own region.

While reading John Burroughs' "Riverby," I came upon a chapter entitled "Notes From the Prairie." My interest quickened when I found that the chapter was composed of the observations of a Delaware County, Iowa, nature student who lived at Manchester fifty years ago. Burroughs often incorporated portions of his correspondents' letters into his chapters, and in this case the letters were so interesting that he quoted them almost in their entirety. The descriptions of the dancing of sandhill cranes, the nesting of prairie chickens, and the past abundance of all kinds of game birds in eastern Iowa make absorbing reading. The correspondent was Mrs. Amelia Beardslee. I once made an attempt to trace the Burroughs side of the correspondence, thinking that his letters might still be in existence; but Mrs. Beardslee had died in 1885, and nothing could be learned regarding what had become of the letters.

"The Life and Letters of John Muir," by W. F. Bade, gave me a very entertaining account of a visit by Muir to McGregor, Iowa, on July 7, 1863. Young Muir, with two companions, was making a long botanical and geological expedition down the valley of the Wisconsin River and on into Iowa, as a vacation from studies at the University of Wisconsin. The last echoes of the guns of Gettysburg had scarcely died away when John Muir and his two companions were nearing McGregor. Pennsylvania was a long way from Iowa in those days, however. The young men thought very little of the great conflict and were engrossed with the study of botany and geology, as well as exploring the bluffs and admiring the scenery about the town. There is much interesting narration here and the reader will enjoy trying to visualize the country about McGregor as it was in those days.

Many county histories have been published. These usually contain a chapter devoted to game birds and mammals of the past. Such accounts are always of great interest and many of them are important contributions to our knowledge of ornithology. Of course, some of this material is too highly colored and is inaccurate, but the discerning reader should be able to distinguish the authentic from the exaggerated in most instances.

Notes on Iowa's natural history of the past are to be found in many places. There is not space here to go into the subject very fully. The above references are merely suggestive of what may be found as one browses among his books.

The Iowa Geological Survey (Des Moines) still has a supply of copies of "The Raptorial Birds of Iowa," by B. H. Bailey. This is a very worth-while work on our raptors and should be in the library of every Iowa bird student. Mr. Lees, of the Survey, writes me that they will continue to distribute the book free of charge to interested persons.

We plan to mail out a circular letter to all public and college libraries in the state, calling their attention to the desirability of having in their files the only Iowa serial publication devoted almost exclusively to Iowa's bird life. We hope to increase our circulation by this plan and have established a special library subscription rate of fifty cents a year. Members who urge their local libraries to subscribe for THE BULLETIN lend very material aid to a worthy cause.

When studying the ornithology of the past, the paper on "Birds of Early Iowa," which appeared in the April, 1924, issue of *The Palimpsest*, should not be overlooked. This good article is from the pen of E. D. Nauman, one of our members.

## TRAGEDY AT A SWALLOW NEST

One day in December, while looking around in my father's barn, I chanced to see a swallow nest with a dead barn swallow hanging from it, some five or six feet above my head. Investigation disclosed the fact that the swallow, an adult bird, had met death by becoming nopelessly entangled in some horse hairs used in the construction of its nest.

The nest was complete in every respect, with a large amount of chicken feathers for lining, and with what seemed to me an unnecessary amount of the stiff horse hairs. A large number of these hairs did not seem to be woven into the nest, but hung in careless fashion, in the form of long streamers, on the outside of it. The swallow had unfortunately fallen into its own trap, unwittingly made by the careless use of this material. Two of the hairs clung tenaciously about the neck of the dried body, and the numerous times they were twisted and knotted told plainly of the struggle the dying bird had made to free itself. It is regrettable that my father did not note in time what was going on in his barn, so that the bird's life could have been saved; but the nest was in a rather inconspicuous place and he little imagined the tragedy that was being enacted as he went in and out of the building in his regular work.

It would be interesting to know whether the swallow's mate hatched the eggs, if any were in the nest, and reared the young, with the corpse of the other parent hanging just outside the home. Nothing, however, could be learned of this part of the story, as the nest contained nothing in the way of evidence. The nest was inaccessible to rats, so they could not have carried the eggs away if there were any in the nest at the time of the accident.

I knew of one house wren that died when it was caught in horsehair nesting material, and numerous cases of orioles being caught in string used in their nests are on record, but this is the first time I have known a swallow to die in this manner.

F. J. P.

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