

THE BULLETIN

Iowa Ornithologists Union

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OUR PRESIDENT'S LETTER

It is remarkable how people love birds. Seventy-five per cent of the Iowa people do. They depend for information and guidance upon a few who, it is hoped, all belong to the Iowa Ornithologists Union. These few should realize their responsibility to gather facts correctly and make observations thoroughly.

The best ornithologists use many note books, write down everything in detail, from length of feathers to the number of times the eyes are winked. The facts may be valuable information fifteen years later, for we ornithologists are continually experiencing the thrill of discoverers.

In order to see if the life lists of our members are well worked up and for the purpose of exchanging them with others, it is suggested that each send in the number of his life list. A life list is that list of live birds seen by one person anywhere during his life time. It would be interesting to see who in Iowa has the longest life list. Send them in for the next Bulletin. Someone is going to write a new "Birds of Iowa" one of these days and such information will help him.

WALTER W. BENNETT, President

A pair of Pelicans were seen by C. F. Wolden and myself on August 22. Mr. O. Refsell, who first called our attention to their presence, stated that they had been seen there since about the middle of June. As the lake can not be seen from Mr. Refsell's residence, only from the more outlying fields, they probably had been there since spring without being noticed earlier. A farmer on the other side of the lake stated that there were five birds at first. The two birds were seen all through the summer. Their favorite place was near the north shore, where several boulders appear above the shallow water.

I visited the lake again on Sept. 15, thinking they might leave with the opening of the hunting season on the 16th. I obtained a good view of them, although they were well out on the lake as the water was low and very shallow around the edges. After the 16th they left the lake at intervals, and one of them was seen on Mud Lake, a few miles away, by C. F. Wolden some days afterward. They were again seen later on Bur Oak Lake but I do not think they have been seen since a week or so after the shooting began.

B. O. Wolden, Estherville

There was in Maquoketa a wholesale slaughter of warblers on the night of September 4th. This was the second time this year that this has happened. When these birds were going north in April more of them met death, I think, than did in September. I remember in the spring one morning there were 32 of them piled up on the stairs to my office when I came up. Folks had placed them there thinking I would want to mount them. There were Myrtle Warblers, Black throated Warblers, Olive Warblers, one pair of Redstarts, one Bobolink, one Chipping Spar-

row. I am not sure whether or not there was any other variety in the pile or not. The birds that were piled on my stairs were nearly all picked up on the street corner near my office. Dead birds were scattered around the whole town, especially in the business part. They had perished here by the hundreds. It was a rainy night and I awoke and could hear them making a noise on all sides of our home, so they must have travelled all night.

On the afternoon of September 4, the weather changed from real warm to uncomfortably cool very suddenly and we built a fire in our heating plant that evening. In the morning when I went up town there were dead warblers scattered all around in the business section much the same as on the morning in April, the date of which I do not know. Again a nice collection of corpses was placed on my stairway. I also found a live warbler in my stairway which I released. Several other business men found live ones in their buildings and closed stairways, where they had flown during the night. My impression is that when they flew into the glare of our lighted town they struck wires, plate glass, and possibly sides of buildings, with such force that it killed them. The daily papers of the 5th stated that there was frost and hail in the north, which I think started them back in such droves at that time.

We have had some freak birds here at different times. Two years ago a snow white grackle was raised here in the edge of town. His four nest mates were regular in color but this one was snow white with pink eyes, even his beak and legs were white.

Cardinals are very plentiful, as are opossum, which shows that our southern birds and animals are moving up here. Both have located here since I was a boy.

For the last nine years we have had a fine colony of southern Mocking Birds nest about four miles northeast of Maquoketa on the Wm. Meyer farm and the Walter Ingalls farm, which join, I believe. They nest in goose berry bushes near the farm buildings and raise some nice youngsters each year. They arrive here about May 1, and leave about September 1. They are the real southern variety and not the south western kind with the speckled breast, such as live in southern California and other south western states. These are the kind that used to perch on the chimney and sing before daylight in Louisiana one winter when I was there.

These males have their favorite singing perches, all of them high up in the tallest trees. One of them used Mr. Meyer's windmill wheel. They imitate not only the different songs and calls of the native birds but also the squeaking of the windmill and chirping of the little chickens.

Last winter our Isaac Walton League chapter bought grain and had all of our rural mail carriers spread it out on their routes every snowy day for the Quail, Pheasants, and other birds. We also requested WOC and WHO to broadcast an appeal to farmers to feed the birds, which they very nicely did every day. As a result, we saved thousands of birds and never before in my life have I seen so many Quail along the road-sides as there were this year.

Frank E. Ellis, Maquoketa.

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EDITORIAL NOTES AND COMMENTS

The beautiful fan of the peacock consists of the greatly elongated tail coverts. The fan of the turkey, however, is the tail itself. The Spaniards took turkeys from Mexico to Europe. When our Pilgrim forefathers came to this country, they brot turkeys with them and so our domestic turkey is of Mexican origin. It differs from our wild turkey by having white tipped feathers.

Harlow Mills, Ames, of the zoology department is a new member of the Union. He observed a Red breasted Nuthatch here on the campus October 8th. Is this not an unusually early date?

Other new members of the Union are Mrs. C. A. Fricke of Davenport and the Davenport Public Museum.

Mrs. Mary L. Baily, our secretary, has returned to Sioux City after several months travel in Europe. Thru a mistake, I failed to include Mrs. Bailey's name in the list of Iowa members of the American Ornithologists Union.

O. R. Clark, Professor of Botany, Cedar Falls, would like to know if there are any authentic records of the southern Mockingbird from any counties in the northern half of the state. There is one record from Minnesota in 1898.

Philip DuMont, formerly of Des Moines but now connected with the American Museum of Natural History, gave a talk on "Some Observations on the Use of Bird skins and Feathers by the American Indians" at the last meeting of the American Ornithologists Union.

The Wilson Ornithological Club will meet Dec. 27 and 28 at Des Moines in connection with the A. A. A. S. meeting there. A banquet will be served Saturday evening, Dec. 28. This is an exceptional opportunity for Iowa ornithologists to meet with others who have similar interests.

I believe every member of the Iowa Ornithologists Union owes it to the Iowa birds he loves to act on Miss Sherman's suggestion and kill every Starling seen in Iowa before they propagate and become too numerous to deal with.

There are three complete sets of The Auk in Iowa. They are owned by Iowa State College, the University of Iowa, and Dr. T. C. Stephens of Morningside College.

In a meeting at McGregor, early in August, the Iowa Conservation Association re-elected G. B. MacDonald of the Iowa State Forestry Department as secretary of the association. MacDonald has held this position for the last fifteen years.

The Biological Survey reports that last year Mrs. Marie Dales of Sioux City banded between 500 and 800 birds; Dr. F. L. R. and Mary Price Roberts of Spirit Lake, between 300 and 500; and Oscar P. Allert of McGregor, between 100 and 200.

The picture of the Bartramian Plover in the last Bulletin was included thru the kindness of our president, W. W. Bennett, who loaned the cut for that purpose.

I addressed the Biology Club of Iowa State College on Nov. 8., on "Birds of a Neglected Area". I also used motion pictures loaned by the Visual Instruction Service.

T. H. Whitney of Atlantic died September 10. He was the first treasurer of the I. O. U. and was at one time vice-president. Tom Whitney, as all of his friends called him, was an active and talented ornithologist. He will be greatly missed by a host of friends.

In the current edition of Bird Lore, E. D. Nauman, one of our most capable observers, tells of a number of observations he had made of birds nests being destroyed by snakes. In every case it was one of the larger species of snakes that was the offender. As there are few of these larger snakes left in the parts of Iowa with which I am familiar, they must do comparatively little damage now. I wonder if any of our members can supply evidence regarding our Garter Snakes. We should be careful not to take the attitude of the hunter, which is that all animals are vermin if they prey on those species he wishes to preserve. Snakes are of undoubted value in the control of insects, rodents, etc. They are part of our interesting fauna and have a place in the balance of nature. The poisonous snakes must, for the safety of man, be exterminated; but we should hesitate to exterminate species because we know they prey on a form of life we wish to preserve.

Walter W. Bennett, our president, recently made a trip east, visiting a number of museums, such as the Chicago Arts and Sciences and Field Museums at Chicago, American Museum at New York, Cambridge Museum at Cambridge, and Victoria National Museum at Ottawa, Can.

He writes, "Of particular interest was a visit to Dr. Rudolph M. Anderson at Ottawa. It will be remembered he is the one who wrote the "Birds of Iowa" published by the Davenport Academy of Sciences, which is still the authority in Iowa. Dr. Anderson is engaged in a study of Canadian mammals. His associate at the Victoria National Museum is P. A. Taverner, who recently issued two volumes on Canadian Birds. Taverner is now preparing a new work embodying the two books in one. Mrs. Anderson, formerly a Sioux City, Iowa, girl, is also taking an active part in ornithology and has recently published several important works. She told me an interesting story of a Winter Wren which nested in the pocket of an old coat at their summer home north of Ottawa last summer. The Winter Wren apparently has some of the same tricks as our House Wren.

One of the interesting places visited was Jack Miner's bird sanctuary, the one of newspaper fame, in southern Ontario. Although it has had more publicity than any other preserve in America, it is doubtful if it is any better than Ridgeway's or many others. Miner's success in attracting wild geese has, of course, been remarkable but can be done by anyone else who wants to spend \$5,000 a year for grain to feed them. Miner is now trying to attract Snow and Blue Geese in the same way. He says a real estate development project has kept the Swans from coming there this year."

On June 6, 1929, Arthur T. Watson, Kenneth Nelson and I covered a good share of Polk county in trying for a "big list". We found a total of 101 species, including such unusual ones as a Holboell's Grebe, an Orange-crowned Warbler (collected), a pair of Mockinbirds and a pair of Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawks. These hawks were seen at Brenton's Slough, 4 miles west of Camp Dodge. They had first been noted by Mr. and Mrs. John E. Stewart of Des Moines on May 5th but no agreement was reached as to their identity.

Both birds were well seen and the field marks useful in their identification may be of interest to others. They appeared a little larger than a Red-tailed Hawk, but with a longer tail, more like a Marsh Hawk (not the fan tail of the Bueto's) and white at the base. The broad wings were almost as long as an Osprey and when flying showed the black tips of the primaries as well as the slightly black axillars. The wing-arc was small (entirely different than the Osprey) and the line of flight very direct. The characteristic "flap three times then a short sail" is diagnostic. The identification of one bird which flew directly over us was determined by a study of the specimens in the Dwight Collection of the American Museum of Natural History. It was an immature female with but little if any color on the legs. The entire tone of color above inspecimens of this age is a dull grayish brown.

We did not record these hawks after June 6th nor did we find any indication of their breeding.

Bailey (Raptorial Birds of Iowa, 1918, p. 141.) records this species from six counties. Three (Woodbury, Pottawattamie and Mills) are along the western edge of the state, Kossuth in the north and Blackhawk and Linn in the north-east.

On June 3, Arthur Watson, Kenneth Nelson and I saw a total of 115 species of birds in Dallas, Boone and Polk counties (2:45 a. m. to 10:00 p. m.). We believe this to be a record for Iowa.

I have found Iowa specimens of the Northern Water Thrush (*Seiurus m. noveboracensis*) in Dr. Dwight's collection. They were taken at Hillsboro and Burlington. Anderson did not list this species.

I have seen 306 species of birds this year. Had 200 of them by the end of March down in Florida.

Would it not be a good idea through the Bulletin to invite contributions in the line of *additional species* seen within the state of Iowa since Anderson wrote his book in 1907? In that manner, anyone later who might want to bring the material up to date would have the notes in the Bulletin to draw on. Such notes would include the Long-tailed Jaeger Anderson recorded in the Auk shortly after his book was out; the Lazuli Bunting and Lewis Woodpecker at Sioux City, etc.

It might be well to try to get a correct determination on some of the sub-species, such as the Willow Thrush vs. Wilson Thrush; Eastern House Wren vs. Western House Wren; Western Sandpiper vs. Semipalmated Sandpiper, etc. Philip A. DuMont, New York City.

We have had a Wren's nest in a small birdhouse at Camp Hantesa, just outside of our Guest tent. On June 11th a group of girls discovered that one of the birds living in the nest this year was a banded bird and on investigation we found that the number was 99789. The bird was banded by us on June 3rd, 1928—it is the father bird of the family which lived in the same house last year and who has returned to raise a family this year again.

Clara S. Nelson, Des Moines

Ben Reed bagged a duck, known as the Serf Scoter,

Saturday while hunting. The duck, which is a coast duck and very rare in this part of the United States, was all black except for a bit of white on its neck. Another peculiarity of the duck was its red and white bill. W. H. Barrett is having the rarity mounted.

—Spirit Lake Beacon

A friend informs me that a few years ago he shot a Great Horned Owl. It had one of its feet badly mutilated and one of its toes was missing. There were other evidences that it had been in a great fight. Worst of all, its plumage was so fearfully scented with skunk odor that it was almost impossible to approach it. It is interesting to conjecture what the skunk must have looked like.

E. D. Nauman, Sigourney

Many bird observers have noticed changes in the habits of English Sparrows in the past few years. I have been impressed several times by the places the sparrows have built their nests. When at the Dells near Dell Rapids, S. D., I saw that many of the homes of the cliff swallows had been taken over by the sparrows. In a deep cut on the paved road near Council Bluffs, I observed the sparrows carrying nest material into the homes of the bank swallows. Last summer I saw a sparrow carrying nest material into the hole of a ground squirrel along a road in this county. A few days ago when at Luverne, Minnesota, I saw great numbers of the Sparrows living in small crevices in the rock at the quarry, where blasting was being done regularly and the rock was being taken out every day. In my yard I have nest boxes made of hollow logs which have been occupied by Chickadees, Nuthatches, Downy, Hairy and Redheaded Woodpeckers. I have had to destroy the nests of the Sparrows in each box, several times a season. Of course they use the Martin houses when permitted.

O. S. Thomas, Rock Rapids.

On November 5, Mr. Sam Battell brought in a junco which he had just trapped and banded. This bird had a large cyst on the side of the head behind the eye. The cyst was a sac of thin skin half an inch in length narrowed at the base to a diameter of an eighth of an inch. It looked red as tho filled with blood. The bird appeared and acted healthy when liberated.

On the night of October 29-30 a remarkable flight of geese was noted at Ames and some other towns of central Iowa. The night was extremely thick with fog and evidently the geese were confused and lost their bearings. Beginnings in the evening and lasting until daylight of the following morning the air was filled with the cries of the birds which seemed to be circling all night, occasionally lighting, often flying very low. It is probable that most of these geese were not Canada Geese, *Granta canadensis* (Linn) tho some have said they detected an occasional "honk-honk" of the ordinary Canada Goose among the myriad lesser cries of the others. The numbers were hard to determine. It sounded as tho there were thousands of them. The writer was aroused from sound sleep at four in the morning and thought at first that it was the distant yelping of small dogs or the discordant brake-screechings of shunting freight cars.

Bird's Christmas candles are appreciated by the Nuthatches and Downies and other suet eaters. Get "hardware cloth", half inch mesh, cut six inches square at any hardware store. Bend each square into a flattened cylinder, bending a few of the cut ends of wire back to hold it

in shape. Flatten one end shut and bend over a few wires to hold it so. Fill at the other end with suet and hang by a small wire thru the top to branches or strung wires in sight of your windows. If there are hungry birds they are likely to find the delectable meal.

J. E. Guthrie, Professor of Zoology, Ames.

Regarding that migration of geese can say that they passed over here in great numbers on Monday evening, Oct. 28th. I had gone to bed but heard them through the open window very plainly and I arose and tried to see them but it was not moonlight and I could only hear them. This was about 11:15 p. m. but others told me that they had heard them during the evening.

The next morning one of our farmers saw a number of "white geese" in his pasture feeding. Whether they were some which hovered over Ogden during the night or not we of course do not know. However you know that the honking of the Snow Geese is a little different than that of the Canadian Geese so perhaps the ones which passed over Ames were Snow Geese also.

W. M. Rosen, Ogden.

On October 22, I observed a flock of twelve Pine Siskins feeding on the boxelder seeds in our back yard.

A. J. Palas, Des Moines

A small grove of elm trees on the Grinnell College campus has been the roosting place of great numbers of Grackles for several weeks past. The birds disappear in the early morning and return about dusk, after the manner of crows. Is this customary? Each morning one or more dead birds will be found on the ground. Oct. 27th there were four dead, and one bird just able to fly a little. A large amount of guano is left in which are countless seeds. The whole phenomenon is strange to the writer.

And for the last two or three springs, we have had large flocks of Robins roosting in the sugar maples and Douglas firs of the campus. These birds assemble by hundreds at dusk, filling the air with song. Up to the middle of last June there were far more roosting Robins than could be accounted for by the number of nests. This also is a new thing in my experience. Have I merely missed it hitherto?

Henry S. Conard, Grinnell

An interesting robin's nest was reported to me by Mr. E. A. Emery. The nest was located in a deep crevice in a steep clay bank and the site was about twenty feet above the street level. The nest was really wedged in this niche and close inspection showed it to be very solid. The parents were successful in rearing a brood of four youngsters in this nest.

Another curious nest was the nest of a Water Ouzel found by members of the Morningside College Ornithological Class, while in Yellowstone Park. This nest was one of the beams of a small bridge over the Firehole River. The base of the nest was a mud-lined Robin's nest and around and over this the Ouzel had built it's own nest of green moss.

Wm. Youngworth, Sioux City.

The unexpected sometimes happens. A decidedly unexpected happening in bird study conducted in an open prairie location is the seeing of certain pre-eminently wood-haunting species of birds; species that are not rare in their native ranges, but whose appearance on the prairies may be marked as a red letter event. The first one of these to be recorded for my home place was the Red-bellied Wood-

pecker. In several years it has been seen here and one appearing once on several days came to my feeding stick and ate therefrom. A Ruffed Grouse was seen here on September 23, 1920, and on November 1, 1921, a Grouse appeared on the same spot on the top of the north fence of our yard. These birds may have been resting on their journey from the woods to the Turkey River to the heavily wooded hills that border the Mississippi River. The last and least expected of all was a Northern Pileated Woodpecker that on October 1, of this year, flew over our yard and lit in plain sight on the trunk of a tree.

We hear of an expected happening in other parts of Iowa, which means the arrival in our state of the Starling, a foreign pest, far more loathsome and dangerous to our native bird life than is the English Sparrow; a pest that needs to be fought with the same unflinching determination. Can not members of the I. O. U. report the shooting of every Starling seen? Only by such action can we save our hole-nesting birds and concur in the request of our President who asks us to join in the enviable task "of studying, enjoying, protecting Iowa's bird population."

Althea R. Sherman, National

The A. O. U. Checklist is partly in galley proof but probably will not come out in completed form before next fall—possibly late summer. Dr. Stone thinks it certainly will be out before the next A. O. U. meeting. The next meeting will be at Salem, Mass. Time to be fixed later.

The third volume of Forbush's Birds of Massachusetts will be out about the first of the year. It will contain 31 colored plates, largely by Allan Brooks as Fuertes had completed only a few. The introduction will be a biography of Forbush by May, who as you know has taken Forbush's place and is seeing the work finished. The issue will be ten thousand copies and the first and second volumes are being reprinted in such numbers as to bring each up to 10,000.

Dr. T. S. Roberts, Minneapolis, Minn.

A Bald Eagle was reported at Storm Lake, Iowa, Oct. 27. It was seen by a friend of T. M. Murdock of Sioux City, who said the bird was flying very low and so close to him that he could very plainly see the entire head was white.

On November 3, I observed at least three thousand wild ducks in the state game refuge at the north end of East Okoboji Lake, adjoining the town of Spirit Lake. They would permit the four wheels of an automobile to come within 25 feet, but the two legs of a walking man were a danger signal.

The question of how late in the summer do birds nest is answered by a Bob White found by Ivan Richards and shown to me at Sioux City. The bird was flushing from ten eggs, September 14. It certainly is an unusually late record. The nest was located on the ground among tall grass and rose bushes near South Sioux City, Nebraska. Because the eggs were so badly soiled, it was at first wondered if they were infertile and perhaps laid in the middle of the summer, but this question was also settled when they hatched about September 22, a few days before frost. Here's hoping the young fellows were Eskimos.

Two White-winged Scoters were reported shot near Sioux City at Brower's Lake early in October. They have not been common in the state but have been known to nest north of here.

Walter W. Bennett, Sioux City.