

# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 18 Number 3

December 1998

## Calendar

**Field trips**, unless otherwise noted, leave from Terrill Mill Park, located across N. Dubuque Street from the Mayflower. **Meetings** are generally held at 7:00 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month at Lucas Elementary School, 830 Southlawn Drive, near Towncrest in eastern Iowa City.

**December 9, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count organizational meeting** at the home of Jim Fuller, 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City. If you would like to participate in the count but cannot attend the meeting, call Jim Fuller at 338-3561 or Chris Edwards at 626-6362.

**December 20, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count**, followed by evening meal and compilation at The Mill restaurant in Iowa City.

**January 24, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Mississippi River** near Davenport for wintering gulls and waterfowl. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**February 13, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Amana Turkey Trot.** Join us for an early morning hike followed by breakfast at the Amanas. Meet at the former Target (future Shopko) parking lot on Highway 6 West in Coralville. Please call Jim Fuller at 338-3561 if you plan to attend.

**February 18, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Neil Bernstein from Mt. Mercy College will present "State Preserves: Here Today, Gone Tomorrow," with a special emphasis on neotropical migrants.

**March 20, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Cone Marsh** or another local area for waterfowl and other early migrants. Rick Hollis, 338-4834.

**March 25, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Ann Barker of Quad Cities Audubon and the Iowa Ornithologists' Union will discuss birds of South Georgia Island & the Falklands.

**April 15, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Jim Fuller will make a presentation about winter birding in Duluth, Minnesota.

**April 17 – 18, Saturday – Sunday. Southern Iowa for Prairie-Chickens.** Karen Disbrow is organizing an overnight trip to Ringgold County to view displaying Greater Prairie-Chickens on their lek at dawn. This is a tentative date. Call Karen at 339-1017 if you are interested.

## Other Dates of Note

**December 19, Saturday. Cedar Rapids Christmas Bird Count.** Call Pete Wickham at (319) 363-6884 for details.

**December 30, Wednesday. North Linn Christmas Bird Count.** Call Weir Nelson at (319) 848-4846 for more information.

**February 19 – 22, Friday – Sunday. Second Annual Great Backyard Bird Count.** Sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. See page 7 for more information.

## Field Trip and Meeting Reports

**September 6, Hawkeye Wildlife Area.** We began this hot, humid morning at Swan Lake, where we studied swallows on the wing. Several warblers and other migrants were found in the woods nearby. A nice variety of shorebirds were observed along Babcock Access, but overall their numbers were down from previous weeks as the habitat dried up. Large numbers of pelicans, cormorants, and herons were also seen at Babcock. We ended the morning at Madsen Pond, where we enjoyed nice looks at immature and adult Black-crowned Night Herons.

People (17): Chris Caster (leader), John Cordell, John Daniel, Chris Edwards, Mary Edwards, Julie Englander, Jean Falk, James Huntington, Cal and Bernie Knight, Ken Lowder, Dick and Nancy Lynch, John and Gail McLure, Lou Pailliotet, Jean Sanders.

Birds (56 species): Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Black-

crowned Night-Heron, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Sora, American Coot, American Golden-Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Spotted Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Mourning Dove, Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Red-headed Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Bank Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Canada Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Baltimore Oriole, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Edwards*

**September 19, Annual Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve.** Hawk watching is a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Unfortunately, the weather on this particular day was too warm and sunny to produce a good hawk flight. Despite many sharp eyes, only four migrating raptors were sighted. We saw a kettle of Turkey Vultures, which technically are no longer classified as raptors. Interestingly, several days earlier 3,000 migrating Broad-winged Hawks were observed from nearby Macbride Nature Recreation Area!

People (35+): Julie Buchsbaum, Chris Caster, Dave Conrads, Chris Edwards, Julie Englander, Roger Heidt, Rick Hollis, Kay James, Li-Hsien Lin, Chris Lu, and more than 25 non-club members.

Hawks (2 species): Sharp-shinned Hawk (1), Red-tailed Hawk (2), *Buteo* sp. (1)

– *Chris Edwards*

**September 20, Hickory Hill Park.** Birds were certainly not plentiful, except American Robins, but we found a few “pockets” of warblers. It was mostly cloudy and 68 degrees at 7:30 a.m., with light rain from 8:30 – 10:30 a.m.

People (6): James Huntington (leader), John Cordell, Julie Englander, Li-Hsien Lin, Ramona McGurk, Lou Pailliotet.

Birds (37 species): Cooper’s Hawk, Common Nighthawk, Chimney Swift, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Swainson’s Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Philadelphia Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Canada Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Cardinal.

– *James Huntington*

**October 11, Redbird Farms Wildlife Area.** A pleasant, mostly cloudy morning that started cool and warmed too slowly for some, began with a large “V” of cormorants flying over the parking lot meeting place. We headed south soon after 7:30 and had a morning productive for fall migrant and resident species on and around the trails, ponds, etc. at our destination, though we shared the area with some unseen turkey hunters whose calls didn’t fool us for long.

People (9): Sara Adams, Bud Gode, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Chris Lu, Li-Hsien Lin,

Mary Noble (leader), Lou Pailliotet, Jean Sanders.

Birds (37 species): Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Canada Goose, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-necked Pheasant, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-billed Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, House Wren, Marsh Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, European Starling, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln’s Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Goldfinch.

– *Mary Noble*

**October 15 Meeting.** A brief business meeting was held. Comments were made on the American Bird Conservancy, changes in the Teaming With Wildlife proposal, Partners in Flight memorandum, and Iowa’s new birding list server. The possibility of raising funds to put benches in parks was discussed. The DNR is thinking about changing the access rules for parts of the Hawkeye Wildlife Area. After Jim Durbin presented a delightful slideshow on “Iowa Through the Seasons,” treats were enjoyed by all. Jim also brought a number of antique bird books to share.

People (9): Chris Caster, Margrieta Delle, Karen Disbrow, Jim Durbin, Bud Gode, Rick Hollis, Bernie Knight, Cal Knight, Jean Sanders.

– *Rick Hollis*

**November 19 Meeting.** During the brief business meeting, the upcoming Christmas Bird Count was discussed and several announcements

were made. Bernie Knight says our budget is tight, and reminds us all to pay up. Kirkwood Elementary is considering installing a bird blind in their wooded area. By unanimous vote of all present, the ICBC is adding its name to the list of organizations supporting Partners in Flight. Dave Conrads was the featured speaker tonight. He presented some of his research on the energetics of Sharp-shinned Hawk migration.

People (14): Dave Conrads, Roy Davenport, Margrieta Delle, Karen Disbrow, Mari Draeger, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Cal Knight, Mary Noble, Ann Perkins, Ed Perkins, Jean Sanders, Ella Spies. – *Rick Hollis*

## **Birdlife at the S & G Materials Sandpit**

### **Mike Dooley**

I started birding in late May of 1997 and my enthusiasm for it grew rapidly. By trial and error I gradually discovered Hickory Hill Park and a few other local spots which more than filled the needs of a beginner. I live just south of the Iowa City city limits, and in early fall that year as I would drive back and forth along Sand Road I looked enviously at the S & G Materials sandpit, which seemed to harbor numerous ducks. I'd had virtually no experience with waterfowl or shorebirds and the sandpit was right down the road from me. I didn't own a spotting scope at the time, so I couldn't really work the sandpit from the gravel road to the south. One day in October on a whim I pulled into S & G's parking lot, went into their office, and asked the foreman for permission to bird there. He hesitated a long while, and then said yes on the condition that I send him reports on what I found there. They added me to the sheriff's list of people who have permission to be on the property, and eventually gave me a key to their gates. I've since mailed them numerous reports on the nearly ninety species of birds I've seen there.

My first experiences past the fences at S & G were in time for the fall diving duck season. I was still working only with binoculars and sometimes found myself crawling along the ground (with its ample evidence of vacated Canada Goose flocks) to sneak as close to the shoreline as possible. There is little natural cover at water's edge, and I knew next to nothing about identifying ducks – close-up views were essential. I also discovered the natural bird-blind afforded by the sand dune off to the southwest, with its view over a whole section of water not

visible from Sand Road. Two of my firsts were Northern Pintail and Northern Shoveler, and an early beginner's challenge was distinguishing Canvasback from Redhead. Since that first October I have seen the nineteen most usual Iowa duck species at S & G, all but one or two of them regularly.

One cold, gray, windy day late that October I was wandering along the shore by the southwest dune and flushed a lone sparrow-sized bird that flashed a lot of white in its wings. It landed only about fifteen yards ahead of me and I inched toward it one cautious step at a time. In my binoculars I saw a cream-and-rust patterned bird with black legs that waddled like a pigeon. It was oblivious to me as it slowly pecked its way along the sandy shoreline. I watched it a good half hour, but not until I thumbed randomly through my field guide later did I recognize the bird as a Snow Bunting, on the rather early date of October 25th. There were three more Snow Buntings along the north ledges this past November.

Another puzzle one morning that fall was a fair-sized flock of charcoal-gray "ducks" with white beaks, all making their way in a line from one shore to another. After forty-five minutes of circling, crouching and crawling, still working with binoculars, I was stumped. They dove and they also ran along the water before flying, which I'd never seen before. Some of them were standing on the shore's edge, exposing peculiar football-shaped bodies. Finally I stumbled across these critters in the Peterson guide, but not in the duck section at all – they were American Coots! I've since come to think of

coots as the mascot birds of S & G – one day this past October they numbered 2500, my high count at the sandpit so far. In 1997 their numbers trailed off to nil by early December, and rebounded to their spring migration peak the following April.

By November I had a spotting scope and had learned the lay of the land. More and more Ring-billed Gulls began to gather on the mudflat in the northeast corner of the sandpit, sometimes with a few Herring Gulls mixed in. This mudflat is formed by the runoff from S & G's gravel-sorter. Gull numbers peaked at about 200 last year, but were greater this November, with 800 – 850 crowded together on and around the flat just after Thanksgiving. These included eight lingering Franklin's Gulls and three Bonaparte's Gulls on the 27th.

Diving ducks were gone for December and January, but made an early return during our unusually mild February this year. The second week in February brought a trickle of divers, including Canvasback, Ring-necked, Lesser Scaup, and Common Goldeneye. On February 13th, however, the pit was half frozen over. Scattered all over the ice, as well as in the air and roosting in the western trees, were 36 Bald Eagles. I had never seen an eagle till I came to Iowa City from Michigan; to see this kind of concentration was stunning. I was not the only one taken by this sight, as occasionally a passing car on Sand Road slowed down to take a look. Three folks in a truck stopped and had a look through my scope. At one later point I heard a thin, squealing cry somewhere above me. I looked up to see thirty of the eagles kettling, an even more mesmerizing sight. Ospreys have been regular at S & G as well, with two or three each in spring and fall. On one sunny afternoon I shortened the legs of my tripod and was able to hold an Osprey in my scope until it was nearly directly overhead, no more than twenty-five

yards away. I was momentarily on my knees with the scope practically vertical, the Osprey's every feather vividly delineated, back-lit by the sun.

March was the strongest month for the ducks, but toward March's end other interesting arrivals appeared. On one afternoon I had my first Horned and Eared Grebes, five apiece. Both species would make a few more visits in April (winter Horned Grebes were seen through most of November this year). On another late March evening, as I drove home from Iowa City, I looked out over the water and saw large white forms dotting the surface, larger than anything I'd seen out there before. I pulled off on the gravel road south of the pit and set up my scope just inside the gate there. My first American White Pelicans, 23 of them, were floating as still and gracefully as swans in a park. They were lit by the deep red glow of the setting sun, the light just emanating from below a front of dark storm clouds to the west. Viewed through just my binoculars it was a particularly riveting and timeless moment, the great white birds against the glassy pinkish-silver water, dwarfing the black dots of surrounding ducks in the failing light. Cartoon and comic book versions had not prepared me for how beautiful pelicans actually are.

Migrating ducks had dwindled off by the third week in April, though a pair of Ring-necked Ducks lingered until late June. There were a few two-to-three day summer visits from unexpected ducks, such as a female Hooded Merganser and one or two Lesser Scaups. A Common Loon arrived June 16th and was content there through early August. But as the ducks left, the shorebirds came, depending on how much mudflat was exposed below the sorter. I've had many shorebird life birds at S & G, including a Ruddy Turnstone and Dunlin in late May and an American Avocet at the end of

July. A pair of American Golden Plovers were mingled among 20 Killdeer on the mudflat September 12th. All told I've identified twelve species of plovers and sandpipers at S & G, along with the avocet.

Caspian, Forster's, and Black Terns were regular at the sandpit, as were most of the Iowa swallow species. An occasional Caspian made a summer appearance and I saw one as late as October 3rd this year. By late September there was a narrow hedge of tall vegetation along most of the south rim. I started walking it, perhaps misguidedly, hoping for LeConte's or Sharp-tailed Sparrows. Instead one day I flushed a dark, plumpish bird that seemed to flap twice as much as most birds to go half the speed. Its legs dangled, and from past idle browsing I somehow thought to look in the rail section of Peterson. The bird didn't go far, and I approached it on hair trigger. I soon flushed it again, fumbled to get it in view and focus, and was lucky enough to catch two white patches on the trailing edges of the wings just before it disappeared in the weeds. I vaguely hoped this might help identify it, and of course it did – a Yellow Rail, my first rail of any kind. A few days later on October 3rd I had two late Soras in the same area.

Like any of us, I've had my share of curious little bird scenes at the sandpit, too. My favorite was a Belted Kingfisher couple perched together on one of the pipes leading from the gravel extractor itself. The male dove, took a small fish, and landed back on his perch. He shook the fish in his beak till it stopped moving, and then presented it to the female like a bouquet of flowers.

Altogether I've had 45 life birds at S & G, including passerines and including the property east of Sand Road, where there is good field habitat, most of it observable from the road. I'm grateful to the folks at S & G who have given me

access to their grounds, where I've gotten some of my best learning experience at birding.

## Book Reviews

**Eagles, Masters of the Sky: An Anthology of Writing, Photography, and Art from Throughout the World.** Rebecca L. Grambo, ed. Voyageur Press. 1997. \$24.95, hardcover. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

This book immediately shows a publisher's commitment to beauty by its size (over 10 inches x 10 inches) and the many, dramatic photos in color. It's a book for two kinds of people, the reluctant junior high reader who looks for limited print and plenty of illustrations for the subject of a book report, and the adult who searches for aesthetic beauty and the underlying ecological messages.

Most of us are familiar with the damage done to eagles and other birds by DDT and other persistent organochlorines. Some dangers to these raptors may not be so well known. Grambo's book speaks of the dangers from electrocution, "their broad wings making a fatal bridge between power lines. Electrocution is the cause of death for 15 percent of young Bonelli's eagles in France each year." One wonders why they don't place the wires further apart.

And then there are the hunters. Grambo writes, "in the early 1960s before eagles were protected, Boy Scouts were making neckerchief slides from eagle talons and headdresses from eagle feathers – until the Audubon Society explained to them what these materials meant for the eagles."

The passage of laws to protect the eagle may work like a sieve that tries to catch the water. Western ranchers occasionally view them as

lamb raptors. The Buffalo Flying Service, of Buffalo, Wyoming, for example, worked for a rancher and shot eagles for \$25 per bird. That rancher (Werner) “is believed to have paid Buffalo Flying Service at least \$15,000” in the early seventies.

One wishes that the ranchers would read this book, weigh the evidence on the merits of the bird, and dwell on the aesthetic domain. Let them reflect upon John Love’s translation of an

Iroquois poem:

I hear the eagle bird  
With his great feathers spread,  
Pulling the blanket back from the east,  
How swiftly he flies,  
Bearing the sun to the morning.

– *John McLure*

## From the President’s Messy Desk

A former Iowan (Tom and Kitty Stoner) gave the Chesapeake Bay Foundation about a million dollars, accompanied by a an unusual request: the Bay Foundation should use a few thousand dollars to place several benches around the Chesapeake in places conducive to contemplation and reflection. Each bench would carry a plaque with the theme: “Open Places, Sacred Spaces.” Is that not wonderful? It sounds so Iowa. It is a shame that there are not more benches like this in some of Iowa’s ‘Open, Sacred Places.’ A heavy-duty, vandal-proof, recycled plastic bench costs somewhere in the neighborhood of \$300 – 400. It would be nice if the bird club could donate some to the city, the DNR, Johnson County, or the Corps of Engineers. We would need some special fundraising for this.

An ad for the recording *101 American Bird Songs*, in the magazine section of the Gazette on September 27, contained the following: “Whether you are an accomplished Orthonologist (birdwatcher)...”

Here is a new address for Bud Gode:

O. J. Gode  
264 N. Calle Del Santo

Green Valley AZ 85614-3204  
BUDGODE@aol.com

I noticed a death notice for Joel Serlin in late September. Joel attended sporadic trips and meetings during 1998.

That is all for me this month. Take Care and Good Birding.  
– *Rick Hollis*

## Iowa Birdline (319) 338-9881

### Bird Notes

**LOG ON TO THE SECOND ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT.** From February 19 – 22, 1999, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, cosponsors of the event, are asking you to count the birds you see at your bird feeders, local parks, schools, or other areas. Then simply log on to the BirdSource web site at <<http://birdsource.cornell.edu>> and report what you saw. The information will be interpreted by researchers at the Lab and Audubon, who will create maps, graphs, and charts showing virtually up-to-the-minute reports from across North America. You’ll be able to see quickly how your own reports fit into the nationwide

picture. Last February, for the first-ever Great '98 Backyard Bird Count, more than 14,000 reports tallied over half a million birds during the three-day count. These data revealed interesting insights into the effects of El Nino and the exceptional winter finch "superflight."

#### **A TROPICAL HUMMINGBIRD IN IOWA.**

A South American hummingbird created quite a stir among Iowa birders this fall. The unusual bird was discovered visiting a hummingbird feeder in Des Moines in early September. It was originally identified and reported to the Iowa Birdline as a Buff-bellied Hummingbird, a resident of Mexico and southern Texas. The bird drew scores of birders from Iowa and throughout the Midwest, eager to add the species to their life or state lists. However, many careful observers noted differences between the bird and the plates in their field guides, and debates about the bird's identification and origin ensued. The bird was eventually identified as an *Amazilia* Hummingbird from South America, one of the most common hummingbird species kept in captivity. It was then learned (to the disappointment of many birders) that an *Amazilia* Hummingbird had been discovered missing from the Des Moines Botanical Center.

**PARTNERS IN FLIGHT UPDATE.** Partners in Flight recently released the Flight Plan, a blueprint for broad-spectrum, collaborative conservation. The plan is described as a single, scientific plan based upon simple concepts with hemispheric implications – a plan devised with input from thousands, but one in which decisions will be made and the work done locally. The plan addresses the long-term needs of birds in the continental U. S., but will likely have a major impact on all biodiversity. The Flight Plan's four steps include: (1) set priorities based on the best current knowledge, (2) set population objectives and habitat

strategies based on those priorities, (3) take conservation action based on those objectives, and (4) constantly evaluate the effects of your actions, and revise accordingly. For a copy of the Flight Plan, contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Migratory Bird Management, 4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Arlington, VA 22203. – *Bird Conservancy*

**NEW DISCUSSION LIST FOR IOWA BIRDERS.** IA-BIRD, a joint project of the Iowa Audubon Field Office and the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, is a new e-mail discussion list for Iowa birders. Users can report current bird sightings, ask difficult identification questions, get information on birding areas, and let others know about upcoming events. To subscribe to this discussion list, send an e-mail message to <listserv@list.audubon.org> with only the following text as your message (the message topic or subject does not matter nor do capital or lower case letters):

#### **SUBSCRIBE IA-BIRD**

Your e-mail address, from which you sent this message, will then be placed on the IA-BIRD subscription list. Any message sent to the list address <ia-bird@list.audubon.org> is sent to all subscribers of this list. The result is a fast and simple way to reach many Iowa birders. Topics in recent weeks have included the *Amazilia* Hummingbird in Des Moines, gull identification, field guides, American Pipit behavior, and of course recent bird sightings.

**IOWA CONSERVATION UPDATE.** Nesting Bald Eagles continued to increase in numbers in Iowa in 1998. There were reports of 82 active nests – 25 more than last year – in 33 counties. Nest sites were discovered in nine new counties this year, including Johnson County. Despite strong windstorms that destroyed a small number of nests, at least 78 young eagles were fledged. Northeast Iowa has the highest

concentration of nesting eagles, with 26 pairs in Allamakee County and 10 pairs in Clayton County. The number of known eagle nests in Iowa rose from one nest in 1977 to eleven nests in 1991, and has since risen dramatically.

The two established Peregrine Falcon nests in Des Moines and Cedar Rapids each produced three young in 1998, and all but one fledged successfully. Captive-raised falcons were released this year in Mason City and Muscatine. However, no additional urban releases are currently planned as the focus shifts to restoring falcons to their historic eyries in northeast Iowa. In 1997 four young falcons were released from a rock-lined hack box atop a bluff overlooking the Upper Iowa River. In 1998 nine birds were released from two boxes mounted on cliff faces in Effigy National Monument. It is hoped that some of these birds will return to nest on the cliffs overlooking the Mississippi River.

*This information is from Wildlife Diversity News, the newsletter of the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. To receive this free publication, write to Jhonna Benson, Wildlife Diversity News, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0034.*

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES INVADE NORTH AMERICA.** Feeder watchers and backyard birders should be on the lookout for the Eurasian Collared-Dove, a recent colonist rapidly spreading across the continent. The species, originally from Asia and Europe, was introduced into the Bahamas in the 1970s, and the population soon expanded around the islands. At some point in the 1980s, the doves migrated from the Bahamas to Florida. They quickly spread throughout Florida and the Southeast and continue to expand their range west and north. Iowa's first collared-doves were discovered in August 1997 in Grinnell, and

a handful of the birds continue to be seen there. The birds have now been seen as far west as Montana and California.

The Eurasian Collared-Dove is larger than a Mourning Dove and has a black collar on the nape and a squared-off tail. It may be confused with the very similar Ringed Turtle-Dove, which is a popular cage bird sometimes seen in the wild as an escaped or released bird. To compound the problem, older field guides do not picture the Eurasian Collared-Dove. The collared-dove's song is a course rapid three-part cooing, which contrasts with the turtle-dove's hollow rolling two-part cooing. The collared-dove has a gray belly and undertail coverts, and shows a pale gray patch on the upper side of the wings which contrasts with the dark primary feathers in flight. The turtle-dove is smaller than a Mourning Dove, has a white belly and undertail coverts, and is plain pale brown and gray on the upperparts.

If the current trend continues, in coming years the Eurasian Collared-Dove will be a common backyard bird throughout North America. Please report any sightings to the Iowa Birdline at 338-9881.

**MORE THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HUMMINGBIRD URINE.** A research paper in the 4/10/97 *Nature* and a summary in the 4/24 issue of *Nature* discuss the fascinating subject of bird droppings. All birds were thought to get rid of nitrogen waste in the form of uric acid. Uric acid is white, powdery, and highly insoluble (we've all noticed this when cleaning the windshield). Ammonia is another way of getting rid of nitrogenous waste, but the only vertebrates thought to use this pathway are fish. Ammonia is highly toxic, but very soluble – their watery lifestyle allows rapid diffusion. Fish get another benefit – ammonia is energetically the cheapest method, although it

does require a great deal of water. Most vertebrates convert waste nitrogen to either uric acid or urea. Both are less toxic, require less water to excrete, but are more expensive. Uric acid makes sense for birds, as it requires the least water and is thought to be the lightest method.

Now Dr. Preest and Dr. Beuchat have found that Anna's Hummingbirds (*Calypte anna*) excrete ammonia. What is the deal – why are hummingbirds weird? One big difference between them and most other birds is that hummingbirds' diets contain large amounts of liquid – four times their body weight, far more than most other birds. This large amount of water lets hummingbirds use ammonia as their waste product, and save some energy. Another effect of hummingbirds' water-rich diet is the need for frequent urination. Hummingbirds eliminate between 54 – 149% of their body weight in liquid. A consequence of this is lowered electrolyte levels. These minerals may not easily be replaced, especially if your diet is nectar and an occasional bug. This is a special problem for calcium in egg-laying females. A recent paper in the Journal of Field Ornithology reports five new and twenty-one old cases of hummingbirds eating mineral-rich substances. These potential mineral sources include subsoil, ash and limey grit from a building foundation.

Both of these phenomenon are complicated by birds' response to heat. When it gets hot, hummers cool off by panting. This uses up water. Thus there is less water to spare for ammonia excretion. When Anna's Hummingbirds need to conserve water, they begin producing uric acid instead of ammonia. Soil eating is more common in cooler climates, as fewer electrolytes would be lost through panting than urine.

Like the title says, this is probably more than

you wanted to know about hummingbird urine.

– Rick Hollis

## Iowa City Bird Club

**Eastern Iowa Birdwatch** is published three times per year (usually April, August, and December). Members are encouraged to send articles, reviews, notes, and comments to editor Chris Edwards, 85 Whitman Ave., North Liberty, IA 52317, or e-mail at [CREdwards@aol.com](mailto:CREdwards@aol.com).

**Annual membership dues** are \$5.00, payable by January 1st for the coming year to treasurer Bernie Knight, Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, 425 Lee St., Iowa City, IA 52246. Check your mailing label for the year you have paid through.

**For general bird club information**, contact Iowa City Bird Club president Rick Hollis at 338-4834.

## RENEWAL NOTICE

**Our annual \$5.00 membership dues, which pay for an entire year of Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, are due now for 1999. Check your mailing label below for the most recent year you have paid for. If your label says "98", please send \$5.00 for 1999. If your label says "97", send \$10.00 total for 1998 and 1999 in order to remain on our mailing list. Please make checks payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" and send to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City, IA, 52246.**

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch  
**Chris Edwards, Editor**  
85 Whitman Avenue  
North Liberty, IA 52317

