



# Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 19 Number 3

December 1999

## Calendar

**Field trips**, unless otherwise noted, leave from Terrill Mill Park, located across N. Dubuque Street from the Mayflower. Destinations may be changed at the discretion of the leader prior to leaving Terrill Mill; please contact the leader in advance if you plan to meet the group at the trip destination.

**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, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count Planning Meeting** at Jim Fuller's house, 6 Longview Knoll north of Iowa City. If you plan to participate in the count but cannot attend the meeting, or if you would like to be a feeder watcher on count day, please call Chris Edwards at 626-6362.

**December 19, Sunday. Iowa City Christmas Bird Count.** For more information, call Chris Edwards at 626-6362.

**January 30, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Mississippi River** near Davenport for wintering gulls and waterfowl. If river conditions are not favorable, an alternate local destination will be chosen. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

**February 5, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Amana Turkey Trot.** Join us for an early morning hike followed by breakfast at the Amanas. Meet at the Shopko parking lot on Highway 6 West in Coralville. Please call Jim Fuller at 338-3561 if you plan to attend.

**February 17, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Jim and Karole Fuller will present "Iowa, The Beautiful Land".

**February 19, Saturday, 6:20 a.m. Burlington** for Eurasian Tree Sparrows, Winter Wrens, and more with local guide Chuck Fuller. Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot near the intersection of Riverside Drive and Highway 1 South. Bring your own lunch or snacks. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

**March 12, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Muskrat Slough or Cone Marsh**, depending on conditions, for waterfowl and other early migrants. Chris Edwards, 626-6362.

**March 23, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Rick Hollis will present findings from the Iowa Feeder Survey.

**March 25-26, Saturday-Sunday. Sandhill Crane migration in Nebraska.** This is a tentative date. Please call John McLure (351-9121 home, 335-5432 work) by February 26 if you are interested. We plan to arrange travel by van or bus and reserve private viewing blinds (\$15 per person) for Sunday morning. For more information about this trip, see page 10.

**April 13, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting.** Topic and speaker to be announced.

**April 29-30, Saturday-Sunday. Mt. Ayr for Prairie-Chickens.** An overnight trip to southern Iowa to view displaying Greater Prairie-Chickens on their lek at dawn. Call Darlyne Neff at 338-6105 by April 15 to participate.

## Other Dates of Note

**December 18, Saturday. Cedar Rapids CBC.**  
Jim Durbin, (319) 377-7194

**December 29, Wednesday. North Linn CBC.**  
Jim Durbin, (319) 377-7194.

**January 8, Saturday. Dubuque Bald Eagle Watch** at Lock and Dam 11 and Marshall School.

**January 8–9, Saturday–Sunday. Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days, Environmental Fair and Wildlife Art Show.** QCCA Expo Center, 2621 4th Avenue, Rock Island, IL. (309) 788-5912.

**January 15–16, Saturday–Sunday. Keokuk Bald Eagle Days.**

**February 18–21, Friday–Monday. Great Backyard Bird Count.** Sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. See below for details.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

*The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society invite you to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count:*

The BirdSource web site received some 42,000 bird checklists during the second annual Great Backyard Bird Count last February. These reports came in from bird enthusiasts all across North America who “counted for the birds” by tallying those they saw at their feeders, local parks, and natural areas. Now you’re invited to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count 2000, February 18-21. Great Backyard Bird Count 2000 marks the third year of the count. This concentrated bird-censusing effort creates

immense snapshots of winter bird distribution and population status. From Alaska to Florida, Newfoundland to Hawaii, backyards “appear” on state-of-the-art BirdSource maps displaying the whereabouts of our winter birds. This represents tremendous conservation potential as we soar into the new millennium. Reports from this year will be combined with previous findings, allowing us to determine how different species have moved across the landscape over the last few years. This year’s reports will also add to a tremendous long-term database that will allow us to detect broad-scale changes in bird populations. Please join us and citizen scientists across the continent as we count birds for Great Backyard Bird Count 2000!

*For more information, visit the BirdSource web site at: <http://birdsource.cornell.edu>.*

## News

**MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY.** There has been interest expressed in publishing a membership directory listing the names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of club members. It would be distributed with an upcoming newsletter to club members only. If you would like your telephone number and/or e-mail address listed, please send the information to Chris Edwards at [credwards@aol.com](mailto:credwards@aol.com) or 85 Whitman Avenue, North Liberty IA, 52317, or print it along with your name on a 3” x 5” card and send it with your membership renewal to Bernie Knight.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE** for the April issue is March 15, 2000.

## RENEWAL NOTICE

**Our annual \$5.00 membership dues are payable now for 2000. Your dues will pay for**

**an entire year of Eastern Iowa Birdwatch. Check your mailing label for the most recent year for which you have paid. If your label says "99", please send \$5.00 for 2000. Make your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" and send it to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City, IA, 52246.**

## **Field Trip and Meeting Reports**

**September 12, Hickory Hill Park.** We started our walk at the north parking lot of Hickory Hill Park. It was a mild morning, but with heavy and threatening clouds. I had hoped that we would have a few hours before the rain reached us, but the weather was not going to cooperate.

We walked down the gradual slope of the large shrubby field. It was very quiet except for the thunder. Birds were few. We saw briefly a Black-billed Cuckoo, a couple of Field Sparrows, and a Least Flycatcher.

We turned into the south valley and picked up the pace. The rain began before we could reach the shelter. Mary Noble had been the smart one, the one with the umbrella, but the rest of us were more or less wet by the time we reached the shelter.

We stood and talked quietly and listened to the rain fall. By and by, robins and catbirds began to appear on the lawn and feed, and birds began to filter into the trees around the shelter. There were Downy Woodpeckers, robins, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, and female-plumaged Scarlet Tanager. They moved about the branches and found good perches where they could take "showers". It was quite a nice show for a little while.

We headed to Hy-Vee for coffee and donuts.

The rain showed no sign of ending and we called it a day.

*Participants:* Jack Bagford, Chris Caster, Drew Dillman, Judy Dillman, Karen Disbrow, Julie Englander, Vaibhav Garde, James Huntington (leader), Mary Noble.

*Birds (28 species):* Black-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood-pewee, Least Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Parula, American Redstart, Scarlet Tanager, Field Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch.

– James Huntington

**September 18, Hawk Watch at Stainbrook Preserve.** This year's hawk watch was one of the most enjoyable and successful in recent memory. It was an absolutely gorgeous fall day, with sunny skies and temperatures in the mid-70s. The mild southerly breeze didn't seem to deter the hawks from taking flight. It was probably the most well-attended event in the history of the Iowa City Bird Club, with a crowd estimated at more than one hundred, including a local Cub Scout pack. Hourly raptor programs were held by the expert staff at the nearby Macbride Raptor Center. An immature Red-tailed Hawk caught at the Cornell College banding station was brought to the site and released, providing those in attendance with an exciting close-up view.

Six raptor species were sighted, not counting numerous Turkey Vultures, which are now considered to be more closely related to storks

than to raptors. An impressive 228 migrating Broad-winged Hawks were tallied. Throughout much of the morning, they flew past in small groups at low elevations, and several provided impressive views as they sailed over our heads. Later in the morning we saw some large kettles high up in the thermals.

Another highlight was the sight of hundreds (perhaps thousands) of American White Pelicans as they rose up from their roosting areas at Hawkeye Wildlife Area miles to the west. They rode the thermals closer and closer until many soared right over our heads. Migrating butterflies were also in evidence, as 51 Monarchs were seen flying by.

*Participants:* Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Ann Bagford, Jack Bagford, Dave Conrads, Margrieta Delle, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Julie Englander, Janet Golio, Charles Hamilton, Roger Heidt, Rick Hollis, Kay James, Li-Hsien Lin, John McLure, Mary Noble, and many non-club members.

*Raptors (6 species):* Osprey (4), Bald Eagle (2), Sharp-shinned Hawk (3), Cooper's Hawk (1), Broad-winged Hawk (228), Red-tailed Hawk (4).

*Other Birds (13 species):* American White Pelican, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue Jay, American Crow, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch.

– *Chris Edwards*

**October 9, Cone Marsh.** The day's outing got off to a very foggy start. Our first stop was a privately-owned marsh north of Lone Tree. We walked along the road looking for sparrows along the roadside (which was about as far as we

could see). Chris Caster spotted a Lincoln's Sparrow, and we all got good looks at a Swamp Sparrow scared up with a "spish". The fog hadn't lifted by the time we got to Cone Marsh, so we started out birding the woods in the northwest corner. Yellow-rumped Warblers and Cedar Waxwings were abundant. An *accipiter* flew through at one point, and we also scared up a couple of very young and inexperienced duck hunters, who came over and actually hit us up for duck-hunting advice.

The fog lifted around 9:30, so we headed for the overlook on the west side. Unfortunately, the area was already being worked by some more experienced hunters, so we only saw a few Mallards, coots, and many decoys there. On the south side of the marsh, there were two Great Egrets, as well as Blue- and Green-winged teal and Northern Pintail. A Common Snipe flushed from a drainage ditch, and a "Harlan's" Red-tailed Hawk passed overhead in company with a Turkey Vulture.

By this time, the day was completely clear; the sun rapidly warmed it up into the 70s. Working the south side of the marsh, we found a cooperative Savannah Sparrow posing for us, and what was the first junco of the year for all of us. White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows, as well as the by-now ubiquitous "butter-butts", were also found here. On the southwest corner of the marsh, we found a large mixed flock containing both kinglets, Yellow-rumped, Bay-breasted, and Nashville warblers. Chris and Karen had to leave at this point, but the remaining three of us were joined by an exceptionally friendly yellow dog, who stayed with us the rest of the trip.

We drove (the dog in pursuit) to the dike on the east side. A path had recently been cut along the dike, and in the tall, thick vegetation on either side were good numbers of elusive lbj's.

Many of the ones we were able to get a look at were Swamp Sparrows, but at one point a LeConte's Sparrow popped up, and hung around long enough for us to get a good look. An immature Northern Harrier was working the area to our south as we left, with a final goodbye to the dog.

*Participants:* Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Vaibhav Garde, Eric Haley (leader), Bob Stearns.

*Birds (51 species):* Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, *accipiter* sp., Red-tailed Hawk (including "Harlan's"), falcon sp., Ring-necked Pheasant, American Coot, Killdeer, Common Snipe, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Nashville Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Savannah Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– Eric Haley

**October 21, Meeting.** Dean Abel presented a fascinating slide show about mushrooms.

*Participants:* Dean Abel, Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Ray Davenport, Margrieta Delle, Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards, Mary Edwards, Jim Fuller, Karole Fuller, Janet Golio, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Richard Tetrault, Gladys Wanek.

– Rick Hollis

**October 24, Coralville Reservoir and Lake Macbride.** The day started out crisp at 23 F, but clear and sunny, when we headed out of Iowa City to Sandy Beach. While there we saw the first of many Purple Finches and literally hundreds of American Robins. But the birds of the day for me were the pair of swans that we glimpsed flying near the shore and then out of sight around a bend. Trumpeters or Tundras, no one had time to be sure. We headed to the Macbride Nature-Recreation Area and the raptor center, where we heard the Pileated Woodpecker. A short stop at the bird blind to see if the Red-breasted Nuthatch would show up; it didn't. From there we headed to Sugar Bottom, seeing turkeys feeding on the far shore. We wound our way home along Jordan Creek Road where we saw a Red-headed Woodpecker. One last stop at the West Overlook to see what gulls could be found, but nothing other than the Ring-billed and Bonaparte's seen earlier. All in all 46 species.

*Participants:* Karen Disbrow (leader), Chris Edwards, Vaibhav Garde, Janet Golio, Mike Golio, Eric Haley, James Huntington, Bob Stearns, David Weiss.

*Birds (46 species):* Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, swan sp., Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Killdeer, Pectoral Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin,

Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Karen Disbrow*

**November 14, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area.** First of all, I would like to apologize to those individuals who left messages on my answering machine that they would meet the group at Pleasant Creek. I would have liked to have discussed things with you, but I wasn't provided a phone number in either instance. Secondly, I would like to apologize to those persons who found the field trip to be too long. In the future, I encourage any person leaving messages to provide their phone number and any person needing to get back to Iowa City to speak up before time becomes a problem.

The temperature at dawn was around 38 degrees and it reached a mid-day high of about 56. As usual there was a stiff breeze blowing off the water at all locations. Since most of us did not dress for the chill, we didn't tarry long in any location without shelter. The marvelously mild weather this fall is good for being out, but it isn't good for producing migrating waterfowl. The cold front on the 13<sup>th</sup> proved to be too little, too late. It was a slow day.

Mike Dooley and I met at 7 a.m. at the S & G sandpit south of Iowa City. There we found most of the diving ducks we would see on the trip. At 8 a.m. we met up with everyone else at Terrill Mill Park. After leaving some of the cars at City Park, the group caravanned across the Mehaffey Bridge and made stops at Twinview Heights and Sandy Beach for looks at the Coralville Reservoir. We spent some time scanning the open water, but there wasn't a whole lot to see at any location. After leaving

Sandy Beach the group made a pit stop at the convenience store at the Shueyville exit and then traveled northward to Pleasant Creek.

We arrived at Pleasant Creek around 10:30 and found the water to be empty except for a female scaup. Even the hunters were absent. It was decided that we should travel around the lake in case any of the persons who were to meet us there might be elsewhere. After parking near the beach house we found a Northern Shrike, which was easily the best bird of the day. This was a life bird for four in the group and so we chased and scoped this bird for close to a half hour. Most everyone got excellent looks. We were able to note the curved beak, the white rump, the vermiculations on the breast, and the large oval patch behind the eye.

After Pleasant Creek we decided to take a walk on the Palo Marsh trail. Large flocks of Rusty Blackbirds were present and we got excellent looks at these as well.

Another pit stop was made at the Palo Mini-Mart before heading down to make stops at Cedar Lake, a brushy sparrow place, Swan Lake, and Babcock Access and Greencastle Avenue in Hawkeye Wildlife Area. We did not find many birds in any of these locations. The highlight of the return trip had to be the visit to Mike Dooley's feeder station in the HWA. To reach this take the Sand Point access off Swan Lake Road. Park about thirty feet or so in from SLR and you will find the station in the first group of pines you come to, a short walk from your vehicle. Mike promised us Red-breasted Nuthatches and his feeders delivered. This spot could be useful on the Christmas Bird Count.

*Participants:* Chris Caster (leader), Karen Disbrow, Mike Dooley, Chris Edwards, Vaibhav Garde, Thérèse Guédon, Eric Haley, James Huntington, Ramona McGurk, Sally

Robertson.

*Birds (39 species):* Pied-billed Grebe, Canada Goose, Mallard, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, Hooded Merganser, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Coot, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Common Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Barred Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Northern Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Caster*

**November 18, Meeting.** Rick Hollis filled in and shared his slides from a nature photography course that he took at the Lakeside Lab this summer.

*Participants:* Ed Allgood, Jean Allgood, Ray Davenport, Margrieta Delle, Thérèse Guédon, Rick Hollis, Ramona McGurk, John McLure, Darlyne Neff, John Neff, Mary Noble, Sally Robertson, Bob Stearns.

– *Rick Hollis*

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to the e-mail address:

**listserv@list.audubon.org**

## **Alexander Skutch's Classic Work on Bird Behavior Available in New, Expanded Paperback Edition**

*[Press release from the University of Iowa Press.]*

This expanded edition of *Helpers at Birds' Nests: A Worldwide Survey of Cooperative Breeding and Related Behavior*, returns to print a classic work of ornithological research. Renowned naturalist and ornithologist Alexander Skutch provides vivid, detailed accounts of a remarkable aspect of bird behavior – the aid that one bird gives another who is neither its mate nor its dependent young and who may even belong to a different species. First discovered by the author more than half a century ago, cooperative breeding has become increasingly studied by professional ornithologists.

In his excellent foreword to the book (excerpted on the back), noted behaviorist Stephen T. Emlen – whose father John T. Emlen, Jr., knew and worked with Skutch and was himself a pioneering ornithologist at the University of Wisconsin – credits Skutch's passionate observations of birds with promoting scientific interest in avian behavior. Emlen describes the advances made in the field during the past ten years and places Skutch's work in the context of contemporary ornithological research.

In graceful, clear prose, Skutch makes accessible to amateur bird-watchers examples of cooperation in species as far-flung as the little rifleman of New Zealand, the Laysan albatross in the mid Pacific, and the neotropical birds of Skutch's own Valley of El General in Costa Rica.

Skutch describes the cooperative behavior of more than fifty families of birds. Each family is introduced by a brief sketch of its distribution and outstanding features, followed by intimate, non-technical accounts of the helpful behaviors that have been most carefully studied. Skutch considers the significance of helpful birds and discusses the theoretical aspects of cooperative breeding, its evolution, kin selection, altruism, and demography.

Alexander Skutch has lived and studied in Costa Rica for more than sixty years. He has published many books on birds and their behavior, including *Life Histories of Central American Birds* and *Birds of Tropical America*. He is also the author of *A Naturalist amid Tropical Splendor* (Iowa, 1987).

*Helpers at Birds' Nests: A Worldwide Survey of Cooperative Breeding and Related Behavior, an Expanded Edition* (328 pages, 62 drawings, \$24.95 paperback, ISBN 0-87745-674-7) is available at bookstores or can be ordered from the University of Iowa Press by calling 800/621-2736.

### **NEW BOOKS AVAILABLE AT THE IOWA CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**Gatherings of Angels: Migrating Birds and Their Ecology.** Kenneth P. Able, editor. A collection of ten essays about bird migration, with photographs, maps, and charts.

**The American Robin.** Roland H. Wauer. A natural history of the American Robin.

**The Life of Birds.** David Attenborough. The companion book to the 10-part television series recently aired on PBS. Includes dozens of stunning color photographs.

**Birds of Lake, Pond and Marsh: Water and Wetland Birds of Eastern North America.** John Eastman, with illustrations by Amelia Hansen. Life histories of 41 common water and wetland birds.

## Book Reviews

**Chasing Monarchs: Migrating with the Butterflies of Passage.** Robert Michael Pyle. 1999. Houghton Mifflin. 307 pages including appendix, bibliography, and index. \$24.00, hardcover. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

Having met Robert Pyle (a.k.a. Butterfly Bob) at a presentation in Cedar Rapids several years ago, I started reading his latest work with great anticipation. He has many previous natural history books to his credit, including *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies* and the excellent *Handbook for Butterfly Watchers*.

This is the story of the author's journey as he sets out one fall to follow the migrating butterflies south from their northernmost breeding grounds in British Columbia, Canada. He migrates with them down the Columbia, Snake, Bear, and Colorado Rivers, across the Bonneville Salt Flats, through Hell's Canyon and the Grand Canyon, and to the Mexican border. His objective is to challenge the long-held belief that all Monarchs breeding west of the continental divide migrate to California, while those east of the divide migrate to Mexico.

I was expecting the book to focus primarily on the ecology and migration of the Monarch butterfly. However, I should have paid more attention to the dusk jacket, which describes it as "a lively and compelling travel book about the American West, filled with unforgettable places and characters, both animal and human." Once I adjusted my expectations and became accustomed to the direction of the book, as well as the author's informal writing style, I thoroughly enjoyed the trip. The book is full of interesting observations about the natural world and about life in general, and as expected there is plenty of information about Monarchs thrown into the mix.

– Chris Edwards

**Birds at Your Feeder: A Guide to Feeding Habits, Behavior, Distribution and Abundance.** Erica Dunn and Diane Tessaglia-Hymes. WW Norton. 1999. 418 pages with index, references, maps and illustrations. Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

This field guide-sized book presents some of the data from Project Feeder Watch, with an emphasis on species distribution. Every species section has a two-page discussion of habits and behavior, followed by two pages of data. Two maps, one of distribution of occurrence (percent of feeders with the bird) and one of abundance (how many per feeder) face a page of charts showing changes in abundance and occurrence over the year and the percent of feeders with various numbers of birds. The data is presented in awfully large cuts – the occurrence maps are demarcated as 0, <30, 30-60, 61-90 or >90%. The "<30%" category covers a great deal of ground. Nothing seems to be said about changes in distribution, but I guess the book was written before sufficient data had been accumulated to speak to changes over time. Still this book is not without value. As a guide to what you might see at your feeder it would be nice for a

new birder. The text sections on birds are filled with odd little facts, of the kind that I love to read. American Goldfinches get through cold winter nights, not by storing fat, as do juncos, but rather by storing seeds in their crops. Evening Grosbeaks are apparently real food hogs – one was observed eating 96 sunflower seeds in less than five minutes. American Tree Sparrows are estimated to remove 875 tons of grass and weed seeds from the state of Iowa. Seed eaters like minerals and will like it if you put out a mineral supplement. The authors suggest mixing salt and fireplace ash in water (no exact recipe given) and pouring it over rotten wood and allowing crystals to form. I might have to try this. I was surprised to learn that peanuts were not high on the list of foods preferred by Red-bellied Woodpeckers. The red-bellies in my yard apparently did not read this book.

– Rick Hollis

**Red-tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park.** Marie Winn. 1998. 305 pages including index, map, and appendices (bird list with occurrence dates, butterfly list, hawk migration, edible plants, bibliography). Available at the Iowa City Public Library.

This is an absolutely delightful book. It is as much about birdwatchers as it is about Red-tails, as it follows the Central Park regulars for several years as they discover and follow a pair of Red-tailed Hawks nesting on an apartment building that adjoins Central Park in New York City. One of the factoids gleaned from this book is that both Gray Gulls and Marbled Murrelets may fly 50+ miles from their nests to their food sources to provide food for themselves and their young. Gray Gulls nest in the Atacama Desert in Chile, but one was seen in Central Park after the snow-induced collapse of an aviary at the Bronx Zoo. Marbled Murrelets nest in the Pacific Northwest.

– Rick Hollis

## Rick's Ramblings

### Rick Hollis

I walked into Hickory Hill Park a few weeks back and saw the present amount of damage. It is not great. The city council is discussing dedicating another five or ten acres to future cemetery use while turning the rest over to the park. Unfortunately, the future cemetery use would be the good woodland on top of the high, flat peninsula of woods that runs between the two triangles. It would effectively cut the park's woods in half. Pro-cemetery forces do not like even that compromise. We still have yet to hear if the wide bike / handicapped paths will be built down the middle of the park.

It finally happened again, after years of turning over bird carcasses and looking for bands. While birding in California this fall (with Jan Akre, a former neighbor and ICBC member), I found another banded bird. I have now found three. I was a bit disappointed to find for the second time that I had recovered a racing pigeon's band.

Down near Big Sur I finally saw a California Condor, albeit a wing-tagged and radio-marked released bird. The birds near Big Sur are pretty wild and the Big Sur rehab people are proud of their birds. Near Ventura, the condors are so used to people that they have had many bird / people problems (Condors even broke into a house). Supposedly the Grand Canyon birds are also less wild than they would like. The Big Sur birds have found some food on their own (marine mammals). The food that is "planted" for them is dropped at night, forcing them to find it. Even a captive-raised bird, lolling around a stillborn calf carcass, was a treat. I may never see a free-living, wild-born bird. There is hope that some of the released birds will be coming into breeding age over the next couple of years. With the death of one of the original captive

condors there are now 95 condors in captivity. The bird that died had produced 15 young since being captured in 1986. The total production for 1998 was 20. As of last spring, there were 52 free-flying condors.

I collect quotes, and recently stumbled across this one that I thought I would share with all: "True environmental education creates widely shared values, an ethic if you will, that would enable us to move beyond regulation as the main means to our goals." This quote appeared in an article by Tom Horton in the Baltimore Sun on June 25, 1999.

"Scientists are treacherous allies on committees, for they are apt to change their minds in response to arguments." – C. M. Bowra, 1898-1971.

IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION  
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## Impressions of Owls in Recent Poetry John McLure

*soon*

*an owl inaugurates the night.*

– F. D. Reeve, "Harbor Island" <sup>1</sup>

*an owl with a voice deeper than time  
announced the lateness of the hour.*

– David Bottoms, "A Tent Beside a River" <sup>2</sup>

*The owl prosecutes in darkness.*

– Selwyn S. Schwartz, "Letters to My Unborn Son" <sup>3</sup>

*I remember...*

*watching owls hunch up and feed  
each other proving once again  
love makes even the wisest  
ridiculous.*

–Dean Young, "Post-Ovidean" <sup>4</sup>

*The owl...*

*Trawled scimitar hooks keen as tawny sight:  
The night hunter, eyes fierce as spears of noon,  
Yanked the mole's squeal to a shroud in flight*

–William F. Dougherty, "By Owl Light" <sup>5</sup>

*The singular screech-owl's bright  
Invisible lyric seeds the mind.*

–Allen Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead" <sup>6</sup>

*he alights:*

*a phosphorescent warrior  
riding shoreward  
gripping a dark prow*

–I. P. Taylor, "White Owl" <sup>7</sup>

*A great horned owl sweeps between trees  
as if to cropdust the rising  
sap with white for the flowers.*

–Gretel Ehrlich, "The Orchard" <sup>8</sup>

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> *The Sewanee Review*, v. CI, n. 2, Spring, 1993, 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Poetry*, v. CXLV, n. 1, Oct. 1984, 19.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sewanee Review*, v. LV, n. 2, Apr-June, 1947, 263.

<sup>4</sup> *Ind. Rev.*, v. 17, n. 2, fall, 1994, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Plains Poetry Journal*, n. 1, 1982, 33.

<sup>6</sup> *The Sewanee Review*, v. LX, n. 3, July-Sept., 1952, 516.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sewanee Review*, v. LXXXVI, n. 4, Fall, 1978, 522.

<sup>8</sup> *Graining the Mare: the Poetry of Ranch Women*, ed. Teresa Jordan. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998, 53.

**Sandhill Crane Trip  
Karen Disbrow**

The following is taken from several sites on the Internet about Sandhill Cranes (including [www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/cranes.html](http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/cranes.html)). They are spectacular birds that vary in height from 34 to 48 inches. The range is due to the differences between the two subspecies: the Lesser Sandhill Crane is the smaller with a wingspan of 6 feet, and the Greater Sandhill Crane has a wingspan of 7 feet. Sandhill Cranes are gray-feathered with occasional rust-colored streaks. Adults have a red forehead while yearlings have a dark brown forehead. The birds begin to arrive in Nebraska in early to mid-February, peaking in mid- to late March. After the first of April the cranes move out steadily until mid-April, heading for their nesting grounds in Alaska.

A typical day begins at dawn on the Platte River where the birds roost during the night. From there they move out making brief stops at the wet meadows adjacent to the river before arriving in the neighboring fields to feed on corn. Corn makes up 80% of their diets during this time. After a late afternoon feeding they reverse this process returning to the river sandbars for the night.

Changing river conditions on the Platte have placed the cranes in a ninety mile stretch from Lexington to Grand Island known as the Big Bend. Getting a good view can be difficult as much of the land is privately owned. Parking on bridges is not safe or legal, and the shoulders along the roads are narrow and soft. The best viewing is from a blind. Cranes do not allow observers to get very close – they keep moving away. Cost for viewing from a blind ranges from free at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Kearney to \$15 at the National Audubon Society's Rowe Sanctuary in Gibbon or Crane Meadow Nature Center in Wood River. Viewing times in the blinds are 5:00 a.m. to 8:00

a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Birders should dress warmly, as it is always colder in a blind than outside. It is better to remove a layer than to wish you had your long underwear later. Remember the wool socks and your warmest boots, and don't forget warm drinks and snacks. All the blinds have chemical toilet facilities outside. Reservations are required for all of these blinds. So are you excited? Make plans to join us for one of the best sights a birder can see – Sandhill Cranes at dawn and sunset in the thousands.

## Bird Notes

**RUFFED GROUSE RELEASED IN AMANA WOODS.** This past fall 30 to 35 Ruffed Grouse from Winneshiek County were released in a 500-acre block of the Amana Woods. These birds have special habitat needs – new-growth timber 10 to 30 years old with high stem densities. At grouse level this equates to dense stands of pencil-thick trees fighting for sunlight with bushes and other understory herbaceous vegetation. This provides protection from hawks and owls while the grouse feed on seeds and insects. Tom Smith, Wildlife Technician for the DNR's Otter Creek Unit, released the grouse with Amana Society Forester Larry Gnewikow in the Amana Woods. The area has a large expanse of wooded habitat where the cutting of mature trees and regrowth will come close to the natural regeneration seen before Iowa was settled. By March or April there are hopes of hearing the sounds of drumming as the males perform their courtship displays on moss-covered logs. The logs give the drumming more of an echo, like the "thump, thump of an old John Deere tractor starting," according to Smith. Source: Sept. 30, 1999 Iowa City Press-Citizen article by Joe Wilkinson.

– Karen Disbrow

**ORIGINS OF BIRD NAMES.** Did you ever wonder who Bewick was that he should have the Bewick's Wren, *Thryomanes bewickii*, named in his honor? Thomas Bewick (1753 – 1828) was the author of *A History of British Birds* as well as a wood engraver who provided illustrations for *Aesop's Fables*. He was a friend of Audubon who named the bird in his memory.

How about Bell's Vireo? *Vireo bellii* was named by Audubon for John Graham Bell (1812 – 1889), a New York taxidermist who had accompanied Audubon on a journey up the Missouri River in 1843. Bell also had the Sage Sparrow, *Amphispiza belli*, named in his honor by John Cassin (1813 – 1869).

Who was Anna of the hummingbird family? *Calypte anna* was named for Anna, Duchess of Rivoli and wife of Prince Victor Massena, an amateur French ornithologist, by French naturalist Rene Primevere Lesson (1794 – 1849).

This information is from the interesting book *Pioneer Naturalists*, available at the Iowa City Public Library.

– Bud Gode

### HUNTING SEASONS

Ring-necked Pheasant Oct. 30 – Jan. 10  
 Bobwhite Oct 30. – Jan. 31  
 Turkey (bow) Dec. 20 – Jan. 10  
 Deer (bow) Dec. 20 – Jan. 10  
 Deer (muzzleloader) Dec. 20 – Jan. 10  
 Deer (shotgun) Dec. 4 – 8 & Dec. 11 – 19  
 Deer (late season) Jan. 11 – Jan. 17

To report a rare bird or hear about  
 the latest sightings, call the

**Iowa Birdline**  
**(319) 338-9881**

## 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.

**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. **To lead a field trip**, contact field trip coordinator Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

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