

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch

The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter
Volume 25 Number 1 April 2005

Schedule

Field trips depart from the Dodge Street Hy-Vee in Iowa City unless otherwise noted. Meet in the southwest corner of the parking lot. Please contact the leader in advance if you plan to meet the group at the trip destination. Many of our trips are accessible to people with disabilities; for more information please contact the trip leader. Meetings are held at the Grant Wood AEA Southern Facility, 200 Holiday Road in Coralville, generally at 7 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month.

April 5, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. Bird Watching Classes begin at Kent Park and continue each Tuesday evening through April. Classes are free for club members. See page 6 for more information.

April 9, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Cone Marsh for waterfowl and other early spring migrants. Meet at the Iowa City Fin & Feather parking lot. Leader: Rick Hollis, 665-3141.

April 10, Sunday, 3:00 p.m. Spring Bird Count/Birdathon Organizational Meeting at Bernie Knight's home, 425 Lee St. in Iowa City. For details contact Chris Caster at 339-8343 or cjcaster@earthlink.net.

April 16, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area for pelicans, shorebirds, waterfowl and other water birds. Meet at Hills Bank & Trust on Hwy. 965 in North Liberty. Leader: Diana Pesek, 363-3522.

April 21, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting. Dr. Jim Dinsmore, retired ISU ornithologist, will present on **New Zealand—A Birder's View**.

April 23, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Macbride Nature-Recreation Area and Raptor Center. Meet at Hills Bank & Trust on Hwy. 965 in North Liberty. Leader: Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

April 24, Sunday, 6:30 a.m. Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge in Louisa County. We will search for the elusive Fish Crow, a species which has been expanding its range up the Mississippi River. Leader: Chris Caster, 339-8343.

April 30, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Otter Creek Marsh in Tama County for Sandhill Cranes, rails, bitterns, and other marsh birds. Meet at Hy-Vee at 7:00 or Perkins in Cedar Rapids at 7:30. Leader: Diana Pesek, 363-3522.

May 1, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Kent Park. Meet at the Conservation Education Center. This will be followed by a trip to Wilson's Orchard. Leader: Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

May 7, Saturday. Spring Bird Count and Birdathon. See page 4 for more information.

May 9-11 and May 16-19, 6:00 a.m. Warbler Walks in Hickory Hill Park. Meet at the north shelter parking lot, off N. Dodge St. at the end of Conklin Ln. Be prepared for wet walking. Leader: James Huntington, 338-1837.

May 19, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting. Kelly McKay of the USFWS will give two short presentations: one on his bird surveys of the Port Louisa NWR in SE Iowa and the other on the breeding bird surveys of the Long Island complex, pool 21 on the Mississippi River.

May 21, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Redbird Farm and Frytown Conservation Area. Important Bird Area (IBA) Survey. Leader: Mike Dooley, 354-3011.

May 22, Sunday, 6:00 a.m. Dudgeon Lake in Benton County for warblers and other late spring

migrants. IBA Survey. Leader: Jim Fuller, 338-3561.

May 28, Sunday, 6:30 a.m. Coralville Reservoir Bird Survey. See page 5 for more about this series of summer field trips. Leader: Chris Caster, 339-8343.

May 29, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Hanging Rock Woods. IBA Survey. Leader: Ken Lowder, 351-1207.

May 30, Monday, 6:30 a.m. Brinton Timber in Washington County. IBA Survey. Target birds include Kentucky Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, and Acadian Flycatcher. Leader: Chris Edwards, 626-6362.

June 4, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Coralville Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Chris Edwards, 626-6362.

June 5, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Maquoketa River Canoe Trip. Meet at Hy-Vee at 7 a.m. or at Applebee's Canoe Rental in Monticello at 9 a.m. Canoe reservations are available by calling Applebee's at (319) 465-3697. Leader: Barb Beaumont, 626-6227.

June 11, Saturday, 6:30 a.m. Coralville Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Chris Edwards, 626-6362.

June 12, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Matsell Bridge Recreation Area in Linn Co. IBA Survey. Meet at Hy-Vee at 7:00 or Perkins in Cedar Rapids at 7:30. Leader: Diana Pesek, 363-3522.

June 18, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Indiagrass Hills in Iowa County. IBA Survey. Target birds include Henslow's Sparrow, Sedge Wren, Bobolink and other grassland birds. Leader: Mike Dooley, 354-3011.

June 19, Sunday, 6:30 a.m. Coralville Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Diana Pesek, 363-3522.

June 25, Saturday, 6:00 a.m. Wildcat Den State Park in Muscatine Co. IBA Survey. Target birds include Pileated Woodpecker, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Acadian Flycatcher. Leader: Chris Caster, 339-8343.

June 26, Sunday, 6:30 a.m. Coralville Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Bob Dick, 337-4945.

July 2, Saturday, 6:00 a.m. Toolesboro/Lake Odessa area in Louisa County. IBA Survey. Target birds include Prothonotary Warbler, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Pileated Woodpecker. Leader: Chris Caster, 339-8343.

July 3, Sunday, 6:30 a.m. Coralville Reservoir Bird Survey. Leader: Bob Dick, 337-4945.

July 16, Saturday. Annual Butterfly Count sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association. We will visit Kent Park, Hawkeye Wildlife Area, and Lake Macbride. Contact Chris Edwards at 626-6362 for details.

July 22, Friday, 8:15 p.m. Squaw Creek Park in Linn Co. Jim Durbin will setup night-lighting equipment to attract and identify moths. Bring a lawn chair. Meet at 8:15 at Hy-Vee or 9:30 at Squaw Creek. Leader: Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

August 6, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Cedar County. Visit a private woodland/wetland/prairie property near West Branch. Leader: Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

August 18, Thursday, 6:00 p.m. Annual Bird Club Picnic at Hickory Hill Park. Located at the north shelter at the end of Conklin Lane off N. Dodge Street. Bring something to grill, a dish to share, table service and drinks. For more information call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

August 21, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area or other local areas for shorebirds. Be prepared for wet or muddy walking. Leader: James Huntington, 338-1837.

Other Dates of Note

April 29 – May 1, Friday – Sunday. Iowa Audubon’s Wild About Birds Weekend near Ledges State Park. See www.IowaAudubon.org for more information.

May 13 – 15, Friday – Sunday. Iowa Ornithologists’ Union Spring Meeting near Indianola. See www.iowabirds.org for more information.

April 21st Vote for ICBC Dues Increase Chris Caster, President

Currently the Iowa City Bird Club takes in 105 paid \$10 memberships giving us an annual budget of slightly over \$1,000 dollars. Annual expenditures vary, but we spend nearly \$750 dollars a year on the newsletter for copying and postage. Since Johnson County got out of the server business, our website now costs us \$192 annually for server space. We can also expect to incur at least \$100 in copying for promotional materials like brochures and event schedules and for materials used on the CBC and Spring Count. If you do the math we are already over-budget.

We have made our newsletter available online and this has saved us some money, but I don’t think any other reductions are possible. The newsletter is the heart and soul of the club and contributions to it have been great. Keeping it to a manageable size has been challenging and some space saving changes may need to be made, but I foresee those changes as preventing cost-increases rather than creating cost-savings.

The website is a wonderful resource for members and non-members alike and thanks to Jim Scheib’s generosity it is has been “cheaper-than-dirt” to us. I don’t foresee it ever being any cheaper. Truthfully the club has prospered because of the willingness of members to pay for many of the little expenses out of their own pockets. I do not doubt that our members will continue to be gracious of their time and resources, but our club is growing and our activities are expanding – it is only right that the costs be shared more equally by the membership.

Additionally, I have been in touch with some birding groups around the state and most pay their presenters mileage or provide a stipend --\$60 to \$80 dollars is not uncommon. Those presenters that require a fee often get more. Those that represent a non-profit group or governmental agency may not desire anything personally, but would appreciate a donation to their program. The Iowa City Bird Club has never provided for this. Occasionally we have taken visiting presenters to dinner or put them up overnight at one of our homes, but again this comes out of the pocket of a few club members. We currently rely heavily on local talent to put together interesting presentations at no cost, but typically 3-4 times a year we have invited someone who drives a significant distance. We have had a number of presenters recently who have driven at least 100 miles one-way to present. At 40 cents a mile this would require at least an \$80 dollar reimbursement. To pay this amount would require an additional \$240 to \$320 annually. I do think this is something we should budget for. If we don’t do this much, we risk developing a reputation of being unappreciative.

Currently the club is involved in some fund raising activities. The educational programs that our club gave last year brought in around \$200 after expenses. We also cleared a couple of hundred from the IOU meeting we hosted last fall. The photo CDs that Jim Scheib has produced for the IOU have brought in something. However these funding sources are unreliable and amount to a lot of extra work for a small cadre of willing club members. The ICBC already rides a few willing horses pretty hard and we need to provide for increasing expenses in a manner that shares the load.

I am proposing that the membership adopt an annual dues increase from \$10 to \$15 dollars per household. However I am also proposing that we adopt a student membership that will remain at \$10. This change would go into effect for the 2006 calendar year.

This proposal has evolved from numerous discussions with members and seems reasonable. I believe that the increase will cover our projected annual expenditures with a small cushion and prevent the need for any further dues increases in the near term. And I don't feel that it will be a significant disincentive to new membership.

We will take a vote of the membership in attendance at the April 21st club meeting for approval of the increase—the majority rules. I hope that most of you will attend.

Thank you.

News

Johnson County Spring Count and Birdathon

This year we are going to do something different with our annual Spring Count event on Saturday, May 7th — we are going to conduct a Birdathon to benefit the Iowa Audubon Important Bird Areas Program. Like before, club members will perform a count of birds found within Johnson County during the 24-hour period. But this year we will solicit pledges from individuals or businesses for each species found.

Birdathons have been held annually by a number of the Audubon Clubs around the state and have been enormously successful events, raising thousands of dollars for bird conservation. We hope to make this an annual event of the ICBC and a means for us to contribute financially to Iowa bird conservation efforts.

We will be having an organizational meeting on Sunday, April 10th at 3 p.m. at Bernie Knight's home. Count sheets, pledge sheets, and information on the IBA Program and the ICBC will be provided. This is an event in which truly all of us can participate—either by gathering pledges or finding birds, it is all good. Please join in and help make this event successful.

For more on the Iowa Important Bird Areas Program read the March 24th meeting write-up and go online at www.iowaaudubon.org

Macbride Raptor Project T-Shirt Sale

Due to the strength of sales at the March meeting we will again make MRP T-shirts available at the April 21st meeting. There are two designs—one featuring hawks, eagles and osprey and another featuring owls. Both are very nicely done and come in a wide variety of sizes. Youth sizes 6/8 and 10/12 are also available. All shirts are \$15. We ask that you pay with a check made out to the Macbride Raptor Project. Jodeane Cancilla and the rest of the MRP staff and volunteers thank you.

Coralville Reservoir Bird Surveys

Kate Soska with the Army Corps of Engineers at the Coralville Reservoir has requested that the Iowa City Bird Club assist in surveying the undeveloped plots around the reservoir for bird life. Kate is concerned with making intelligent decisions regarding the management of these habitats and realizes that any data available on the birds is now over a dozen years old. A number of members of the ICBC participated in an extensive survey effort of lands surrounding the Iowa River and Coralville Reservoir and the results were published in the Fall 1994 issue of Iowa Bird Life, vol. 64, no. 4.—this will not be a duplication of that effort.

We have been supplied with area photos of all 17 survey plots. They range in size from 54 to 240 acres. Most border the Iowa River and contain a wide variety of habitats. We have birded only a few of these locations as a group so this is an exciting opportunity for club members. By providing aerial photos and personally participating, Kate has made some potentially bird-rich areas accessible.

The Coralville Reservoir lands are part of a larger IBA that includes Lake Macbride and the Hawkeye Wildlife Area, so our efforts will benefit the IBA Program as well. Because the ICBC is committed to surveying IBA sites elsewhere, we only had room on our busy schedule for six Coralville Reservoir Surveys—about one each weekend through the breeding season.

Chris Edwards will be coordinating this effort and trip leaders will get their assignments and report back to him. A minimum of six plots will be visited weather permitting. Additional plots may be visited at the discretion of trip leaders. Multiple visits are desirable for thoroughness and it is hoped that individual club members will return to these sites on other days and communicate their findings to Chris.

Email Addresses Requested

Once again we are requesting that all those club members who have not supplied us with their current email address to please do so. This is a very important avenue of communication between club officers and the membership. Occasionally the schedule has to be changed on short notice and currently we can only reach about half of the membership. The last time a club email was sent out nearly ten of those messages were returned as undeliverable. If you have not received any ICBC e-messages this year, please send an e-mail to cjcaster@earthlink.net. Thank you!

Crex Meadows Trip

Last year Jim Scheib led a small group of area birders to Crex Meadows near Granstburg, Wisconsin to see the mating display of Sharp-tailed Grouse along with other northern nesting species such as Trumpeter Swan, Common Loon, Bald Eagles, and a variety of egrets, ducks and grebes. On the way home they visited Necedah NWR to view Whooping Cranes and then toured the National Crane Foundation in Baraboo. Jim is considering leading another trip this year the weekend of April 30-May 1. This could be either a 2- or 3-day trip. Please contact Jim as soon as possible if you are interested in participating in this trip. You can contact Jim at 337-5206 or jim@tenlongview.net.

Bird Watching Classes Tuesdays in April at Kent Park

The Iowa City Bird Club and the Johnson County Conservation Department are offering a 4-week Introduction to Birding Course at the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park. There will be 4 sessions lasting 1-1.5 hours starting at 7 p.m. Tuesday evenings with a field trip on the following Saturday or Sunday morning at 8 a.m.

Evening Sessions are \$5.00 for adults. Children accompanied by adults or Iowa City Bird Club members are FREE.

Field Trips are FREE, although children must be accompanied by adults.

Participants can attend all 4 sessions or pick 1 or more to attend. Classes can hold 30 with hand-outs and refreshments. Registration is requested; please call Brad Freidhof at (319) 645-2315 by noon of the Tuesday session.

Come to class early and bird the loop path by the education center at Kent Park.

Telescopes are helpful for viewing shorebirds and waterfowl; if you have one bring it; the ICBC will have several telescopes on the field trips requiring one.

Bring binoculars to all field trips, if you do not have a pair let us know ahead of time and loaners can be arranged.

Tuesday, April 5, 7 p.m. - BACKYARD AND FEEDER BIRDS. This session will cover the common birds found in our area's backyards during the year, and what types of feeders and food to use to attract specific birds.

Saturday, April 9, 8 a.m. Field Trip to CONE MARSH. Meet at the Fin and Feather Parking Lot. Cone Marsh is approximately 28 miles from Iowa City in Louisa County, a few miles to the SE of Lone Tree. We expect to see ducks migrating north and woodland birds. Bring a telescope and prepare to walk in wet

areas.

Tuesday, April 12, 7 p.m. - **BASICS OF BIRDING**. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment that every birdwatcher needs, or might someday need.

Saturday, April 16, 8 a.m. Field Trip to **HAWKEYE WILDLIFE AREA (HWA)**. Meet at the Hills Bank Parking Lot, Hwy. 965 in North Liberty. We expect to see ducks, white pelicans, other waterfowl, early migrating shorebirds and possibly warblers. Bring a telescope (if you have one) and prepare to walk in wet areas. Telescopes will be available to the group from club members.

Tuesday, April 19, 7 p.m. - **WHERE TO BIRD IN JOHNSON COUNTY**. Well known, lesser known and secret places to watch birds and study nature in and around Johnson County.

Saturday, April 23, 8 a.m. Field Trip to **MACBRIDE NATURE-RECREATION AREA**. Meet at the Hills Bank Parking Lot, Hwy. 965 in North Liberty. Visit the Raptor Center, observe birds at feeders from the bird blind and walk the nearby trails. See early migrant songbirds, common backyard feeder birds, raptors and possibly a Pileated Woodpecker.

Tuesday, April 26, 7 p.m. - **WARBLER AND SHOREBIRD IDENTIFICATION**. Warblers and shorebirds are coming! Warblers are among our most colorful birds, while shorebirds are drab. Compare and contrast similar warblers. Hints for shorebird identification.

Sunday, May 1, 8 a.m. Field Trip to **KENT PARK**. Meet at the Conservation Education Center. We will explore the trails in Kent Park looking for warblers, migrating songbirds, woodland birds, and waterfowl.
<http://www.icbirds.org> <http://www.johnson-county.com/conservation/index.shtml>

The Game – Five Birders’ Friendly Competition to See the Most Species in Iowa in 2004 Diana Pesek

“What’s that on the roof of that building?!” said James Huntington, pointing excitedly to a warehouse by the side of I-80 near Davenport. “That was a Cattle Egret!” he exclaimed. Quickly, I turned the truck around at the first available spot (read – unauthorized turn-around) and we headed back in the direction of the warehouse. After asking permission to enter the property, we drove to the back of the lot, set up a scope and verified that indeed, this was our first Cattle Egret of the year. As it was October 31st, we had started to worry that we might miss this bird for our “year list”.

We quickly got on the phone to two of our counterparts in our birding game, Chris Edwards and Chris Caster. We had to leave a message for Chris E. but we reached Chris C. The fifth participant in our little competition, Bob Dick, we knew to be out of town visiting family that day. “Chris, how quickly can you get to Davenport? We have a Cattle Egret here,” said James.

“I can be there within an hour,” replied Chris hastily.

We stayed with the Cattle Egret and Chris Caster was there within 45 minutes. After viewing the bird with a big smile on his face, Chris said, “Well, I had better head home now.”

“Chris, can’t you stay and bird with us a while? We plan to check Fairmont Cemetery for crossbills, then go by the river just in case anything interesting is around.”

“Well,” said Chris somewhat sheepishly, “I was at church when you called, and I was watching the kids while Terry is teaching Sunday school. So someone else has the kids now. I really should get back. Besides, it’s Halloween, the kids have a party and it’s also Terry’s birthday today. But maybe I can stay just a little longer...”

Just another day in the life of five Iowa City Bird Club members as we all competed to see who could find the most species of birds in Iowa in 2004. “The Game,” as we came to call it, resulted in many missed family outings, chores not done, other hobbies not pursued. Bob Dick gave up fishing opportunities to chase birds around. Chris Edwards promised to go shopping in Des Moines with his wife if she would accompany him to Spirit Lake to see the Black-headed Gull so they could enjoy a weekend out of town together. My poor horses were ridden very seldom this year, and the one weekend I put off birding to take a long weekend to western Iowa to spend time with my husband and do some hiking in the Loess Hills, I

missed the Groove-billed Ani in Ottumwa and then cursed my timing!

The game also resulted in some fun weekend trips. Bob and Dara Dick, James and I spent a lovely October weekend at Hitchcock Nature Center, watching hawks and looking for fall migrants. Chris Caster made a number of solo trips around the state, and was the only one of us to come across the elusive Gray Partridge. Chris Edwards also made a number of trips, especially to southeast Iowa while visiting family in Keokuk.

Some birds were near misses, but were then found at the last possible minute and those birds really made us happy when we saw them. When Mike Dooley and I were out birding and came across three Red Knots at Hawkeye Wildlife Area, we called the game participants. Chris Edwards wasn't home, but emailed later to tell his story. When he arrived home from dinner and a movie with his family that evening, he got our message, hustled out to HWA, took his bike along to get to the end of Sand Point as quickly as possible, and was able to relocate the Red Knots at twilight. Whew!! Another notch, and a lovely bird to see, game or no game!

Of course, some birds were missed, and those birds we'd rather not think about! I'll just say, Snowy Plover (James) and Swallow-tailed Kite (Bob). Bob and James were both out of state when these exciting birds came through.

It will come as no surprise to any of you, I'm sure, that James was the person who started all of this madness. James suggested to Bob that they do an Iowa big year. Shortly thereafter the rest of us joined the game. James has said that he originally started the game to get Bob to cross over to the "dark side" as he calls it. Bob did not; however, there was discussion that perhaps one or two of the other game members needed serious intervention to save them. Dara offered (maybe threatened) to hold the interventions!

James, of course, the epitome of birders who have gone over to the "dark side," just smiled through it all and urged us on. I remember particularly one email from James that said only "White-faced Ibis?" Immediately, my little gray cells went into action. Jay Gilliam that day had posted a White-faced Ibis from Banner Wetlands near Indianola. Sure, I was supposed to be at work by 10 a.m. the next day, and the ibis was south of Des Moines. Could I make it there and back by 10:00? Well, I'll just go into work at noon instead. Oh yeah, no problem. Quickly I responded, "Sure, pick you up at 6:00." And we were off on another bird chase.

Although the game was technically a competition, it had to be the most friendly competition I've ever been involved with. When any of us found a good bird, we'd call each other to make sure we all got a chance to see the bird. And of course we'd post to the IA-BIRD list-serve as soon as possible as well. The game was as much about finding and enjoying the birds as it was about winning. We all ended up with more birds seen in Iowa this year than any of us had ever managed before.

But there was the question of how to count the birds. One evening Bob saw posted on IA-BIRD an ibis at Greencastle Avenue. He knew that Chris Caster was at Sand Point and called him. He also called Chris Edwards. Then Bob and Dara decided at the last minute to head out and see the bird. They arrived as Chris and Chris were standing out in the muck looking at the ibis. Bob claims good-naturedly that when the Chrises waved, they scared the bird off before Dara and he could see it! That is when Bob tried to establish a rule that the ibis, because it could not be identified as a white-faced or glossy, would only count half a point. Bob also tried using the "half-point rule" on us when we identified birds on the Mississippi River, claiming we couldn't know for sure if they were in Iowa or Illinois!

For the year, besides my game total, I picked up 37 life birds right here in Iowa chasing birds. What fun! Some of my many highlights were the King Rail at Hawkeye Wildlife Area, the Swallow-tailed Kite in Iowa City, the Snowy Plover at Hawkeye Wildlife Area, the Townsend's Solitaire in Clay County, the Bohemian Waxwings near Spirit Lake, the White-faced Ibis at Banner Wetlands and the Golden-crowned Sparrow at Lake Meyer Nature Center.

The other game participants are of course much more experienced birders than I am and so did not have as many life bird opportunities this year as I did, but we all had fun competing and adding Iowa birds to our

lists. I have to admit that by fall, with the numbers adding up and the end of the year in sight, my highly competitive nature kicked into full swing and I was anxious to add as many birds as I could!

By year's end, our numbers stood like this: James Huntington–286; Chris Caster–282; Chris Edwards–276; Bob Dick–273; Diana Pesek–273. All five of us combined saw 302 species. This combined total is still far short of the all-time Iowa big years by some of Iowa's top listers, which are in excess of 315.

What a blast the game was! But in 2005, we have agreed to tone it down a little. After all, we want to see our families once in a while!

2004 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count Chris Edwards and Bob Dick

The 54th annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 19. The total of 59 species was below the count's ten-year average of 64 species and was the lowest total since 2000. The day was very cold with temperatures ranging from 3 to 15 F. A brisk north wind and partly cloudy skies in the morning gave way to calm and sunny conditions in the afternoon. The Coralville Reservoir and Lake Macbride were mostly frozen, while the Iowa River and smaller streams were mostly open. There was no snow cover. The cold weather seemed to hamper both the birders and the birds, as many common species were reported in below-average numbers. The best birds sighted this year were Snowy Owl and Northern Mockingbird.

Geese to Raptors

Canada Goose and Mallard numbers were below average this year, but a flock of 300 Snow Geese flying over Hawkeye Wildlife Area was an all-time high count for that species. One Bufflehead, two Red-breasted Mergansers, and one Ruddy Duck were all rare finds. In contrast to last year, the numbers of Ring-necked Pheasants and Wild Turkeys were far below average. Many water birds were scarce this year, so a Great Blue Heron along Clear Creek was a surprising find. The 233 Bald Eagles reported more than doubles our previous high count, but it is possible that some of these highly visible and mobile birds were counted by more than one party. Accipiters and Red-tailed Hawks were seen in normal numbers, but no Northern Harriers or Rough-legged Hawks were found.

Gulls to Woodpeckers

Gull numbers were below average, and no unusual species were found. Following last year's record count of Mourning Doves, this year's total was the lowest in over a decade. Owls again made a poor showing, with one rare exception. Only one Barred Owl and no Long-eared, Short-eared, Saw-whet, or Screech-owls were recorded, but a Snowy Owl at Hawkeye Wildlife Area provided the first count record since 1966. Most woodpeckers were seen in average numbers, but the 33 Hairy Woodpeckers tied the high count for that species. A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was a nice find.

Jays to Sparrows

Blue Jays and American Crows were both reported at levels significantly below the ten-year average, as were Horned Larks, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and Brown Creepers. Eastern Bluebirds were present for the fourth straight year, while American Robin numbers were below average. A Hermit Thrush was a good find, and a Northern Mockingbird along Slothower Rd. in SW Iowa City was the first record since 1962. Cedar Waxwings were seen in normal numbers. Sparrow numbers were down this year: the three Song Sparrows were the lowest total in almost forty years, and American Tree Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, and White-crowned Sparrows were seen in below-average numbers. No Swamp Sparrows were found.

Blackbirds to Old World Sparrows

A large flock of Red-winged Blackbirds at Hawkeye Wildlife Area provided a ten-year high count for that species, and two Common Grackles were the only other icterids seen. Purple Finches, House Finches, and Pine Siskins were all seen in average numbers this year, but American Goldfinches were down. Eurasian Tree Sparrows have apparently established a small presence at Hawkeye Wildlife Area, where two birds were seen along James Ave. for the second straight year.

Species recorded during the count week but not on count day included Varied Thrush, Snow Bunting, and meadowlark species.

This year there were 33 field observers in 10 parties. Field observers were Hakar Akey, Ed Allgood, Behiye Befr, Brady Belcher, Mark Brown, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Mary Edwards, Jonni Ellsworth, Mike Feiss, Linda Fisher, Jim Fuller, Karole Fuller, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bill Kent, Tom Kent, Ken Lowder, Nancy Lynch, Richard Lynch, Ramona McGurk, John McLure, Mary Noble, Diana Pesek, Rosemarie Petzold, James Sandroock, Jean Sandroock, David Weiss, and Pete Wickham.

There were 21 feeder watchers at 16 locations this year: Jack and Ann Bagford, Al Carr, Jean Dunn, Carolyn Gardner, Marilou Gay, Brian and Anne Glenister, Gloria Henry, Jan Hollis, Ken and Janice Hook, Jim Murray, Edward and Anne Perkins, Rosemarie Petzold, Jim and Ann Ridenour, Jan Segreti, Karla Stout, and Ronnye Wieland.

This year's count was organized by Bob Dick. The results were compiled by Chris Edwards. A pre-count planning meeting was held at the home of Jim and Karole Fuller. On the day of the count we met for lunch at the North Liberty Community Center, at which time we had 54 species. At the end of the day, many participants gathered at the The Mill Restaurant in Iowa City for a well-deserved meal and compilation.

Nationally, this year marked the 105th consecutive Christmas Bird Count. More than 45,000 people from all 50 states, every Canadian province, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and many Pacific Islands participate in this annual bird census. Christmas Bird Count results are published annually in a special issue of American Birds. The results of all counts from 1900 to the present are also available on the Internet at www.birdsource.org, a cooperative project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Thanks to everyone who participated for making this year's count a success!

SPECIES LIST

Snow Goose	300
Canada Goose	895
Gadwall	1
Mallard	870
Bufflehead	1
Common Merganser	38
Red-breasted Merganser	2
Ruddy Duck	1
Ring-necked Pheasant	8
Wild Turkey	25
Great Blue Heron	1
Bald Eagle	233
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4
Cooper's Hawk	1
Accipiter sp.	3
Red-tailed Hawk	64
American Kestrel	13
Ring-billed Gull	255
Herring Gull	2
Rock Pigeon	203
Mourning Dove	60
Great Horned Owl	3
Snowy Owl	1
Barred Owl	1

Belted Kingfisher	3
Red-headed Woodpecker	4
Red-bellied Woodpecker	99
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
Downy Woodpecker	132
Hairy Woodpecker	33
Northern Flicker	33
Blue Jay	79
American Crow	498
Horned Lark	2
Black-capped Chickadee	234
Tufted Titmouse	56
Red-breasted Nuthatch	5
White-breasted Nuthatch	95
Brown Creeper	2
Carolina Wren	3
Eastern Bluebird	13
Hermit Thrush	1
American Robin	11
Northern Mockingbird	1
European Starling	506
Cedar Waxwing	221
American Tree Sparrow	253
Song Sparrow	3
White-throated Sparrow	25
White-crowned Sparrow	2
Dark-eyed Junco	710
Northern Cardinal	364
Red-winged Blackbird	250
Common Grackle	2
Purple Finch	17
House Finch	79
Pine Siskin	20
American Goldfinch	135
House Sparrow	959
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	2

Johnson County Birding Highlights, Winter 2005
Chris Edwards

December

In early December, three EURASIAN TREE SPARROWS were found near the Sandtown Cemetery east of Hills on the 1st. This was a new location but within their known Johnson County range along the Iowa River. Two lingering FOX SPARROWS were seen at Redbird Farm Wildlife Area on the 15th.

Highlights of the Iowa City Christmas Bird Count on the 19th were a SNOWY OWL which lingered until the next day at the Babcock Access of Hawkeye Wildlife Area, and a NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD along Slothower Rd. in SW Iowa City. Other interesting finds included GREAT BLUE HERON, SNOW GOOSE, RED-BREASTED MERGANSER, RUDDY DUCK, YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER, HERMIT THRUSH, and EURASIAN TREE SPARROW. A large flock of SNOW BUNTINGS was seen at Babcock Access on the 21st.

A female VARIED THRUSH visited the feeders of Steve Elliott and Jan McDonald on Kimball Rd. in Iowa City beginning on December 22nd and continuing into January. Steve and Jan graciously welcomed birders into their home to view this beautiful bird.

January

A SPOTTED TOWHEE was discovered at Hawkeye Wildlife Area west of Swan Lake on January 2nd, and was present at least through February 21st. It was frequently seen feeding on or around a deer carcass at the edge of a parking lot. Two HERMIT THRUSHES were seen at the same location on the 4th, and a YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER was there on the 16th.

Elsewhere on the 4th, ten LONG-EARED OWLS and another HERMIT THRUSH were found in cedars farther east on Swan Lake Rd., west of James Ave. Two more LONG-EARED OWLS were found at Lake Macbride State Park, and a NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL was found in Hickory Hill Park. On January 8th, SNOW BUNTINGS were seen along Black Diamond Rd. in SW Johnson County. On the 20th, a "RED-SHAFTED" NORTHERN FLICKER was at the Sand Point parking lot, and on the 23rd a BROWN THRASHER was spotted along James Avenue, both at Hawkeye Wildlife Area.

The Iowa River in Coralville and Iowa City was a hot spot for gulls in January. Along with the numerous HERRING GULLS were a number of unusual gull species seen near the Iowa River Power Co. dam in Coralville and the Burlington St. dam in Iowa City. An adult GLAUCOUS GULL was in Iowa City on the 8th and 9th and was last seen in Coralville on the 18th, where there was also a juvenile GLAUCOUS GULL on the 18th and 19th. A juvenile "KUMLIEN'S" ICELAND GULL made an appearance in Iowa City on the 10th, and was seen again in Coralville on the 19th. An adult LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL was in Coralville on the 17th and 18th. Both adult and juvenile THAYER'S GULLS were also seen at both locations between January 8th and 23rd.

On January 30th a NORTHERN SHRIKE was seen east of Morse in eastern Johnson County.

February

On the 5th a NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL was discovered at Hawkeye Wildlife Area in cedars west of Greencastle Ave. An "OREGON" DARK-EYED JUNCO was at the feeders at Macbride Nature-Recreation Area on the 6th.

Mid-month brought thawing temperatures and the first signs of spring. On the 21st, WESTERN MEADOWLARKS were singing along Greencastle Ave., and returning waterfowl at Hawkeye Wildlife Area included three unbanded TRUMPETER SWANS, GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE, CACKLING GEESE, and HOODED MERGANSERS. On the 26th, thirteen waterfowl species were seen at Hawkeye Wildlife Area including REDHEAD, BUFFLEHEAD, two AMERICAN BLACK DUCKS, and hundreds of GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE.

Johnson County highlights compiled primarily from the Iowa Ornithologists' Union Rare Bird Alert, which is compiled by Danny Akers.

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

October 21st, Meeting. Harry Graves, the Director of the Johnson County Conservation Department, visited to discuss with us the Board's "Five-Year Strategic Master Plan." The Executive Summary was published in June 2004 and is available to the public.

Harry began with a brief history of the Johnson County Conservation Board. The first general interest in the creation of county conservation boards occurred in the 1940s. This came from the observation that Iowa was lacking in adequate public lands for recreation. In 1955 the State of Iowa passed the County Conservation Board Law, which allowed for the levy of taxes to fund local county conservation boards. In 1989, the law was changed to require that each county have a county conservation board. The JCCB was created in 1964 and currently manages 1475 acres on 9 properties, 1082 acres contained within F. W. Kent Park alone. Funding for the JCCB comes from property taxes—approximately \$17.50 per household and 17 cents per acre of farmland, as well as REAP funds, grants, and donations. The board is comprised of five county residents who serve, without compensation, for staggered five-year terms.

Currently Johnson County is the 5th largest and 2nd fastest growing county in the state. The county population in 2000 was 111,000. This is a 15% increase over the 1990 census. And it is also not surprising to learn that its population is a good deal younger than the state average

Concerned that the county parks meet the growing needs of the local population a number of surveys were done regarding the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the county parks. Things thought important were education, camping, natural resource protection, water quality protection, trails, and natural areas. Surprisingly nearly half of those surveyed were not aware of the educational programs offered by the JCCB. The JCCB began publishing a newsletter in June 2001, but evidently there is more need to “get the word out” regarding the board’s activities.

Out of this came a set of vision, mission and action statements, as well as strategies to make it happen. There isn’t space in this newsletter to list them word for word, but in general the priorities are to improve the existing parks and enhance natural areas. When asked what it meant to enhance natural areas, Harry replied that primarily it was related to controlling erosion, restoring water quality, and controlling non-native or invasive species. Unfortunately local conservationists created some of their most pressing current problems when they planted species like honeysuckle, multi-flora rose, and autumn olive years ago. These plants have been great food and cover for birds and animals, but they have taken over many of the areas where they grow to the detriment of local species. Deer once extirpated from Iowa were reintroduced and now make it difficult to re-establish the native forest understory. Aside from the eastern red cedar – a juniper, and some white pines in extreme northeast Iowa we don’t have any native evergreens. Everything else has been introduced. The pines at Kent Park might have provided some nice cover for native hardwood saplings that would be transitioning nicely now if we had only thought to plant them.

The Board has a page on the Johnson County Government website, <http://www.johnson-county.com/conservation/index.shtml>. There are many items there, but I was unable to find a copy of the Master Plan. Maybe it will yet be made available online. Until then you can contact Harry at hgraves@co.johnson.ia.us or 645-2315.

Thanks Harry. And thanks to Jim Scheib who brought along about 15 minutes worth of photos from the birding he did on a trip to London and countries around the Baltic Sea while on a Holland America cruise this July.

Attendees: Jean and Ed Allgood, Ann and Jack Bagford, Nora Becker, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Linda Fisher, Karole and Jim Fuller, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Ramona McGurk, Diana Pesek, Ron Price, Jim Scheib, Sandra Stevens, Dick Tetrault.

– Chris Caster

November 18, Meeting. Jim and Sharon Scheib gave us a presentation of their fourth trip to south **Texas in 1998**. They visited during the first week of April in order to see the Whooping Cranes just prior to their migration to northern Canada. They flew into Corpus Christi and took a boat tour out of the nearby town of Rockport. The Warf Cat took the Scheibs and eight others down the intercoastal waterway to Aransas NWR. There they saw a number of cranes close up and got video footage of them in the salt marsh habitat that bordered the waterway. Some of the other interesting sightings in the area were Little Blue Heron, Cattle Egret, Eared Grebe, alligator and javelina, which is a kind of wild pig.

In Kingsville they stayed at the B-Bar-B Ranch. From there they birded the King Ranch. This is an extremely large block of private land along the gulf coast and to bird there you must pay to get on a tour. The King Ranch guide, Tom, is very good and the Scheibs got video of Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, White-tailed Hawk, Greater Roadrunner, Couch’s Kingbird, and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. The Scissor-tails look something like weather vanes when they sit on the fence and face into the wind.

Further south in the Rio Grande Valley they visited Santa Ana NWR. Some of the birds seen included flocks of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Green Kingfisher, and Tricolored

Heron.

A short ways west of Santa Ana they birded Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park. This is feeder watching at its finest. There are feeder stations maintained at a number of the RV sites. Site 14 is particularly well known to birders. The Scheibs videotaped their best birds of the trip there, Clay-colored and White-throated Robins. These are two Mexican species that rarely make it into the United States. Other feeder birds included Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Inca and White-tipped Doves, Altamira Oriole, and the absolutely gaudy Green Jay. Also the Plain Chachalaca may be the largest bird I have ever seen at a feeder—although I believe the Scheibs have likely had Wild Turkeys at their own backyard feeder. Finally at nightfall they got video of an Elf Owl peering out from its tree cavity just before it left for the evening hunt.

Making their way back towards Corpus Christi the Scheibs stayed over at the El Canelo Ranch. There they were treated to five species of owl including Ferruginous Pygmy Owl and three Barn Owls, both in the backyard of the guesthouse. Also videotaped were Great Kiskadee, Cave Swallow, Harris's Hawk, and Northern Bobwhite. The Scheibs also videotaped some of the resident nilgai. This is the largest antelope found in India and they look somewhat like a cross between an antelope and a horse. Obviously they were introduced to the area and now they are hunted year round. Jim reports that El Canelo serves the best margaritas anywhere.

Lastly the Scheibs showed much videotape of the cats at El Canelo. They brought one of them home to Iowa, but now they find that it and another cat in the house don't get along. If anyone wishes to adopt a very nice de-clawed house cat they should contact the Scheibs ASAP. I know it would be appreciated. Thanks Jim and Sharon.

Attendees: Jean and Ed Allgood, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Bob and Dara Dick, Linda Donelson, Linda and Roger Fisher, Karole and Jim Fuller, Rick Hollis, James Huntington, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Gary Leonard, Gail and John McLure, Jim Miller, Kari Oeltjen, Diana Pesek, Ron Price, Suzanne Sarlette, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Joy and Oliver Steele.
– Chris Caster

January 20th, Meeting. This was a rather informal meeting even by ICBC standards. There was no featured presenter or club business to discuss. Jim Scheib made available his Winged Migration DVD that contained a feature on **The Making of Winged Migration**. One can imagine that a fantastic film would require a fantastic effort and this did. No mirrors were involved, but there was a great deal of “cheating,” or “time, hard work and planning” to take the advocate's position.

If you had ever wondered how they could stay so close to a migrating flock of waterfowl you needed to watch the film that chronicles how Bill Lishman in 1993 led the migration of a flock of Canada Geese behind his ultra-light aircraft from Ontario all the way to Virginia. The makers of Winged Migration found Lishman to be an inspiration and used his imprinting techniques to develop semi-wild flocks from the egg just for this film. The perceived imprintability of different birds had a great influence on which birds would appear in the film. Notice that shorebirds were not used—primarily waterfowl, storks, and cranes.

The crews encountered many challenges though. One occurred when they attempted to fly via jetliner an entire flock of pelicans from Europe to Africa and they all got sick. They managed to get most of the pelicans healthy enough to complete those sequences on schedule. Another challenge occurred in the Himalayas when they lost the flock in the vast snow-covered peaks. They were found after nearly two days of searching.

The methods also explained some of the “weird scenes”. Those Canada Geese weren't in the desert southwest to take a walk; they were trucked in by the crew and released to fly across scenic backdrops. This sort of thing undoubtedly occurred over and over in the film, so a great deal of artistic license was present in the film.

They didn't explain everything. I never did learn how they followed the tern from the stratosphere down through the clouds over Western Europe—I somehow doubt that an ultralight was involved.

Moral of the film: “Special effects are in how you define them.” Or as my Dad commented after seeing Jurassic Park, “Pictures are no longer evidence of reality.”

Thanks Jim for showing us the movie.

Attendees: Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Linda and Roger Fisher, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, Dave Kyllingstad, Ramona McGurk, Alan Nagel, Kari Oeltjen, Diana Pesek, Jim Scheib, Marcia and Richard Shaffer, Judy Whetstone.

– Chris Caster

February 17th, Meeting. Ken Lowder gave us a report on the trip he made with his wife and sister-in-law to **Panama** this winter. Panama is an attractive tourist destination due to the U.S. presence for so many years. The roads are great, everyone speaks English, you can drink the water, and you don’t need a passport to go. And the birds are pretty good too.

The first stop was in the Chiriqui Highlands in western Panama. The mountains contain active volcanoes; the highest, Volcan Baru, reaches 7,000 ft. The mountains and hillsides are farmed nearly to the top, but the very tops are protected areas for wildlife. The elevated areas can be quite cool and the moist trade winds off the Caribbean create a cloud forest habitat. This area gets about 140 inches of rain each year and the weather can change very suddenly. Ken was able to get nice photos of the many kinds of hummingbirds there and of the spectacular Resplendent Quetzal.

Ken also stayed at the famous Canopy Tower. This is an old radar tower a stone’s throw from the Panama Canal. It had been used as an outpost for drug trafficking interdiction, but now is dedicated to eco-tourism. It costs \$250 a night and reservations, at least for the winter months, should be made well in advance. Toucans and trogons could be seen from the Tower as well as howler monkeys and tamarinds.

Ken also got to visit the botanical gardens where he photographed the national Bird of Panama, the Harpy Eagle. There is a program underway to release harpies along the Pipeline Road.

More Panama trivia—the country is about the size of South Carolina and has a population size similar to Iowa. If you journey to the Pacific Ocean through the Panama Canal you will travel from NW to SE. The Panama Canal handles about 35 ships every day—most are container ships. These vessels are raised and lowered a height of 27 meters on their trip through the locks. Building the canal was environmentally devastating as large areas were flooded to supply the canal and locks with water. Currently there is a plan being considered to enlarge the canal system that would flood a much larger area.

If you wish to go to Panama, Ken recommends A Guide to the Birds of Panama by Ridgley and Gwynne. Thanks Ken for a very interesting presentation.

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Bob Dick, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Linda and Roger Fisher, Bess and Ed Folk, Therese Guedon, Rick Hollis, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Ken Lowder, Ramona McGurk, Gail and John McLure, Jim Miller, Diana Pesek, Rosemarie Petzold, Suzanne Sarlette, Jim Scheib, Bill Scheible, Marcia and Richard Shaffer.

– Chris Caster

February 19th, Amana Turkey Walk. We departed at 7:30 a.m. and arrived at the “ice pond” area north of Hwy. 6 west of Homestead. The highlights of the trip were undoubtedly the three Northern Saw-whet Owls roosting in separate cedars, but not more than 100 yards from each other. They were each in the same location where Chris Edwards and I found them while scouting on the previous weekend. Each of the owls had a large amount of whitewash under their roosts and many pellets were found. There were at least three other trees in the area also found to contain large amounts of whitewash and/or pellets underneath. Is it possible that each owl has more than one favored roost?

We followed up the 2-hour walk with a brunch at the Colony Restaurant in Amana. It was very enjoyable

as usual. Thanks to everyone for coming out and making it a fun event. Thanks especially to the West High students, Mike and Stephanie, for joining us in preparation for their Envirothon competition.

Participants: Barbara Beaumont, Barry Buschelman, Mike Carr, Chris Caster (leader), Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Linda Fisher, Tony Franken, Therese Guedon, Kurt Hamann, Mary Noble, Diana Pesek, Linda Rudolph, Sandra Stevens, Stephanie Wu.

Birds (48 species): Canada Goose, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Wild Turkey, Herring Gull, Mourning Dove, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal.

– Chris Caster

February 27th, Quad Cities and Mississippi River. The group made a number of stops along the Mississippi River. Our first stop was to view diving ducks on the river just north of the I-80 bridge. We were immediately treated to a pair of Peregrine Falcons that flew towards the bridge, making a number of flights around the bridge columns and then returning to the neighborhood television antennae that they had been roosting on when we drove up. Actually got to see them “doin’ it.” That produced some giggles from the group. A few of us did tear ourselves away to spot a number of diving ducks in the river channel.

Next stop was at Lock and Dam 14. Singing Song Sparrow and Red-winged Blackbird let us know that Spring wouldn’t be long—if the Peregrines hadn’t already made that clear enough. We also found a Belted Kingfisher and a Northern Pintail and had fun aging the Ring-billed and Herring Gulls present.

After pillaging a local convenience store for donuts and pizza, we made a brief run over to the Butterworth Park along the riverbank in Moline. There wasn’t much to see there—some Common Mergansers well to the north. So we proceeded down to Lock and Dam 15 in Davenport where we found a first-winter Glaucous Gull, an adult Thayer’s Gull, and another Peregrine roosting near the top of an office building. It was turning out to be quite the field trip.

The next stop was the Credit Island Park. There we found probably 10,000 Ring-billed Gulls and 1,000 Herring Gulls. Also spied in the masses was another first-winter Glaucous Gull—way to go Linda Rudolph! And an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull was a treat as well. One last stop at Fairmont Cemetery before heading home, where we encountered a pair of Barred Owls and five Red-tailed Hawks soaring together over the hilltop. One doesn’t see that very often either. Nice trip everyone. Thanks for coming out. And if anyone has a mystery pair of black gloves, they might be mine.

Participants: Brady Belcher, Chris Caster (leader), Linda Donelson, Therese Guedon, Kari Oeltjen, Diana Pesek, Linda Rudolph, Bill Scheible.

Birds (33 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Thayer’s Gull, Glaucous Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Barred Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, House Sparrow.

– Chris Caster

March 6, Cone Marsh. Visiting Cone Marsh in Louisa County is an annual rite of spring for many birders. Therefore it was no surprise that a large and enthusiastic group turned out on this beautiful sunny morning.

Before arriving at the marsh, we made a pit stop in Lone Tree, and then visited the local pair of Great Horned Owls nearby. One owl, presumably the female, was sitting on a nest in the end of a large snag, with just her ear tufts visible. The male was roosting in the open a little higher up in the same tree.

We continued on to the marsh and began our tour in the northeast corner near the old caboose. The entire

eastern half of the marsh was covered with thousands of ducks and geese. We spent a fair amount of time staring into a fierce southwest wind and scoping all the birds present. There were many dabbling ducks here such as Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Gadwall, and Northern Shoveler, as well as a few divers including Canvasback and Redhead. There were many Greater White-fronted Geese scattered throughout. One Ross's Goose was detected in a flock of Snow Geese when the birds took flight. A pair of Eastern Bluebirds and a Northern Harrier were also spotted.

Next we stopped at the southeast side of the marsh, where we found half a dozen Green-winged Teal and a pair of American Black Ducks. In the southwest corner, a Eurasian Tree Sparrow was briefly seen, and we added Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, and Ring-necked Duck to our waterfowl list.

By the time we arrived at the dike on the west side of the marsh, the day had really warmed up and we shed our winter jackets. There were very few birds visible from the dike but we did spot three Bufflehead. When we returned to the parking lot, several migrant raptors were taking advantage of the strong south winds. First a small falcon zipped overhead, causing much discussion and consternation about its identify. Then a beautifully-marked adult Red-shouldered Hawk was seen circling over the woods to the north. Several Bald Eagles and a Red-tailed Hawk finished up our mini-hawk watch.

Our next stop was the boat ramp. There were no birds on the water here, perhaps owing to the large flock of Snow Geese decoys and nearby hunters, so we went for a short walk in the woods. It was nice to stand in the woods and listen to the common resident birds singing and the water bubbling from the small spring. We finished our trip in the northeast corner of the marsh. In all, we tallied 19 waterfowl species for the day.

Participants: Brady Belcher, Sarah Bissell, Mark Brown, Bob and Dara Dick, John and Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards (leader), Linda Fisher, Gary Leonard, Ken Lowder, Nancy Menning, Diana Pesek, Linda Rudolph, Sue Sarlette, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Trish Ditsworth.

Birds (45 species): Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, American Crow, Horned Lark, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

– Chris Edwards

March 24th, Meeting. Ric Zarwell gave a talk on the status of the Iowa Audubon Important Bird Areas Program. Ric has been the Iowa IBA Coordinator since the program began three years ago. He and his wife Betty have together worked tirelessly to promote the conservation needs of birds in Iowa.

Over 200 sites around the state have been nominated for review by the Technical Committee based on the presence of species of conservation concern or because they have proved to be migration stops for significant numbers of birds. Many nominated sites have received acceptance as IBAs—locally Hickory Hill Park, Kent Park, and the Coralville Reservoir have been accepted. Others await further documentation—Redbird Farms, the S&G Sandpit, and Cone Marsh are nearby examples.

Although the IBA Program has the strong support of the DNR Wildlife Diversity Program, it is truly a grass roots effort. This program relies on the birders in our bird club and other groups around the state to nominate sites and to locate, identify and document the birds. Much of this important work needs to be done during the breeding season. It is important that we find evidence of the 37 IBA species breeding on these sites, which requires a fairly intense effort from about May 20th to July 4th. Outside of this window it can be difficult to separate local breeders from migrants.

Ric demonstrated for us that online data entry through the Iowa Audubon website is simple. Birders should

record numbers of adults, sex, and presence of juveniles. Also an attempt should be made to document the likelihood of breeding in the area—were the birds simply observed or were they singing, exhibiting territorial behaviors, nest building, feeding young, etc. The online data entry has pull-down lists of criteria that can help determine whether breeding status is possible, probable, or confirmed.

Much has yet to be done. It isn't enough to find the bird just once. Breeding status of IBA species needs to be confirmed if possible in at least two of the last six years. That six-year window is always moving forward, so monitoring year after year will be required. Much of the data used to nominate the sites was old and new evidence of breeding must be found or the sites will be rejected. The criteria are fairly stringent and they need to be. Marginal habitats must be weeded out to legitimize the accepted IBA sites and prevent the needless diversion of resources.

Ric is very excited about the use of GIS technology to map bird data to specific habitat locations. The Iowa IBA Program recently adopted its use. It is anticipated that this will be an extremely powerful tool in developing conservation plans for IBA sites and species of concern.

Ric is also excited about Iowa Audubon's split from National Audubon. The IBA program is still linked to Birdlife International's Global Database, but now the support for the Iowa IBA Program is local and no longer impeded by National Audubon's bureaucracy. Ric spends a great deal of time vying for various grants to keep the program going, but financial support from birders in Iowa is still needed. Ric encourages everyone to join Iowa Audubon, especially now that all donations will stay in the state to support local bird conservation efforts.

Ric encourages birders to take a lesson from the duck hunters and all that they have achieved since the 1930s when waterfowl were disappearing everywhere due to habitat loss and degradation. They lobbied for the national system of refuges and funded the restoration of millions of acres of wetlands across North America. However recent surveys show that hunter numbers are decreasing, while birding is currently one of the fastest growing pastimes. It is now time for birders to make their contribution to the effort.

Thanks Ric and Betty. You're doing great things.

Attendees: Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Linda and Roger Fisher, Judy Felder, Bernie Knight, Dave Kyllingstad, Ken Lowder, Jim Miller, Alan Nagel, Ron Perkins, Sandy Rhodes, Jim Scheib, Marcia and Richard Shaffer.

– Chris Caster

March 27, Hawkeye Wildlife Area. The day started out brisk at 35° F, but bright and sunny with clear skies. The group went to Swan Lake where most of the waterfowl were seen. Babcock Access had a Green-winged Teal and snipe. The Hooded Merganser was at Amana Lily Lake, which was visited late in the day around 2 p.m. by the last four remaining of the group. The day ended with a total of 54 species. A beautiful day.

Participants: Mark Brown, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow (leader), Linda Donelson, Linda Fisher, Therese Guedon, James Huntington, Alan Nagel, Andrew Schmidt, Bob Stearns, Carol Winter, Kirsten Winter.

Birds (54 species): Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Turkey Vulture, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, American Coot, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Common Grackle, House Finch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

- Karen Disbrow

**IOWA CITY BIRD CLUB
MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM**

Please send this form with your annual membership dues to Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, Bernie Knight, 425 Lee Street, Iowa City IA 52246. Annual dues are \$10 per household. Members receive a membership card which entitles them to a 10% discount on bird seed at Bird's Eye View in Coralville.

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Iowa City Bird Club

Eastern Iowa Birdwatch is published three times per year (usually April, September, 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 \$10.00, payable by January 1st for the coming year. Make checks payable to Eastern Iowa Birdwatch, and mail to Bernie Knight, 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 Chris Caster at 339-8343 or cjcaster@earthlink.net.

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

The club web site is maintained by Jim Scheib and is located at www.icbirds.org.

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