
Eastern Iowa Birdwatch



The Iowa City Bird Club Newsletter

Volume 28 Number 1

April 2008

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 1-29, Tuesdays, 7:00 p.m. Beginning Birdwatching Course at the Conservation Education Center at Kent Park. The course is free to club members. Registration is required. See page 4 for details.

April 5, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Hawkeye Wildlife Area for water birds and other migrants. Rick Hollis, 665-3141. *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.*

April 6, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Redbird Farms Wildlife Area for sparrows and other early spring migrants. Meet at the Fin & Feather parking lot on Highway 1. Linda Donelson, 351-7452.

April 12, Saturday, 8 a.m. – Noon. Spring Cleanup Day at Hawkeye Wildlife Area. We will pick up litter along roadsides and parking lots. Wear gloves and old clothes, and meet at the blue maintenance shed at the corner of Swan Lake Road and James Avenue. Rainout date Sunday, April 13. Chris Edwards, 887-6957.

April 13, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Kent Park. Meet at the Conservation Education Center. Rick Hollis, 665-3141. *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.*

April 16, Wednesday, 7 p.m. Meeting. Lon Drake, UI Geology Professor Emeritus, will discuss the creation of Johnson County's newest and best wetland for birders – South Sycamore Bottoms.

April 18, Friday, 6:00 p.m. Night Sounds Foray. We will visit several local areas to listen for frogs, marsh birds, and owls. Dress for cool weather. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

April 19, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Otter Creek Marsh in Tama County to search for cranes, bitterns, rails, and other marsh birds. Be prepared for wet walking. Diana Pesek, (319) 560-8393.

April 20, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Local Areas for spring migrants. Rick Hollis, 665-3141. *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.*

Continued on next page →

Schedule – continued

April 24, Thursday, 7:00 p.m. Bird Watching for Kids Class with Rick Hollis at Kent Park. For ages 6-12. Children must be accompanied by an adult. A Saturday morning field trip will also be offered. Please pre-register with Brad Freidhof at 645-1011.

April 26, Saturday, 8:00 a.m. Macbride Nature-Recreation Area and Macbride Raptor Center. Meet at the Hills Bank parking lot on Highway 965 in North Liberty. Jim Scheib, 337-5206. *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.*

April 27, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Shorebird Field Trip. We will visit Hawkeye Wildlife Area or other local areas to look for migrant shorebirds. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

May 3, Saturday. Spring Migration Count. To participate, call Chris Caster at 339-8343. See page 3 for more information.

May 4, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. Hickory Hill Park and Wilson's Orchard for warblers and other songbirds. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017. *BEGINNING BIRDER TRIP.*

May 5-8, 12-15, 19-22, Mondays–Thursdays, 6:30 a.m. Warbler Walks in Hickory Hill Park led by Jim Fuller, Ken Lowder, and/or Chris Edwards. Meet at the north shelter parking lot at the end of Conklin Lane off Dodge Street. Daily sightings will be posted on our web site.

May 17, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Hanging Rock Woods for migrant warblers. Jim Fuller, 338-3561.

May 18, Sunday, 6:30 a.m. Muskrat Slough and Beam Woods in Jones County for marsh birds and woodland birds and wildflowers. There may be some wet walking and some steep hiking. Chris Edwards, 887-6957.

May 21, Wednesday, 7:00 p.m. Meeting. Nicki Nagl, the Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas Coordinator, will present on this second 5-year Breeding Bird Atlas Project set to begin this spring and continue through the summer of 2012. The project will attempt to document changes in breeding bird distribution as a result of land use patterns in the last 20 years.

May 31, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Rochester Cemetery in Cedar County. This is a sand prairie with beautiful wildflowers and many migrant and resident songbirds. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

June 1, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Breeding Bird Atlas Trip. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

June 7, Saturday, 7:30 a.m. Indian Creek Nature Center. Meet at the Perkins parking lot near I-380 and 33rd Avenue in Cedar Rapids. Diana Pesek, (319) 560-8393.

June 8, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Breeding Bird Atlas Trip. Chris Caster, 339-8343.

June 14, Saturday, 5:30 a.m. Townsend Woods south of Lowden. It is 40 miles to this location and we want to be there as the birds are starting to stir. Linda Donelson, 351-7452.

Continued on next page →

Schedule – continued

June 21, Saturday, 7:00 a.m. Indiangrass Hill in Iowa County for grassland species including Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Sedge Wren, and Bobolink. Mark Brown, 354-8751.

July 12, Saturday, 9:00 a.m. Mushroom and Bird Foray at Kent Park with the Prairie States Mushroom Club. Meet at the Conservation Education Center in Kent Park. Bring water and a sack lunch. Karen Disbrow, 339-1017.

July 13, Sunday, 1:00–5:00 p.m. Backyard Habitat Crawl. We will visit backyards in Johnson and Linn counties setup to enhance and encourage wildlife observation, including Jim Durbin's yard in Marion. If you have a yard you would like to share, contact Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

July 19, 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 887-6957 for details.

August 3, Sunday, 7:00 a.m. Shorebird Field Trip at Hawkeye Wildlife Area or other local areas. If you are able to lead this trip, please call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

August 21, Thursday 6:00 p.m. Annual Picnic at Hickory Hill Park north shelter. Bring something to grill, a side dish to share, table service, and drinks. For more information call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

Other Dates of Note

April 26, Saturday, 9 a.m. – Noon. Johnson County Great Garlic Mustard Challenge. For more information, visit www.icgov.org/garlicmustard or contact Marcia Klingman at 356-5237.

May 9-11, Friday-Sunday. Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring Meeting in Oskaloosa. For more information, see www.iowabirds.org.

Spring Migration Count Saturday, May 3

Our annual Spring Migration Count is Saturday, May 3rd. This count is run just like our Christmas Bird Count, except that it is county-wide. Observers have a 24-hour period on Saturday, May 3rd to count every bird they can. Both numbers of species and numbers of individual birds are recorded. The results of our previous counts can be found at our website.

There won't be an organizational meeting for the count this year, but we will meet on count day for lunch at the Coralville Hy-Vee Deli at noon. If you wish to participate you will need to contact the count compiler, Chris Caster, in advance of count day at cjcaster@earthlink.net

or 339-8343. Participants can download a spring count checklist from the club website. These will also be available at the April club meeting.

Renewal Reminder

If you haven't renewed your membership yet for 2008, please do so soon to ensure continued delivery of Eastern Iowa Birdwatch. Your mailing label shows the most recent year you have paid for. Our annual membership dues remain \$15 per household or \$10 for students. Please complete the membership renewal form on the inside back cover and send it with your check payable to "Eastern Iowa Birdwatch" to Bernie Knight, 425 Lee St., Iowa City, IA 52246. Thank you!



2008 Bird Watching Classes Tuesdays March 25 – April 29



The Iowa City Bird Club and the Johnson County Conservation Department are offering a 6-week **Introduction to Birding Course** at the **Conservation Education Center in Kent Park**. There will be six Tuesday evening sessions along with six weekend field trips to area birding hot

spots.

Tuesday evening sessions are \$5 each for adults, and free for children accompanied by an adult. Iowa City Bird Club members receive free admission (a one-year membership is \$15, or \$10 for students). **Participants may attend all six sessions or pick one or more to attend.** Classes can hold 30, and **advanced registration is requested – please call Brad Freidhof at (319) 645-1011 by noon of the Tuesday session.** Handouts and refreshments will be provided. Come to class early and bird the loop path near the Conservation Education Center.

Weekend field trips are free. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Bring binoculars to all field trips; if you don't have a pair let us know in advance and loaners can be arranged. Spotting scopes are helpful for viewing shorebirds and waterfowl; if you have one bring it. Bird club members will have several scopes available on those field trips requiring one. **Unless otherwise noted, field trips depart from the Dodge St. Hy-Vee in Iowa City; meet in the SW corner of the parking lot.** For more information on field trips, call Karen Disbrow at 339-1017.

Tuesday, March 25, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING by Rick Hollis. This will include field identification of birds, field guides, and equipment that every birdwatcher needs, or might someday need.

Tuesday, April 1, 7 p.m. BASICS OF BIRDING II by Rick Hollis. Continuing the previous topics.

Saturday, April 5, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HAWKEYE WILDLIFE AREA near North Liberty. We expect to see ducks, geese, American White Pelicans, and other early spring migrants. Wear boots for walking in wet areas, and bring a spotting scope if you have one.

Tuesday, April 8, 7 p.m. WHERE TO BIRD IN JOHNSON COUNTY by Rick Hollis. Well known, lesser known and secret places to watch birds and study nature in and around Johnson County.

Sunday, April 13, 8 a.m. Field Trip to KENT PARK near Tiffin. We will explore the trails in Kent Park looking for migrating songbirds and resident woodland birds.

Tuesday, April 15, 7 p.m. TECHNIQUES AND EQUIPMENT for BIRIDING BY EAR by Gerald White. This session will cover methods, techniques, and equipment to use in learning to bird by ear.

Sunday, April 20, 8 a.m. Field Trip to LOCAL AREAS for songbirds and other spring migrants.

Tuesday, April 22, 7 p.m. BACKYARD AND FEEDER BIRDS by James Scheib. This session will cover the common backyard birds found in our area, and what feeders and food to use to attract them.

Saturday, April 26, 8 a.m. Field Trip to MACBRIDE NATURE-RECREATION AREA. Starting location is the **Hills Bank parking lot on Hwy. 965 in North Liberty** instead of the Dodge St. Hy-Vee. Visit the Raptor Center, observe birds from the bird blind, and hike the nearby trails.

Tuesday, April 29, 7 p.m. WARBLER IDENTIFICATION & SHOREBIRD REVIEW by Karen Disbrow. Warblers are coming! Warblers are among our most colorful birds. Compare and contrast similar warblers.

Sunday, May 4, 8 a.m. Field Trip to HICKORY HILL PARK. A great place to view migrating warblers.

Membership Spotlight on: **Bill Scheible**

What is your occupation? Recently retired Radiologist. Undergraduate and Medical School at UCLA, where I helped John Wooden win seven NCAA basketball championships during my eight years on campus.

Tell us about your family. Daughter Kristin, Professor of Comparative Religion at Bard College in upstate New York, two grandchildren. Son Ethan, Montessori School teacher in Portland, Oregon, one grandchild.

Where did you grow up? Born in Cedar Rapids, but left after 2nd grade when the Air Force recalled my father, a WW II bomber pilot, during the Korean War. Grew up as an Air Force brat, moving every two to three years (Texas, Indiana, Japan, Alabama, California).

When and how did your interest in birds develop? My grandfather was a birder before the term was invented, and I would accompany him on hikes around Cedar Rapids. By the age of six, I could I.D. most of the common birds in the area. He died about the time we moved away, and birding took a back seat to boyhood shenanigans. I maintained an interest in the natural world, though, and through volunteer work with Earthwatch (banding raptors in Nevada, establishing a MAPS station in Alaska, searching for ptarmigan in Montana), an interest in birds was rekindled. My daughter and future son-in-law worked for the Puffin Project in Maine between college and grad school at Harvard, and visits to New England solidified my interest. So, I consider 1995 to be my watershed year for birding.

Did you have any birding mentors? I'm more or less self-taught, but Pete Wickham here in Cedar Rapids surely qualifies as a mentor, introducing me to all sorts of people and places when I moved back to Iowa in 1999.

When did you join the Iowa City Bird Club? Not sure, probably 5 or 6 years ago.

What was your first Iowa City Bird Club event? Undoubtedly a field trip to Hawkeye Wildlife Area.

Do you have a favorite bird or bird family? Tough to pick favorites, but Accipitridae, Strigidae, Picidae and Mimidae are near the top. You can have most of the Laridae!

What particular aspects of birding interest you the most? Integrating birds/behavior/habitat. I believe I learn something every time I venture afield. The study of birds is fascinating. Recently I've enjoyed birding some of Iowa's less visited counties and discovering what can be found there. This doesn't usually include good restaurants, however.

Do you keep a life list? I keep several lists, but don't consider myself a driven "twitcher". My ABA life list is at 672, as I've birded in most parts of this country, and it is experiencing new places that contributes mightily to the appeal of birding. Now that I'm retired, I hope to travel to new locales and someday achieve the 700 species benchmark. I also keep a year list, and although I usually have a rough idea of where I stand, I don't add up the numbers until January 1st of the next year. I don't want to feel pressured to "get" a particular species to achieve a "good" year.

What was the most recent bird you added to your life list? Buff-collared Nightjar in California Gulch in Arizona.

What interesting birds have you seen in your yard? Two unexpected birds here in essentially urban Cedar Rapids – Northern Bobwhite and Northern Shrike.

Where is your favorite place in Iowa to bird, and why? Squaw Creek Park, a wonderful spot with varied habitat between Cedar Rapids and Marion. “Good” birds I’ve discovered here include Little Blue Heron, Common Moorhen, Worm-eating Warbler and Summer Tanager.

Tell us about one of your most exciting Iowa birding moments. Two come to mind. American Woodcock was a lifer for me and my first experience with their evening displays was memorable indeed. My life Smith’s Longspur was at Cone Marsh in Louisa County, a bright male sitting up like an Olive-sided Flycatcher at the top of a tree.

What is your “most wanted” Iowa bird? Two favorites of mine from Montana: Northern Goshawk (I think I’ve seen two in Iowa, actually, but I’m a stickler for 100% positive I.D.s) and Bohemian Waxwing (haven’t even come close to this one).

Tell us about a favorite birding experience or place outside of Iowa. I recently toured New Zealand, the most beautiful country on the planet. Our group of ten, including Ken Lowder of ICBC, saw every endemic species we sought, and indeed, we established a New Zealand record for species seen on one trip. Iowa’s own Ross Silcock was a co-leader on the trip.

If you could visit any place on earth, where would it be? I’ve been fortunate to have traveled extensively, although mostly before I became a birder. I’m not on a world-birding quest, but I would like to explore Australia.

Do you have any hobbies or interest besides birding? Grandkids are my number one hobby these days. I’m a student of WW II history (particularly aircraft), collect vintage automobile license plates and dabble in art, have a bunch of HO-gauge trains stored away, like music of the 60s and 70s, and on nice days, I bring out my cherry 1971 Camaro, purchased new my internship year for \$3,300.00. My son and I are pursuing a moving target of seeing a baseball game in each of the major league ballparks – currently we’ve tallied 21 of them.

Do you have any favorite movies or TV shows? A list of favorite movies would be lengthy, but coming immediately to mind are *The Graduate*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Five Easy Pieces*, *Breaker Morant*, *The Natural*, *Sleeper*, *Sling Blade*, *Chinatown*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *Fargo*. Don’t watch much TV, but *Cheers* and *Northern Exposure* were favorites. For utter comic relief, I sometimes tune in to “fair and balanced” on Fox News.

Have you read any good books recently? Five most recent are *The Devil in the White City* (a tale of a mass murderer in the setting of the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair), *1491* (an account of the Americas prior to European contact), *Theatre of Fish* (a history of Newfoundland), *Collapse* (by Jared Diamond, one of my medical school professors, detailing why societies fail), and *Theodore Rex* (a biography of Teddy Roosevelt).

What is your favorite restaurant? I enjoy ethnic food and I suppose my favorite right now is Taj Mahal in Cedar Rapids – wonderful Indian cuisine.

The Thayer's/Iceland Gull Complex

Chris Caster

Thayer's Gull is uncommon in Iowa, but may be the most frequently found gull in winter after Ring-billed and Herring. It was first described by Brooks in 1915 and considered a subspecies of Herring Gull until 1973, when the American Ornithologists' Union gave it full species status. This was in response to research published in 1961 by Macpherson that showed that Thayer's and Herring Gulls did not interbreed. That same research also suggested that the Thayer's Gull was similar to the Kumlien's Gull in many respects. Brewster, in 1883 first described Kumlien's Gull. Historically it has been considered a full species, a hybrid between Thayer's and Iceland Gulls, and a subspecies of Iceland Gull. The AOU currently treats Kumlien's as a subspecies of Iceland, but more research on the breeding grounds will be needed before the taxonomy is settled further.

The difficulty is that these gulls represent a cline of nearly continuous variation. The nominate Iceland Gull, which breeds in southern Greenland, is ghostly pale in the primaries. The Kumlien's subspecies, which breeds on southern Baffin Iceland and extreme northwest Quebec, has varying amounts of gray on the outer webs of its primaries. The Thayer's Gull, which breeds in a number of Arctic colonies from northern Greenland in the east to Banks Island in the west, has black on the outer webs of its primaries. So the amount and depth of pigmentation in the primaries increases from Iceland to Kumlien's to Thayer's. The Kumlien's and Thayer's that share the colony on the east of Baffin Island may interbreed, but this is difficult to assess because researchers can't adequately distinguish between the two, nor can they characterize the offspring. Additionally there are a small number of birds breeding in Greenland that have some gray in their primaries—are they nominate Iceland, hybrids, or extra-limital Kumlien's? As a group, gulls have been one of the most challenging for ornithologists to classify.

Most of the large gulls we see during the winter are adult birds. We also see a large number of first-winter birds. This is a result of the high mortality in first-year birds and longevity of birds that manage to survive to adulthood. The same is presumably true of Thayer's and Iceland Gulls in their normal winter range, but Iowa is outside those areas. Thayer's Gulls normally winter on the west coast from southern Alaska to the Gulf of California. Kumlien's Gulls normally winter in the northeast from Newfoundland to Chesapeake, and nominate Iceland Gulls winter from the ocean surrounding Greenland to northern Europe. But as we all know, birds sometimes wander far from where they are supposed to be, and gulls make a habit of it. If first-winter birds have a greater tendency to wander, we might expect first-winter birds of this complex to be more prevalent in Iowa than the adults—and I suspect this may be the case.

While the ornithologist's task is to assess the relationships between the forms, it is the birder's task to identify those forms. Historically this has been difficult. Carl Bendorf submitted the first accepted record of Thayer's Gull in Iowa in Dec. 1985. They have been reported every year since, most often from places where other large gulls are found wintering in Iowa: Red Rock and Saylorville Reservoirs and along the Mississippi in Scott and Lee Counties. They are still probably underreported due to their similarity to Herring Gull, but as our collective knowledge and experience grows this will presumably change.

To find a first-year Thayer's Gull amongst a roost, look for a gull that is medium to light brown overall—lighter than a first-year Herring. Examine the primaries. Thayer's retain the pale edges to the tips of their primaries much longer into the winter than Herring. Compare the darkness of the primaries to the tertials. The primaries should be darker than the brown of the tertials—in Herring Gulls they are about the same. Next examine the bill color and shape. The Thayer's Gull should have a bill that is

nearly completely black, shorter, with a reduced gonydeal angle—Herring Gulls will usually have some lightening to the base of the bill, it will be longer and have a pronounced gonydeal angle. To find a first-year Thayer's Gull in flight, again look for a medium to light brown gull that shows little contrast across the primaries—Herring will show a lighter panel in the inner primaries. The underside of the wing should be uniformly light on the Thayer's as well. The tail feathers will be medium brown and about the same color as the secondaries, which should show as a bar along the top hindwing.

Adult Thayer's are difficult to spot within a roost. The primaries are nearly as dark as Herring. The mantle is slightly darker in Thayer's than in Herring, but this is a difficult thing to judge as the birds change position relative to sun and observer. About 80 percent of adult Thayer's Gulls have a dark iris, while all Herring Gulls have a pale yellow iris—if you are close enough to see this. Overall size comparisons are of limited use. Thayer's Gull is slightly smaller than Herring. Male gulls are often larger than the females. A female Thayer's might look substantially smaller, with a more rounded head and shorter bill than a male Herring, but the differences between male Thayer's and female Herring will be less obvious. Adult Thayer's are easy to spot in flight however. Unlike Herring Gulls the black in the primaries is confined to the outer web except at the tip. This produces the effect of dark fingers, unlike the relatively solidly black outer primaries of the Herring Gull. Even more noticeable is the underside of a Thayer's primaries. They are very light, only showing a bit of black along the very tips—in the Herring the underside is just as black as the upperside.

Iceland Gulls are more unusual in Iowa. They are considered casual and sightings should be documented for the records committee. Tom Kent submitted the first accepted record for Iceland Gull in Iowa in March of 1991. So far all Iowa records are believed to be of the Kumlien's subspecies. Any bird that is indeed Kumlien's Gull is easily separable from Herring. In the first-year birds, the challenge is distinguishing between a light Thayer's Gull and a darker Kumlien's. When the birds are roosting the first detail to examine is the primaries—Kumlien's should have primaries that aren't any darker than the tertials. Look for patterning in the tertials—the Kumlien's should have patterned tertials, not solidly brown as in Thayer's. The next detail to examine is the bill color—Kumlien's should be lighter in the basal one third, while Thayer's bill is more likely to be all dark. The head shape of Kumlien's should be even more rounded and dovelike than in Thayer's, without the dark smudge that can be present in the cheek/auricular area in Thayer's. In flight, the first-year Kumlien's Gull should have a uniformly light upperwing. The secondary bar seen in Thayer's should be much less obvious or missing in Kumlien's. The tail feathers in Kumlien's are less likely to show a brown band. When it is present it should be darker than the secondaries.

With patience adult Kumlien's are easier to spot in a roost than Thayer's. The amount of gray found in the primaries is variable, but it is never the black found in Thayer's. Typically it will be quite light. Eye color in the adult Kumlien's is variable—some are dark like Thayer's. In flight the adult Kumlien's simply replaces the black primary pigment with gray, and often this is confined to fewer primaries.

In February of 2006, James Huntington, Diana Pesek and myself viewed an adult gull at Credit Island south of Davenport. It was obviously an adult Iceland Gull, possibly of the unrecorded nominate subspecies. It had a yellow eye and we could not see any gray within the primaries. A number of persons traveled to see the bird. Steve Freed got some photos of it on the ice. Ann Johnson reported seeing a small amount of gray in the outer primaries and the record was accepted as a Kumlien's. It may be however that we will never be able to safely identify a nominate Iceland Gull in Iowa. Work done on wingtip patterns of adult Kumlien's in Newfoundland published by Howell and Macavish in 2003, found that 4 percent have pure white primaries.

2007 Iowa City Christmas Bird Count

Chris Edwards and Bob Dick

The 57th annual Iowa City Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 16. The total of 65 species was slightly below the count's ten-year average of 68 species. Temperatures on count day were below normal and ranged from 10° to 19° F. The sky was overcast all day and there was a steady northwest wind of 8-12 MPH. There were several inches of old snow cover. The Coralville Reservoir and Lake Macbride were mostly frozen, while the Iowa River and smaller streams were mostly open. Late November and early December weather featured several ice- and snow-storms which pushed many lingering birds out of our area. No species new to the count were seen this year, and the all-time count list remains at 133 species. The best bird this year was a Merlin. Other infrequently-found species included Cackling Goose, Canvasback, Northern Shrike, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and meadowlark species. Expected species that were not found this year included Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, and Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Waterfowl to Raptors

As to be expected with the cold December temperatures, waterfowl numbers were below normal this year. Canada Geese and Mallard numbers were both less than half their average. Six Cackling Geese, one Wood Duck, and two Canvasbacks on the Iowa River were nice finds. Ring-necked Pheasants and Wild Turkeys were both seen in average numbers. Despite the snow cover, no Northern Bobwhites were found this year after two good years in 2005 and 2006. It was an excellent year for raptors. Bald Eagle numbers were above average, and the six Northern Harriers was a ten-year high. A total of 14 accipiters were sighted, including an all-time high count of six Cooper's Hawks. Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks were both seen in above-average numbers. A Merlin, seen in the peninsula area of Iowa City, provided only the second record of this species for the count, with the other sighting occurring in 1993.

Shorebirds to Owls

A Wilson's Snipe, found for the second straight year in a creek on the west side of North Liberty, was an excellent find. No gulls were seen this year. Eurasian Collared-Dove, a species which has rapidly expanded throughout the state in the last decade, has yet to be recorded on our count, but should be expected within the next several years. Mourning Dove numbers were above average, but were far below last year's record. Owls were a mixed bag: the eight Great Horned Owls set a ten-year high count, but only four Barred Owls and 1 Eastern Screech-Owl were found, and no other owls were recorded. Northern Saw-whet Owl, formerly seen almost every year, has now been missed on four straight counts.

Woodpeckers to Warblers

Two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were nice finds. Red-headed Woodpeckers were found in below-average numbers, but the 34 Hairy Woodpeckers and six Pileated Woodpeckers were both all-time high counts. The three Northern Shrikes match a count record. Blue Jays and American Crows were both seen in above-average numbers, perhaps indicating these species are starting to recover from the effects of West Nile virus. It was an invasion year for Red-breasted Nuthatches, and the 20 birds seen were the most in twelve years. The December ice storms undoubtedly made it difficult for American Robins and Cedar Waxwings to find food, as their numbers were far below normal. Two Yellow-rumped Warblers, found in the same cedar grove at Hawkeye Wildlife Area as three birds in 2005 and 2006, were a surprising find.

Sparrows to Old World Sparrows

A single Fox Sparrow furnished the seventh record in nine years for this formerly rare winter species. Swamp Sparrows set a ten-year-high. Blackbird numbers were low, with only three Red-winged Blackbirds and a single Common Grackle. Five meadowlarks at a farm west of North Liberty were a rare find. Despite the appearance of a slight winter finch invasion throughout Iowa, Pine Siskins and Purple Finches were seen in modest numbers, and no redpolls or crossbills were found. Eurasian Tree Sparrow, now regular in small numbers in our area, was found for the fifth straight year.

This year there were 32 field observers, slightly fewer than normal, in 12 parties. Field observers were Mark Brown, John Broz, Barry Buschelman, Chris Caster, Dean Colton, Bob and Dara Dick, Karen Disbrow, John and Linda Donelson, Chris Edwards, Jonni Ellsworth, Mike Feiss, Linda Fisher, Tony Franken, Jim Fuller, Rick Hollis, Ken Hunt, Ken Lowder, Richard and Nancy Lynch, Ramona McGurk, Mary Noble, Jason Paulios, Diana Pesek, James and Jean Sandrock, Jim Scheib, Tom Shires, Dick Tetrault, Doug Wallace, and David Weiss.

There were 21 feeder watchers in 18 locations this year, about the same as last year. Feeder watchers were Jack and Ann Bagford, Barbara Beaumont, Al Carr, Anne Edwards, Linda Fisher, Carolyn Gardner, Marilou Gay, Gloria Henry, Anne Hesse, Janet Hollis, Nancy Johns, Barbara Kalm, Jane Knoedel, Alan Nagel, Edward and Anne Perkins, Jim Scheib, Ronnye Wieland, and Jude and Ronda Wilson.

This year's count was organized by Bob Dick. The results were compiled by Chris Edwards. The pre-count planning meeting was cancelled this year due to poor weather. On the day of the count we met for lunch at the North Liberty Community Center, at which time we had 60 species. At the end of the day, many participants gathered at The Brown Bottle Café in North Liberty for a well-deserved meal and compilation.

Nationally, this year marked the 108th 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.

2007 IOWA CITY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT SPECIES LIST

Cackling Goose	6	Sharp-shinned Hawk	5	Belted Kingfisher	2
Canada Goose	876	Cooper's Hawk	6	Red-headed Woodpecker	10
Wood Duck	1	<i>Accipiter</i> sp.	3	Red-bellied Woodpecker	94
Mallard	435	Red-tailed Hawk	121	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2
Canvasback	2	Rough-legged Hawk	8	Downy Woodpecker	159
Lesser Scaup	4	American Kestrel	23	Hairy Woodpecker	34
Common Goldeneye	4	Merlin	1	Northern Flicker	29
Hooded Merganser	2	Wilson's Snipe	1	Pileated Woodpecker	6
Common Merganser	1	Rock Pigeon	230	Northern Shrike	3
Ring-necked Pheasant	55	Mourning Dove	426	Shrike sp.	1
Wild Turkey	74	Eastern Screech-Owl	1	Blue Jay	233
Bald Eagle	107	Great Horned Owl	8	American Crow	1,653
Northern Harrier	6	Barred Owl	4	Horned Lark	6

Black-capped Chickadee	312	American Tree Sparrow	353	Purple Finch	22
Tufted Titmouse	67	Fox Sparrow	1	House Finch	151
Red-breasted Nuthatch	20	Song Sparrow	20	Pine Siskin	10
White-breasted Nuthatch	107	Swamp Sparrow	15	American Goldfinch	202
Brown Creeper	4	White-throated Sparrow	25	House Sparrow	758
Carolina Wren	10	White-crowned Sparrow	2	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	1
Eastern Bluebird	22	Dark-eyed Junco	875	TOTAL SPECIES	65
American Robin	3	Northern Cardinal	687	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS	8,980
European Starling	623	Red-winged Blackbird	3		
Cedar Waxwing	37	Meadowlark sp.	5		
Yellow-rumped Warbler	2	Common Grackle	1		

Field Trip and Meeting Reports

November 18, Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area. It was a chilly morning, with temperatures in the upper thirties to low forties, damp air, overcast skies, and a stiff breeze. Several of our members were off chasing a first state-record Black-tailed Gull at Saylorville Reservoir, and others were as far away as New Zealand and Antarctica. They didn't miss much though, since it was one of the poorest mornings of birding at Pleasant Creek that I've ever had. The company was great, but there weren't many birds to watch.

We scoped the lake from all angles and came up with a grand total of 13 birds – 8 Common Goldeneyes, 3 female Buffleheads, 1 Horned Grebe and 1 Pied-billed Grebe. We saw a few passerines including a small flock of Eastern Bluebirds, but were unable to find a Northern Shrike which is sometimes found in the area at this time of year.

After leaving Pleasant Creek we stopped at Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids. There was a nice flock of Hooded Mergansers, a Great Blue Heron, and a few other typical water birds there.

On the way back to Iowa City, we stopped at Hawkeye Wildlife Area. We noticed several changes that have taken place recently: the construction of a new parking lot along the Babcock Access road and the closing of the final segment of the road to the old parking lot there; the (much-needed) graveling of the

eastern portion of Swan Lake Road leading to Babcock; and the closing of Greencastle Avenue north of the parking lot at Half Moon Lake. No interesting birds were seen until our final stop at Round Pond, where we had a fleeting but diagnostic look at a Northern Shrike.

Participants: Karen Disbrow, Chris Edwards (leader), Roger Heidt, Ken Hunt.

Birds (29 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, American Coot, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal.

– Chris Edwards

January 17, Meeting. Chris Caster gave a presentation that used Ring-billed and Herring Gulls to discuss plumage progression in maturing gulls and then discussed identification of Thayer's and the Kumlien's race of Iceland Gull, primarily in first-winter and adult birds. For more on this topic, see the article on page 7.

We don't usually schedule a January meeting in order to avoid the need for last minute cancellations, which often occur. Thankfully the snowstorm wasn't as severe as anticipated,

the meeting was well attended, and Chris finished up in an hour as promised. The companion field trip scheduled to the Mississippi at Davenport for Saturday the 19th was canceled due to the predicted sub-zero temperatures.

Attendees: Barry Buschelman, Nancy Carl, Chris Caster, Karen Disbrow, Sally Fowler, Jim Fuller, Ken Hunt, Pat Kieffer, Bernie Knight, Kristen Lawton, Mark Oxley, Linda Rudolph, Suzanne Sarlette, Jim Scheib, Bill Scheible, Blossom Shaw, Bernard and Nancy Sorofman, Lisa Spellman, Dick and Gerry Tetrault.

– *Chris Caster*

January 27, Bird Feeder Watch Social hosted by the Allgoods. It turned out to be a beautiful, sunny day. The birding was casual which left time to visit and “catch up” with some long-time friends as well as get to know a few new ones. Did I mention the food, more than I have seen in one place in a long time. There were so many different conversations going on I’m not really sure exactly what was seen so here are the possible good views:

Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, European Starling, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, House Sparrow.

A couple of hours after everyone left, a Cooper’s Hawk chased a dove through our yard, landed in a tree in the next yard, and preened for a long time. Then our chickadee started calling which got the hawk’s attention—I thought oh darn!—but then the hawk flew about a block away and flushed a flock of robins from a tree.

Attendees: Ed and Jean Allgood (hosts), Nancy Carl, Karen Disbrow, Therese Guedon, Bernie Knight, Dick and Nancy Lynch, Sally Moore, Mary Noble, C. Rosemarie Petzold, Blossom Shaw.

– *Ed and Jean Allgood*

February 9, Amana Turkey Walk. Seven birders spent the morning traipsing through the snow. Several areas we had planned to visit were difficult to access due to the 10-15 inches of snow on the ground, so we decided to go to the Kent Park Conservation Education Center first to observe the birds at the feeders. There we saw a typical assortment of winter feeder birds including White-throated Sparrows and a female Purple Finch. From there we drove towards Amana, and along the road in a bush a Northern Shrike was spotted. We stopped at the Nature Trail at Homestead but the road was impassable. At the Amana Lily Lake we observed several Bald Eagles feeding on deer carcasses that had been placed on the frozen surface. We went to the Colony Inn where we were joined by Jim and Sharon Scheib, Bernie Knight, Viana Rockel and her daughter Valissitie Heeren for a lovely breakfast. On the return trip to Iowa City we stopped at Crandic Park, where Canada Geese and Mallards were seen on the Iowa River.

Participants: Barry Buschelman, Karen Disbrow (leader), John and Linda Donelson, Jonni Ellsworth, Therese Guedon, Diana Pesek.

Birds (19 species): Ring-necked Pheasant, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Purple Finch, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

– *Karen Disbrow*

February 21, Meeting. Jason Paulios gave a presentation on birding in Washington. Before moving to Iowa City, Jason had lived in Olympia at the bottom of Puget Sound for five years.

Washington has recorded around 480 species. This high number is due to its highly varied habitat zones, 9-10 eco-regions in all. The Cascade Mountain Range divides the state into a

wet side on the west and a dry side to the east. The Columbia Plateau on the east consists of sagebrush habitat. Sage Sparrow is a typical species there and Sage Grouse can be found. The East Cascades are dry, but White-headed Woodpeckers can be found amongst the Ponderosa Pine. The North Cascades contain Boreal Chickadees and Great Gray Owls. The Skagit Flats, north of Seattle, host wintering Gyrfalcons and large numbers of waterfowl. The Puget Trough contains Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Hermit Warbler, and many water birds like Pigeon Guillemot and Rhinoceros Auklet. Higher elevations host Mountain Quail, White Ptarmigan, Black Swift, and nesting Barrow's Goldeneye. The Olympic Peninsula rainforests hold nesting Marbled Murrelet and the rare Spotted Owl. The rocky coastlines hold Black Turnstone and Wandering Tattler. On the Pacific Ocean you can find Black-footed Albatross, shearwaters, and Tufted Puffins. Additionally, Washington's northwest location makes it a good place to see Asian wanderers like Tufted Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Baikal Duck, and Whooper Swan. And they also get wanderers from eastern North America that a birder from Iowa wouldn't necessarily care about, such as Blue Jay or Black-throated Green Warbler.

If you go in the winter the Skagit Flats can be very rewarding. This is an agricultural area north of Seattle that is noted for attracting raptors. Yellow-billed Loon and all five falcons are often found here. Birders simply drive around to find the raptors often seated atop telephone poles.

Not far from Olympia is the Nisqually NWR. This is a large refuge at the southernmost end of Puget Sound that contains a variety of habitat types. It is recommended that you spend the day and even then you may not be able to cover it all as well as one would like. Barn Owls can be found here, although Jason says that you can even hear their screams around downtown Olympia at night.

West two hours from Olympia is the town of Westport on the coast. Pelagics from Westport are best in September and October. The boat goes about 30 miles out to the Gray's Harbor Shelf. Jason admits he gets sick on a swing, but urges birders to get "the patch" to combat sea sickness—he has tried everything else and nothing has worked. Jason recommends learning the basic shapes of the different pelagic species and then sticking close to one of the spotters on the boat. These spotters are highly experienced volunteers who act as guides simply for a free opportunity to bird. Near Westport is the Ocean Shores Jetty. This is a really good place to find "rock-pipers", but go at lower tides. Shorebirding can be absolutely tremendous along Gray's Harbor, a major staging area in the spring migration for Western Sandpiper and others. Jason recommends birding an incoming tide as this pushes the birds in towards you. Rarities like Bar-tailed Godwit and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper can be seen here—even Bristle-thighed Curlew in El Nino years.

On a depressing note—Jason says that fragmentation of Spotted Owl old-growth habitat is allowing encroachment by Barred Owls, who prefer second-growth edge habitat. The two owls are now interbreeding and biologist fear that the Spotted Owls will soon be genetically swamped. The situation appears so desperate that serious consideration is being given to shooting Barred Owls.

There is a lot to bird in Washington. Planning is important and Jason recommends, "A Birder's Guide to Washington", by Hal Opperman—also "Birds of Washington", by Terence Wahl, Bill Tweit, and Steven Mlodinow (eds.) The state has a Tweepers listserv (birdingonthe.net), but be warned, it isn't always as civil as ours—evidently there is a lack of sunlight in Washington. There is also a Washington Ornithological Society (wos.org) and Bird Web (birdweb.org) sponsored by Seattle Audubon. Westport Pelagics (westportseabirds.org) is the only outfit doing trips, but they are reasonably priced at about 90 dollars and may be the best on the entire west coast. And nothing beats

having a good guide to show you around—Jason is ready to go whenever you are. Thanks Jason for another great presentation. Thanks to Nancy Carl and Sally Moore for the refreshments. And thanks to Jim Scheib for running home for his laptop in time to save the meeting.

Attendees: Nancy Carl, Chris Caster, John and Linda Donelson, Chris and Anne Edwards, Ken Hunt, Dave Kyllingstad, Kristen Lawton, Barb and Roy Mahaffa, Sally Moore, Linda Rudolph, Suzanne Sarlette, Jim and Sharon Scheib, Marcia and Richard Shaffer.

– *Chris Caster*

February 24, Quad Cities. This was a makeup for the trip canceled in January due to extreme cold. It was a good day to be birding as temps were in the low thirties and there was no wind. The first stop was L&D 14. There were a number of Bald Eagles present and a goodly number of eagle watchers armed with cameras. About 50 gulls were roosting on the frozen pond near the auxiliary lock. Most were Herring Gulls, but there was a larger pale gull that caught our attention. Amazingly it turned out to be a Herring x Glaucous hybrid (a Nelson's Gull). This 1st winter bird was larger than all the Herring Gulls, had a dark eye, cleanly bicolored bill, long sloping forehead, pale body, wing coverts and tertials—however the primaries and tail feathers were a medium brown. The primaries were heavily edged in white and they only extended past the tail half as much as the Herring's. In flight the bird had an upperwing pattern similar to Herring with similarly darker secondaries and outer primaries and a paler inner primary panel. The tail band was concolor with the secondaries. There were also a number of gulls circling over the river below the dam, but none were close enough to identify with certainty—although one was likely an adult Thayer's Gull.

We met up with local birder Walt Zurdeeg at L&D 15. Walt spotted one of the local Peregrines atop the US Bank sign, but there weren't many gulls present and all were

Herrings. Walt escorted us south of Davenport to the river south of Credit Island where the water was open. There were a number of Mallards, Common Goldeneye and mergansers there—and a few more Herrings.

Walt lives next to the Fairmount Cemetery, so we headed over there to check for feeder birds. We saw quite a few White-throated Sparrows and Pine Siskins there. Cardinals and chickadees were both singing.

After leaving Walt at home, we headed to the Butterworth Parkway in Moline. There were mostly Ring-billed Gulls over there, which was odd since we hadn't seen any elsewhere. The river contained large numbers of Common Goldeneyes and mergansers, but nothing more. On the way back to I-80 we scanned for waterfowl along Canal Shore Drive and felt fortunate to add a beautiful pair of Hooded Mergansers to our list.

It was a slow day for birding, but a wonderful day to be out.

Participants: Chris Caster (leader), Ken Hunt

Birds (25 species): Canada Goose, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Ring-necked Pheasant, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Herring x Glaucous hybrid, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, American Crow, Blue Jay, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Junco, Pine Siskin, House Sparrow.

– *Chris Caster*

March 4, Burlington. It was 5° F when we left Iowa City at 6:30 a.m. and 12° when we met Chuck Fuller and John Rutenbeck at the Port of Burlington at 8 a.m. The day started sunny and warmed to a high of 38° by the time it ended at 5 p.m. We walked the concrete storm sewer, where we heard a Pileated Woodpecker, and then birded the cemetery in Burlington. We

drove to Green Bay Bottoms where we saw large flocks of Snow Geese with some smaller Ross's Geese, and Greater White-fronted Geese. At Fort Madison we saw the resident male Mute Swan on the river. Then on to Denmark to see the Eurasian Collared-Doves; 10 were spotted and Chuck said 25 were actually resident. We birded along the Mississippi River and stopped at Heron Bend where we saw an Eastern Screech-Owl in a Wood Duck box. We saw groups of ducks on the Mississippi, but not the large rafts of the previous year. There were still ice floes and snow on some of the shoreline. It was a spectacular day that ended at 7 p.m. back in Iowa City.

Participants: Sarah Bissell, Barry Buschelman, Karen Disbrow (co-leader), Trish Ditsworth, Linda Fisher, Chuck Fuller (co-leader), Mary Noble, John Rutenbeck (co-leader).

Birds (77 species): Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Ross's Goose, Cackling Goose, Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Trumpeter Swan, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup,

Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Wild Turkey, Pied-billed Grebe, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Red-tail Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, American Coot, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Mourning Dove, Eastern Screech-Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, Blue Jay, American Crow, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Winter Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Purple Finch, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

– Karen Disbrow

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

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