



Redpoll in Ogden
by Doug Harr

President's Column

by Tim Garner



The flight of birds has long fascinated man. The ability to fly-to soar to the heavens, to traverse great distances-has inspired songwriters (the Gospel/country song *On the Wings of a Dove* comes to mind), poets, (Emily Dickinson wrote that "hope is a thing with feathers"), books (Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* being the obvious choice.) and lame jokes from Borscht Belt comedians (I just flew in from Chicago and boy are my arms tired.)

But what about flightless birds, the ones that don't fly? With the exception of penguins, due to their charm and cuteness, flightless birds tend to get short shrift, and are often equated with undesirable traits such as stupidity (calling someone a dodo, for example), or a vain attempt at avoidance of something (to bury your head in the sand, which of course is a myth about ostriches). Avian oddities they are, curiosities to both the casual and avid birder alike.

Yet an article that the Smithsonian Institution Museum of Natural History published recently caught my eye. Ornithologists have long known that the ancestors of big flightless birds, such as the ostrich in Africa, the rhea in South America, the emu of Australia-arrived after " the prehistoric southern supercontinent Gondwana broke up, which makes their existence across oceans puzzling."

The answer lies in the study of fossilized breastbones. The breastbone anchors the largest flight muscles, which, according to the article, make it crucial for determining flight capability. The researchers were able to determine that the ancient ancestors of ostriches and emus were likely able to fly great distances, like modern day egrets or parrots. The researchers' next question is to find out why these birds eventually lost their ability to fly.

Imagine that! An ostrich or emu flying. It seems utterly implausible, like something a creative author of a science fiction book or a director of a fantasy motion picture with a robust imagination could concoct. It is discoveries like these that reveal what truly remarkable species birds are. And it is a reminder that birding is a hobby that can endlessly educate, fascinate, and be the source of awe and wonder.

2026 Big Bluestem Audubon Society Programs

All programs are held at the
Ames Public Library (515 Douglas Ave.)
Business Meetings: 6:30pm • Programs: 7:00pm

2026 Upcoming Programs

- Apr. 16th: Doug Harr, BBAS Vice President**
Topic: The Wildlife of Sax Zim Bog
- May 21st: Joan Van Gorp**
Topic: The Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
- June 18th: Big Bluestem Audubon Society**
Picnic and birdwatching event. Location TBA
- Sept 17th: Xiaoqing Wu**
Topic: My Birding Trip to Florida
- Oct 15th: Ty Smedes**
Topic: Loon Magic
- Nov 19th: Greg Courtney**
Topic: Birding in Costa Rica
- Dec 17th: BBAS Christmas Party, Ames Public Library**

"This is for the **BIRDS**" trivia

The world has approximately 10,000 species of birds and the ostrich lays the largest eggs of any species. So, looking closer to home, which bird almost certainly lays the largest egg in the United States?

Answer on pg 2

Are you Looking for something fun to do...?

upcoming events

(* red - BBAS affiliated, blue - festivals, green - local enrichments)

- *. Apr 2 - OWLS speaker: A Kaleidoscope of Monarchs: Adventures Among the Butterflies by Johlas-Szalkoeski, Marion County naturalist, 10:30-11:30, McFarland Park
- *. Apr 7 - OWLS speaker: Iowa's Lost History from the Titanic, 11:00-12:00, Jester Park Nature Center
- *. Apr 8 - Campfire Comforts (cooking over an open flame), 5:30-7:30, McFarland Park
- *. Apr 18 - Bird walk with Tyler Morrison, 8:00 am, Dakins Lake Park, Zearing
- *. Apr 18 - Trivia Night, Jethro's in Ames, 6:00-8:00
 - *. Sign-up sheets to help that evening & to form a team
- *. Apr 23 - Spring Wildflower Hike, 1:30-3:00, McFarland Park
- *. Apr 24-26 - Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring meeting, Fayette, Iowa
- *. Apr 25 - Spring Wildflower Hike, 1:30-2:30, McFarland Park
- *. Apr 30 - Spring Wildflower Hike, 1:30-3:00, McFarland Park
- *. May 7 - Spring Wildflower Hike, 1:30-3:00, McFarland Park
- *. May 8-10 - Horicon Marsh Bird Festival, "Everglades of the North", Beaver Dam, Wisconsin (<https://horiconmarshbirdclub.com/bird-festival/>)
- *. May 9 - Birdwalk at the Young property (8:00 am, details later, RSVP)
 - *. Sign-up sheet will be passed around in March & April (or you can email Heather if you will be attending)
- *. May 9 - Birdathon fundraiser
- *. May 9 - Bird Festival (at Wild Birds Unlimited)
- *. May 15-17 - Washington Islands Birding Festival, Wisconsin (<https://wianc.org/bird-festival>)
- *. May 17 - Twin Cities Bird Festival, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota (<https://saintpaulbirdalliance.org/event/twin-cities-bird-festival/>)
- *. May 19 - Evening Walks on the Prairie, 7:00-8:30, Doolittle Prairie, Story City
- *. May 21-23 - Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival, Ashland, Wisconsin (<https://www.visitashland.com/events/chequamegon-bay-birding-nature-festival/>)
- *. June 4 - OWLS speaker: Antarctica by Jim Pease, 10:30-11:30, McFarland Park

Armchair Birding

by Denny Seitz

I spend many days looking out the front window at the porch and the yard. Colors explode! Rose-breasted Grosbeaks vie with Red-headed Woodpeckers and Red-breasted Woodpeckers for access to the seed feeder. Blue Jays push their way in too. Indigo Buntings glean the porch floor for bits the others have spilled from above. Chipping Sparrows with their telltale rufous crowns often join the buntings. Red-winged Blackbirds, iridescent Common Grackles, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Brown-headed Cowbirds also visit frequently. Yellow American Goldfinches and red Northern Cardinals appear, vying for the title "Most Brilliantly Colored Bird."

Our sugar budget is stretched to the limit by ravenous Baltimore Orioles, obvious from their orange and black color scheme. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds drink from the same feeder.

From my vantage point I can view out the back window some tall trees on the shore of the pond. Bald Eagles are seen often, sitting patiently, watching the water intensely. Belted Kingfishers, with their prominent white collars and shaggy heads, plunge in and, if successful, emerge with a meal. Great Blue Herons walk slowly in the shallows, hoping to spy and grab an ill-fated fish or frog. Barn Swallows flit about, grabbing gnats and mosquitoes in midair. Turkey Vultures patrol from on high, looking and smelling for available carrion.

With all this birding, it's no small wonder that I have any time left for reading or puzzling or napping, the usual pursuits of my retirement.

Winter is leaving.
Spring will come in its absence.
Birds arrive to nest.

Are you looking for something fun to do that involves nature?

Check out these local county conservation web sites to see what's going on in your area:

Boone County: <https://www.boonecounty.iowa.gov/conservation/upcomingevents/>

Dallas County: <https://www.dallascountyiowa.gov/501/Conservation>

Hamilton County / ISU Extension & Outreach: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/hamilton/events>

Marshall County: <https://www.marshallcountyiowa.gov/calendar.aspx?CID=22>

Polk County: <https://www.polkcountyiowa.gov/conservation/events/>

Story County: <https://www.storycountyiowa.gov/calendar.aspx?CID=41#changeDateMonthDropDown>

Winter Birding

By Greg Courtney

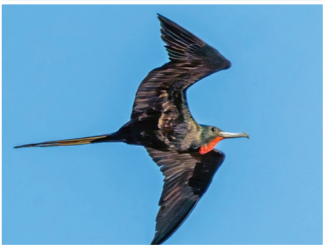
Escape to Mexico. Trip account and photos by Greg Courtney We just returned from a short trip (1st week of February) to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico (PV). It was nice to escape the bitter cold for a few days, especially on day 1 (-5°F when we left Des Moines & 85°F when we landed in PV!). The trip did not include as much birding as I would have liked, but most days I managed to at least briefly search the hotel grounds, adjacent beach, and/or PV Marina. However, the highlights were 2 tours that were mostly dedicated to birding: (1) half-day whale-watching / birding tour to Islas Marietas & (2) full-day trip to Rancho Primavera, in the mountains south of PV. Although the bird diversity at Islas Marietas was less than expected, the islands had some interesting species; e.g., large colonies of Cocos Booby, Blue-footed Booby, Magnificent Frigatebird, and Heerman's Gull. Rancho Primavera was definitely the birding highlight, including 77 species and ≈30 lifers Among the latter were Mexican Squirrel Cuckoo, Boat-billed Heron, Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Military Macaw, Citreoline- and Copper-tailed trogon, Russet-crowned Motmot, Black-throated Magpie Jay, Blue Mockingbird, Yellow Grosbeak, and 5 species of hummers. The total for the week was 115 species and ≈40 lifers. Some exemplar photos...



One of several species of hummingbird at Rancho Primavera, this Broad-billed Hummingbird seemed quite accustomed to birders (which led to many images that needed no cropping!). Although primarily a Mexican species, Broad-billed Hummingbirds can sometimes be seen in the southwestern U.S. (Greg Courtney, 2 February 2025)



A "familiar face" from past visits to the Oregon coast, this Hudsonian Whimbrel was on the beach near the Puerto Vallarta airport. After watching it run up and down the surf line several times, I was able to photograph it capturing a mole crab, which it carried up the beach to within a few feet of me. (Greg Courtney, 6 February 2025)



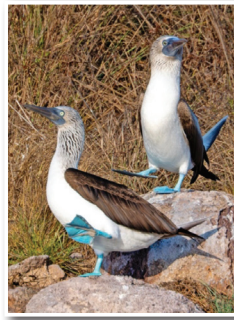
Magnificent Frigatebirds were a common sight along the Pacific coast around Puerto Vallarta. This male (notice the red throat pouch) was photographed at a small off-shore island (Islas Marietas), where there's a resident colony of these birds. (Greg Courtney, 1 February 2025)



Another species found mostly in western Mexico, this Yellow Grosbeak was one of several at Rancho Primavera. They usually feed in fruiting trees, but this male seemed more interested in one of the bird feeders at the ranch. (Greg Courtney, 2 February 2025)



OK, not a bird, but a not-so-distant relative. Green Iguanas are common around Puerto Vallarta (and beyond... e.g., we saw many in Costa Rica in January 2025). This male was one of 3 mature males at our hotel, but it appeared to be the least dominant. This image was captured after another male ("#2") chased it into the water. (Greg Courtney, 2 February 2025)



Islas Marietas also harbored large colonies of Cocos Booby and Blue-footed Booby. This pair of Blue-footed Boobies were "waving" their bright blue feet at each other, an important form of communication and part of their pair-bonding ritual. (Greg Courtney, 1 February 2025)



One of the more bizarre-looking birds, this Boat-billed Heron was hiding along the margin of a pond at Rancho Primavera. These herons usually roost in trees or riparian vegetation during the day and come out at night to feed on amphibians, small fish, and aquatic invertebrates. (Greg Courtney, 2 February 2025)



One of the species on my trip "target" list, Golden-cheeked Woodpeckers are endemic to the Pacific coast of Mexico. They were especially common at Rancho Primavera (where the photo was captured) but we saw (or heard) them at several other locations, including the palm trees at our Puerto Vallarta hotel. (Greg Courtney, 2 February 2025)

E-book Review of: *From Wasteland to WONDER- Easy ways we can help heal Earth in the sub/urban landscape*, by Basil Camu.



If you look out into your yard and wonder, like I do, "What can I plant this year to help the planet and attract birds?," this short E-book is for you.

Author Basil Camu beautifully provides foundational information on WHY we need to change course from the traditional American lawn and landscape, toward a more diverse landscape working with nature. He shows us WHERE we can make a big impact- our yards! That applies whether we are homeowners, or renters with a small patch of ground. And there's a lot of HOW-TO involved as well, so that everyone can get started with fast and easy techniques like planting and pruning trees, or promoting soil bursting with life while avoiding chemical & "maintenance" zones.

For those really inspired, the author goes more in depth, spelling out how to replace a lawn or part of it with native plants, or to create a "pocket forest". Personally, I've been moving my yard in this direction for more than 30 years, but I'm slow. For those just getting started, this E-book will get you planting efficiently in a short time.

Basil Camu is offering a free download of the book at <https://www.leaflimb.com/wonder-download/> as a gesture of gratitude and reciprocity.

Spend a little time with this E-book, and help heal the earth!

Karl Jungbluth

The Great Blue Heron: Witness at the Water's Edge.

*Across the bay, a kayak split the mist.
A heron, cloaked in cobalt reverie,
stood still as time upon a granite stone.
One leg tucked tight, the other poised in thought,
its eye fixed on the glassy, dimpled tide.*

*He waited—not for fish, but for the breath
of something deeper, surfacing at last—
a truth too slow to rise, too sharp to flee.
The river held its secrets just below,
while fog returned to swaddle what we know.*

The Great Blue Heron often appears motionless in shallow water—focused, poised between patience and movement. To encounter a heron in this state is to feel the pace of solitude: space to breathe, to meditate, and to ponder thoughts and ideas carried quietly within. For a moment, the world slows, as if attention itself has been invited—or granted.

The life of the Great Blue Heron is inseparable from water. It depends on healthy wetlands—quiet shorelines, floodplains, estuaries, and shallow rivers where fish and amphibians remain abundant and waters retain ecological balance. Because of this reliance, the heron has long been regarded as an indicator of environmental health. Where herons thrive, wetlands are often functioning well. Where they disappear, the loss usually signals deeper disruption long before it becomes obvious elsewhere.

Yet the heron's significance extends beyond biology.

Across many ancient cultures, herons were regarded with reverence long before modern science provided explanations for natural systems. In Indigenous traditions across North America, herons were associated with wisdom, patience, and self-reliance; their presence often signaled abundance and the assurance of sustenance. In ancient Egypt, herons were linked to the soul and the passage between worlds. In Chinese and Japanese art, folklore, and literature, they appeared as emblems of balance, longevity, purity, and the ability to move between elements—water, earth, and air.

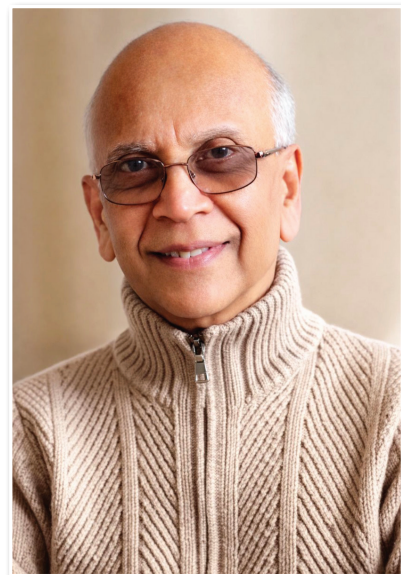
These traditions were not grounded in data, but in sustained observation and lived experience with the natural world. Reverence fostered social cohesion and psychological steadiness at a time when nature's uncertainty could not be explained scientifically. The heron's quiet self-reliance served as an example to individuals and families facing sickness, scarcity, and despair—particularly in the production and gathering of food.

Today, science has given us extraordinary insight into how ecosystems function and why species like the Great Blue Heron depend on ecologically sound wetlands. What science cannot compel, however, is care. No legislation or dataset can require people to notice a bird standing at the water's edge, or to feel responsibility for the habitat that sustains it. Laws can protect wetlands, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on human behavior—on attention, restraint, understanding interdependence, and a willingness to coexist thoughtfully with other forms of life.

As wetlands deteriorate through development, pollution, and climate-driven change, herons often respond quietly. Their absence can speak as clearly as their presence. In this way, the Great Blue Heron becomes both witness and messenger, revealing change not through alarm, but through silence.

Perhaps what is needed now is not a return to ancient belief, but a rational reverence—a way of seeing informed by science and experience, guided by respect. Modern knowledge can explain why wetlands matter; reverence gives us reason to care. Together, they offer a framework for stewardship that serves birds, forests, waters, and people alike.

To watch a Great Blue Heron fish is to observe patience as survival. Nothing holds its attention except the present moment. Nothing is rushed. In that quiet discipline lies a lesson. When we learn to notice the heron clearly, we may also begin to notice the health of our wetlands—and our own responsibilities—more honestly. Care, like balance, begins with attention.



Sepala Weliwitigoda

is a poet and nature writer whose work reflects on birds, wildlife, and environmental awareness through close observation of the natural world. He is a graduate of MIT and previously worked as a communications law and policy advisor with three major law firms. His essays on birds and conservation have appeared in several Audubon and bird-alliance newsletters and blogs, and he is the author of the poetry collections Listen to the Songbirds and Cat the Sovereign.

Sepala found the Big Bluestem Audubon Society while researching Audubon chapters that publish newsletters about birds, wildlife, and conservation. He enjoys reading the work that many local chapters share with their members, and he thought our readers might appreciate a short poem reflecting on birds and the natural world.

Photos courtesy of Gary Parrington, United Kingdom

Boobies of Galápagos

written by Julie Curry

Ever since fifth grade, I had hoped to one day see the iconic seabird, the Blue-footed Booby. That dream carried me to the Galápagos Islands in June, the time when seabirds return to land for their four-month breeding season.



The name "booby" comes from the Spanish word bobo, meaning clown or clumsy. The sailors of 15th century seafaring ships were entertained by the awkward walking gait and acrobatic dives.



Three Species in the Island Cluster

The Galápagos are home to three species of booby: Nazca, blue-footed, and red-footed.



Nazca Booby: Named after the Nazca tectonic plate that helped form the islands, this species is not the same as the masked booby. Nazcas are strikingly white, with dark-tipped wings and a bright orange beak. The largest of the islands' boobies were not breeding at this time.

Blue-footed Booby: Famous for its dazzling feet, which turn vivid blue during courtship around February. By June, when I visited, their feet had softened to a powdery hue as they focused their energies on nesting, feeding and training their young. I was charmed by the dark beaks with a hint of blue. They nest on rocky, flat ground, usually within a circle of stones.

Red-footed Booby: The smallest of the three, these birds were enchanting with their crimson feet and bluer beaks. Unlike their cousins, they perch and nest in shrubby trees, their flexible feet amazingly adapted for gripping branches.

Life on Land and Sea

Watching the boobies on land attend their mates and offspring and fishing over the sea was pure delight. On land, their habitats, coloring and sizes made them easier to distinguish: Red-footed in the trees, Blue-footed and Nazca on the ground or rocky flats. At sea, however, they became harder to tell apart, yet all graceful aerialists and expert divers.

If you have a dream of seeing a favorite bird, don't give up! It only took me 58 years to realize mine.



Badlands National Park



Female Sharp-tailed Grouse

© Doug Hai

A few years ago Doug Harr went on a birding trip to South Dakota. The first photo is the Badlands, and while he was there he saw a female sharp-tailed Grouse sitting beside the park's entrance road.

Donations Made

A \$500 donation was also given to the Izaak Walton League to help pay for the cost of supplies for water quality testing in Iowa. They showed their appreciation in the letter.



1922 2022

A Century of Conservation Leadership

December 7, 2025

Tim Garner
Big Bluestem Audubon Society
P.O. Box 543
Ames, IA 50010

Dear Tim,

On behalf of the Iowa Division of the Izaak Walton League I'd like to thank the Big Bluestem Audubon Society for their recent generous gift of \$500.00. Your contribution will help us to support critical water monitoring efforts across the state of Iowa.

Funding to the University of Iowa's water monitoring program — one of the most important tools we have to track nitrate pollution, algae blooms, and overall water health across the state — was cut by \$500,000. This vital program is now at risk of going dormant. Without it, Iowa loses accountability, communities lose critical data, and our water quality crisis only worsens.

The Iowa Division of the Izaak Walton League is leading the effort to raise the funds necessary to keep this vital program alive. All funds raised go to the University of Iowa's water monitoring network for operations, equipment renewal, and data analysis that keeps Iowans informed and safe.

Thanks again to the Big Bluestem Audubon Society for their generous support that will help the Izaak Walton League to continue advocating for responsible water monitoring to protect public health in our state.

Yours in conservation,

Craig Enneking
Craig Enneking
Treasurer, Iowa Division Izaak Walton League

The Izaak Walton League of America (EIN 42-0687714) is a public charity recognized as tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. This letter serves as your receipt and should be kept with your 2025 tax records. No goods or services were received from the League in exchange for your donation.

Izaak Walton League Pledge:

"To strive for the purity of water, the clarity of air, and the wise stewardship of the land and its resources; to know the beauty and understanding of nature and the value of wildlife, woodlands and open space; to preservation of the heritage and to man's sharing in it."

Sandhill Crane Migration Visitor Tips By Charli Hanway

Download the following two brochures:

https://nebraskaflyway.com/file_download/inline/2f1c2890-9361-426e-9c70-590b2016376b

<https://simplebooklet.com/cranewatchguidekearneynebraska#page=3>

Follow the above brochure maps from Nebraska Fly Way.com and Kearney Crane Watch.com to drive around and see the sandhill cranes eating in the corn fields.

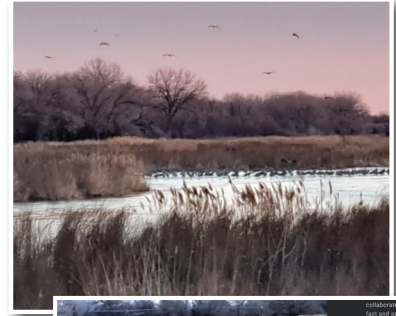
A really good viewing site: CNPRD (Central Platz Natural Resource District) Plautz River Viewing Deck 2 miles south of Interstate 80 Exit 285 (Gibbon)

Get there about 60 minutes before sunrise or sunset because there is limited parking. It has 2 raised viewing decks that look out over the nearby water to watch the cranes fly in at sunset for the night or fly out in big flocks at sunrise in the morning.

Stop by the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary Visitor Center and the Crane Trust Nature and Visitor Center to learn more about sandhill cranes.

Lodging: Kearney has at least 5 different hotels to choose from on Talmadge Street. This was close to I-80 and fast-food restaurants. Make reservations ahead of time.

Take a trip early in the migration season. These photos were taken on a trip March 10-12, 2026. I hope you enjoy your visit as much as I did!



Let's hear from you

We would love to hear about your birding excursions, wildlife events, and outdoor activities that you participate in. Please take lots of photos while you are having fun, and submit them to Heather Sanders for our next newsletter. These will then be forwarded to Karl Jungbluth for our web site and also Tyler Morrison, Olivia DeWitt, and Libby Zaletel for social media and club exposure. We want to hear what adventures are happening around you !

Brekke's Town and Country Store and Wild Birds Unlimited make periodic donations to the Big Bluestem Audubon Society. We are most grateful for their continued support and encourage you to patronize their businesses.

Donate \$5 of your next purchase* of \$25 or more at WBU to BBAS



Big Bluestem Audubon Society



*Coupon must be presented at time of purchase. One coupon per purchase. May not be combined with any other offer. Valid only at Wild Birds Unlimited of Ames.

Expires 12-31-2026

213 Duff Ave. Ames, IA 50010 (515) 956-3145
Monday-Friday 9:30-5:30 Saturday 9-5 Sunday 12-4
www.ames.wbu.com

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Brekke's offers Big Bluestem Audubon Society a donation when bird seed or other bird products are purchased.

Present this coupon with your purchase and a donation will be given to BBAS.

Expires 12-31-2026

March 5 meeting

By Doug Harr and Janet Gebler

Teresa Testroet is in her second year as a retiree. She began her teaching career in Yuma, AZ and ended it 33 years later at Ames High School. Teresa began birding in the early 2000s and photography came shortly after to help in the identification of the birds. Besides Eastern Bluebirds and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, hummingbirds quickly became her favorite and with that she was forced to hone her photography skills.



This photo was taken at the March 5 BBAS meeting and includes Doug Harr, with speaker Teresa Testroet, and her hummingbird cookies. She charmed 30 monthly meeting attendees with stories of her 2024 Big Hummingbird Year! And gave us each a 5 cent coin, to portray hummingbird weight!

General Computer Safety

By Heather Sanders

You all probably know that there are a lot of ways that computer hackers & scammers can get personal information from you. They will email or call you and pose as someone else to get vital information from you. As an organization with a web site and other social media communications, our contact information is "out there". The last few years we have experienced multiple times where someone has posed as one BBAS board member to send a request to another board member. For example, I got an email from "President Tim Garner" a while ago that asked me if I would send a bunch of gift cards to the military. Another time I received "Tim's email" that asked me to pay a bill from an invoice. At the end of the email it said, "Regards, Tim" or "Kindly, Tim". Now, I know that Tim does not speak to me that way, and if he did need an invoice paid, he would have given me the bill directly or called to tell me. After looking at the email address, it was listed as timgarner@_____. Right there was a red flag. It was a gibberish suffix to his address. At other times, Doug, Charli, & I have sent or gotten emails from someone posing as us. And the story goes on and on.

If you receive a message from one of us, please make sure that you are receiving it from us before you open it. I will usually put in the subject line something about an upcoming BBAS meeting, or "important to read BBAS agenda or update". Something like that. My email is very "old school", an aol address. Yes, I'm from the stone age, but I have kept an address that everyone is familiar with and I check a lot (although I also have gmail which I rarely check and is for other purposes). If you get an email from Tim Garner, it will be from mediacom, and if you get one from Doug Harr, it will be a monthly meeting reminder with an explanation of our speakers and it will have a gmail address.

The rest of the officers and board members will probably not be sending out mass emails. If there is a topic to mention or discuss with members, they usually send us the concern and we communicate it. But, if you do receive an email from a board member or someone else from BBAS, just check the newsletter to see if it matches up with the address on your email.

We all want people to feel that they can open emails from us without thinking that our attachments could hack them. Many of the emails I send usually have a calendar of events or an attachment for an upcoming event, and I want to make sure people are reading information from us without feeling nervous to open it.

Fifty Years Ago in Big Bluestem Audubon by Hank Zaletel

In the March, 1976 issue of the club's newsletter, it stated that the objectives of the Ames Audubon were two-fold:

1. To engage in and encourage the enjoyment and study of birds, other wildlife, plants, and the many other facets of nature in order to gain a broader understanding and a deeper appreciation of the world we live in.
2. To engage in educational and similar activities directed toward safeguarding and improving the quality of our natural environment.

The March program featured Wallace and Edna Ogg speaking on "Alaska - Natural History and the Pipeline." In April, Dr. Dean Roosa, State Ecologist, presented "The Red-tailed Hawk in Iowa." and finally in May, "The Pacific Golden Plover" by Ben Okimoto.

Participants for the April field trip were to meet "at Zumwalt Station for a stroll down the nature trail" (Zumwalt Station is located south of Ames near the end of Oakwood Road and State. It was an abandoned railroad line. It is no longer open to the public). The May trip visited Soper's Mill and the Skunk River Trail.

It was noted that Joan Jefferson had retired as editor of the newsletter and that Barney Cook would assume the role.

2025 Ames Christmas Bird Count: Saturday, December 20th

On a day with extensively snow-covered ground but surprisingly mild weather, 28 experts combined efforts to find 76 bird species and nearly 20,000 total birds on the Ames Christmas Bird Count (CBC). In addition to Ames itself, this annual survey encompasses much of the western and central portions of Story County, including Nevada.

Although there weren't any continental rarities in the mix, we tallied a long list of uncommon CBC species, such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-headed Woodpecker, Merlin, Northern Shrike, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Winter Wren, Purple Finch, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird. Many of these birds were near the edge of their usual winter range. In that regard, a Field Sparrow, our first on the Ames CBC since the 1990s, was documented at Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor, which has become a hotspot for native sparrows.

A continuing trend involves the various ducks and geese that bolster our CBC list. Indeed, 30-40 years ago, Canada Geese and Mallards were typically the only waterfowl to be found. But in the 21st century, alongside majestic gatherings of Trumpeter Swans, we expect to encounter multiple goose and duck species lingering at deep-water locations like Ada Hayden Heritage Park and Hallett's Quarry.

Of course, in an era where many native birds are declining, it's heartening to receive reports of conservation icons like Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, and Rusty Blackbird. However, the birds that typically draw the most regional attention are introduced species: Gray Partridge and Eurasian Tree Sparrow (ETSP). Enthusiasts from beyond Iowa's borders message me about where to view these exotics. While partridge sightings usually come from diligent stakeouts in croplands northeast of Ames, birders no longer need to try so hard for ETSP. This close relative of the ubiquitous House Sparrow has recently exploded across Iowa. Just a few years ago, it was rare enough to require documentation. Nowadays, we see ETSP flocks in many spots, especially around rural bridges and culverts.

And now I end with a sincere thank-you to all who participated – on this year's CBC and the past. I hope to see you all again for the 2026 edition, which will be held on Saturday, December 19th. (The Ames CBC is always on the first Saturday of the official CBC season, which spans from December 14th to January 5th.)
Shane Patterson

Boone Christmas Bird Count

Submitted by Karl Jungbluth

The 40th annual Boone County Christmas Bird Count took place on January 3rd, 2026. Results are in! 62 different bird species were recorded within a 15-mile-wide circle centered on the city of Boone. A total of 10,692 birds were spotted for the day. The 62 species ties for the 3rd highest species total for the count, owing to quiet weather good for finding birds, and a whopping 42 people who helped search out and count those birds. Thanks to everyone who helped with the count!

Count weather was chilly and skies were cloudy all day, with temperatures ranging from 21 to 30F. Winds weren't much of a factor, starting out calm and gradually increasing to 8 mph from the southwest and eventually northwest. There was no snow and the ground was frozen hard. The Des Moines River condition was somewhat unusual, with an ice jam in southern Boone County causing high river levels to just above bank full, and a lot of crushed up, uneven ice.

The 42 participants logged 87.25 party hours, with a maximum of 18 field parties and a minimum of 6. The field parties logged 33.5 miles on foot and 542 miles by car. Four groups did some owling before sunrise, logging 4.25 hours and 31 miles owling. We had six feeder watchers adding 340 individual birds to the count total.

You might think, "who cares about all of the miles and hours and parties"? The numbers help National Audubon standardize the bird count totals across the years, allowing them to use CBC data to spot trends in bird populations across the Americas.

Counters found solid numbers of favorite birds like Bald Eagles (106), Eastern Bluebirds (90), the large Pileated Woodpeckers (20) and small Red-breasted Nuthatches (10). On the flip side, lower than normal numbers of bird feeder favorites were seen, like Black-capped Chickadees (129), Tufted Titmouse (14) and Northern Cardinals (170). Likely due to the lack of snow cover, there were no sightings of Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings in the farm fields of Boone County, and only 14 Ring-necked Pheasants.

Birds not often seen on the Boone County count included a Red-shouldered Hawk in Moingona, a Merlin (small falcon), Eurasian Tree Sparrows (numbers are increasing in rural Iowa), a Redpoll, and a couple of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Overall, above average numbers of the following were seen: Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Northern Harrier, Red-headed Woodpecker (49), Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Blue Jay, Winter Wren, European Starling, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, House Finch, Purple Finch (164 is a record for the count by a wide margin), and White-throated Sparrow (62 is another record high by a large margin).

Low numbers of Pheasant, Turkey, Black-capped Chickadee (129 being the lowest number ever recorded on the Boone County CBC by a wide margin), Tufted Titmouse (also the lowest number ever), and Northern Cardinal were recorded.

Count results were reported to the National Audubon Society and to the Iowa Ornithologists Union, where, after review, they can be viewed at christmasbirdcount.org or iowabirds.org/Connections/CBC.aspx. For more information on the Boone County Christmas Bird Count, contact Karl Jungbluth weatherbird58@gmail.com. Next year's count will be on January 2nd, 2027 and everyone is welcome to participate.

*Gary Zenitsky and Katie Cheaney
and a possum in a tree*



--Bird Count numbers on next page--

From the Desk of...

Bluebird Nest Monitor

By Steve Lekwa, retired director from Story County Conservation

It was rare to see a bluebird when I was growing up. We finally attracted a pair to a bluebird house on a post in our pasture - I've been making bird houses ever since. In the 1970s and 1980s, as a ranger-naturalist, I sought out good habitat and placed bluebird houses in the Skunk River Greenbelt. Bluebirds took to the houses quite readily, and bluebird numbers increased in the valley. Nest competitors like house sparrows, starlings and house wrens were also attracted to the new sites. We learned bluebirds needed human help to compete for nest sites, and thus was born volunteer monitoring of nest boxes at various parks countywide.

Nest box volunteers ensure boxes are cleaned and in good repair before nesting begins in early spring. Bluebirds often start looking for nest sites in mid-March. The first nest start at Hickory Grove Park, where I monitor, was in late March this year, but eggs didn't appear for several weeks. The 17 boxes along Hickory rove Park's nest box trail were checked every week until the last baby bluebirds fledged on September 1.

Interesting notes from the 2025 nesting season include persistent House sparrows at Box 16 at the far east end of the park. Their nesting material was thrown out (one of the volunteer duties) weekly for five weeks until they gave up and bluebirds finally moved in. Box 3, east of the beach parking lot, produced three bluebird families - a first for Hickory Grove Park. Twelve fledged. Box 6 was highly contested in May, as bluebirds and tree swallows were both determined to use that box. The male bluebird and tree swallow actually fought in the air and even rolled around on the grass! The bluebirds eventually won and raised two families there.

Finding eggs in a box does not ensure that babies will eventually fledge. I found four dead, nearly-grown baby bluebirds starved in Box 11 in June, just west of the dam, after their parents disappeared. Meanwhile, whole clutches disappeared elsewhere. Raccoons and cats often learn that nest boxes can also be lunch boxes. Coons are amazing climbers and cats can jump to surprising heights. Wrens sometimes pierce bluebird eggs, throw them out and fill the box with twigs for their own nests. Cone-shaped predator guards have been installed on some of the bird box posts to reduce predator losses. In 2025 at Hickory Grove Park, 101 bluebird eggs were laid, 90 hatched and 76 fledged. Countywide, about 70 boxes produced 240 fledged bluebirds from 361 eggs.

Monitoring is pleasant outdoor work. Seeing and hearing birds is always fun; especially if you get to witness a baby's first flight. Some mother birds are so intent on incubating their eggs, they refuse to leave when the box is opened. Others leave as soon as they hear anything nearby. Some defensive parents fly and scold to try and drive you away, while others calmly sit nearby when their boxes are checked.

The 2025 nesting season didn't produce as many young as 2024, but this nest box monitor is already looking forward to 2026!

Boone Christmas Bird Count numbers

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-------|
| Canada Goose | 582 | Black-capped Chickadee | 129 |
| Trumpeter Swan | 17 | Tufted Titmouse | 13 |
| Mallard | 22 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 10 |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | 14 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 190 |
| Wild Turkey | 33 | Brown Creeper | 5 |
| Northern Harrier | 11 | Winter Wren | 6 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 3 | Carolina Wren | 3 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 11 | Golden-crowned Kinglet | 2 |
| Bald Eagle | 106 | Eastern Bluebird | 90 |
| Red-shouldered Hawk | 1 | American Robin | 146 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 72 | European Starling | 4606 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 2 | Cedar Waxwing | 87 |
| Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) | 598 | Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) | 2 |
| Eurasian Collared-Dove | 55 | American Tree Sparrow | 162 |
| Mourning Dove | 15 | Dark-eyed Junco | 651 |
| Eastern Screech-Owl | 8 | Harris's Sparrow | 2 |
| Great Horned Owl | 7 | White-throated Sparrow | 62 |
| Barred Owl | 5 | Song Sparrow | 3 |
| Short-eared Owl | 1 | Northern Cardinal | 170 |
| Belted Kingfisher | 4 | Red-winged Blackbird | 2 |
| Red-headed Woodpecker | 49 | Common Grackle | 2 |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker | 179 | Brown-headed Cowbird | 2 |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 1 | House Finch | 175 |
| Downy Woodpecker | 135 | Purple Finch | 164 |
| Hairy Woodpecker | 97 | Common Redpoll | 1 |
| Northern Flicker | 54 | Pine Siskin | 17 |
| Pileated Woodpecker | 20 | American Goldfinch | 191 |
| American Kestrel | 21 | House Sparrow | 1223 |
| Merlin | 1 | Eurasian Tree Sparrow | 8 |
| Northern Shrike | 1 | Total Individuals | 10692 |
| Blue Jay | 288 | Total Species Reported | 62 |
| American Crow | 155 | | |

Saylorville Christmas Bird Count

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|
| SPECIES | TOTAL | Downy Woodpecker | 153 |
| Field parties | 16 | Hairy Woodpecker | 43 |
| Observers | 40 | Northern Flicker | 160 |
| Car hours | 53.5 | Pileated Woodpecker | 14 |
| Car miles | 541 | American Kestrel | 7 |
| Foot hours | 42.5 | Merlin | 4 |
| Foot miles | 33.8 | Northern Shrike | 2 |
| Owling hours | 6.25 | Blue Jay | 299 |
| Owling miles | 39 | American Crow | 50 |
| | | Black-capped Chickadee | 138 |
| Cackling Goose | 1 | Tufted Titmouse | 6 |
| Canada Goose | 1400 | Horned Lark | 57 |
| Trumpeter Swan | 285 | Golden-crowned Kinglet | 1 |
| Tundra Swan | 2 | Cedar Waxwing | 245 |
| Gadwall | 2 | Red-breasted Nuthatch | 15 |
| American Wigeon | 1 | White-breasted Nuthatch | 133 |
| Mallard | 406 | Brown Creeper | 9 |
| Green-winged Teal | 1 | Carolina Wren | 2 |
| Ring-necked Duck | 3 | Winter Wren | 2 |
| Lesser Scaup | 1 | European Starling | 2899 |
| Long-tailed Duck | 1 | Eastern Bluebird | 187 |
| Bufflehead | 1 | Hermit Thrush | 21 |
| Common Goldeneye | 338 | American Robin | 2324 |
| Hooded Merganser | 5 | House Sparrow | 640 |
| Common Merganser | 2680 | Eurasian Tree Sparrow | 11 |
| Red-breasted Merganser | 13 | House Finch | 156 |
| Ruddy Duck | 1 | Purple Finch | 104 |
| Wild Turkey | 17 | Pine Siskin | 3 |
| Gray Partridge | 12 | American Goldfinch | 181 |
| Ring-necked Pheasant | 313 | Lapland Longspur | 30 |
| Rock Pigeon | 144 | Snow Bunting | 10 |
| Eurasian Collared-Dove | 16 | Fox Sparrow | 11 |
| Mourning Dove | 171 | American Tree Sparrow | 584 |
| American Coot | 2 | Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco | 1134 |
| Parasitic Jaeger | 1 | Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco | 2 |
| Ring-billed Gull | 8 | Dark-eyed Junco | 88 |
| Herring Gull | 1 | White-crowned Sparrow | 24 |
| American White Pelican | 3 | Harris' Sparrow | 9 |
| Golden Eagle | 1 | White-throated Sparrow | 552 |
| Northern Harrier | 16 | Song Sparrow | 44 |
| Sharp-shinned Hawk | 8 | Swamp Sparrow | 11 |
| Cooper's Hawk | 11 | Towhee sp. | 1 |
| Accipiter sp. | 2 | Western Meadowlark | 16 |
| Bald Eagle: Adult | 52 | meadowlark sp. | 23 |
| Bald Eagle: Immature | 84 | Red-winged Blackbird | 99 |
| Bald Eagle: Unknown | 4 | Rusty Blackbird | 13 |
| Red-tailed Hawk | 52 | Common Grackle | 89 |
| Rough-legged Hawk | 11 | Yellow-rumped Warbler | 18 |
| Eastern Screech-Owl | 9 | Northern Cardinal | 324 |
| Great Horned Owl | 22 | | |
| Barred Owl | 18 | Species | 90 |
| Short-eared Owl | 1 | Individuals | 17247 |
| Northern Saw-whet Owl | 1 | | |
| Belted Kingfisher | 2 | | |
| Red-headed Woodpecker | 9 | | |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker | 161 | | |
| Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | 6 | | |

Creating a Replacement Bird Nest

If you find a baby bird in need of shelter, follow these simple steps to build your own emergency nest:

- 1 Find a container.** Shallow boxes, baskets, hanging planters, butter tubs, or yogurt cups can all make excellent bases for your nest. Just make sure to punch holes in the bottom to drain water.
- 2 Line your nest.** Cushion the bottom and sides of your container. Try using grasses, moss, dry paper towels, cloth, torn newspaper, or dryer lint.
- 3 Take precautions.** Consider wearing gloves and sunglasses to protect yourself before handling wildlife. Birds may injure you as they try to defend themselves, and some may carry parasites or disease.
- 4 Place the baby bird inside your nest.** Gently pick the bird up and put it in your container. Birds have a very poor sense of smell and will not abandon an egg or baby handled by humans. If you prefer, you can use a towel or blanket to capture the bird — not only will covering its eyes calm the bird, the towel will help to immobilize it, allowing you to pick it up and secure it safely.
- 5 Keep the bird warm.** If it's cold outside, add a heat source to make sure the bird isn't chilled. Try pouring hot water in a zip lock plastic bag or soft, sealable drink container. Then wrap it with cloth and place it next to the chick.
- 6 Situate your nest.** Secure your new nest next to the original, if possible, with wire or twist ties. Try to give it some cover to avoid sunlight and rain. And make sure to keep it out of reach of predators. Watch to see if parents find the young in the new nest you have created. If the parents don't return within a few hours, contact a wildlife rehabilitator near you.

Audubon

AJG/RS/CMC

I Found a Baby Bird! ...Now What?



B-I-R-D-A-T-H-O-N Fundraiser !

Upcoming annual Birdathon fundraiser is Saturday, May 9. This is a major weekend for bird migration which is a perfect time to get out to see all the beautiful migrating species. While you are out and about, why not help raise money for our annual birdathon fundraiser, with money going towards local conservation projects.

Just find some people who will be on your team & get a rule sheet either on the Big Bluestem web site or by emailing Heather Sanders (hsanders0519@aol.com). Before May 8, ask friends, colleagues, family members to sponsor you. They may offer so much per bird, per species, category of bird, or a set amount they will give. Then anytime on May 9, go out with your team and identify the birds you see. Tally up your numbers and how much your sponsors will owe you. Collect the money and send to Heather Sanders at PO Box 543, Ames, IA. 50010. Last year we earned about \$5400 & our highest to date was \$5900. Our goal this year is to earn \$7000 for conservation. If you would like to participate, but don't have a group to form, let a board member know and you can combine with another group. You will learn so much from each other if you meet new people. If you can't participate in the birdathon, please consider donating individually to help meet our goal this year. All donations can be mailed to our PO Box listed above.

Thanks much for all you do!

Wild Birds Unlimited Spring Birding Festival

Submitted by Heather Sanders, event sponsored by Todd Burris

Once again, there will be a super fun Birding Festival at the Wild Birds Unlimited on Saturday May 9. They are located at the strip mall near the movie theater and Jethro's on S Duff. There will be several booths there with conservation displays and activities for kids. Also, some speakers will share their expertise on birding. In between the speaker, explore the area by going on some of the FREE birding adventures. Since this is World Migratory Bird Day, you can participate in our Birdathon fundraiser and count your sightings for your team while exploring with others. While you are visiting each activity, stop in the store to see what types of awesome products are in there. This is one event you won't want to miss !

To find out more about World Migratory Bird Day go to:
<https://www.migratorybirdday.org/>

OFFICER SPOTLIGHT

Tim Garner *(President & Speaker Coordinator)*

I am currently teaching social studies at Ankeny Centennial High School in Ankeny, IA., where I have been employed since 1998. I plan to retire at age 65 in 2028. Besides birding I have a number of hobbies, which include railroading, stamp collecting, reading, and traveling. I am always up for a visit to a museum as well, as I love to learn. I volunteer at the Bethesda Community Food Pantry in Ames, too. The world is just a very interesting place to me. And I am seldom bored.

I came to birding late in life. My late mother loved birds, and one of my regrets is that I did not take up this hobby until many years after her death. Heather and I decided to attend a meeting of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society in 2016, and the members greeted us warmly. We started attending the monthly meetings, and then took part in BBAS sponsored field trips, and we were hooked. Birds are these amazing creatures—descendants of dinosaurs—whose plumage and songs bring such beauty to this world—and whose migratory habits put me in awe. It is no wonder that birds have inspired humans for as long as humans have been a species.



Doug Harr *(Vice President & Communications)*

I spent more than 38 years as a professional Wildlife Biologist. My primary hobby has always been photography of birds, other wildlife, and scenic nature. I began birding at age 9, on a marshy lake alongside where I grew up in central Minnesota. My lifetime goal has been to help everyone learn about birds and all of nature.

Heather Sanders *(Treasurer, Membership Chair, Newsletter Editor)*

I studied Biology as an undergrad at Western Illinois University, focusing on Zoology, Chemistry, and pre-medicine. I have always been fascinated with animal behavior and their environment, besides the anatomy of various species. Unfortunately I was not able to take an ornithology class in college because of the way the courses were arranged - once every four semesters. However, I was able to take Mammalogy, Ecology, and Animal Behavior courses, so I am very familiar with mammals. Although I never did continue my career in the field of medicine nor get a job in the conservation department, I did live and breathe biology for the next 23 years by teaching it at the middle and high school levels.



Nobody ever stops learning concepts and this is what I love spending my free time doing - taking courses, attending speakers, and learning new science content. I'm constantly watching science programs because of the fascinating research and discoveries that are made to improve problems on the planet. My last 4 years of teaching involved adding other interesting courses to my roster such as Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Geology, Environmental Science, and Forensics. No matter what area of science I am learning about, I am excited and glued to that lesson. Because I love the outdoors, I choose my travel destinations based on what types of outdoor exploration I want to see. I go on vacations to see flora and fauna and be adventurous outdoors such as when I went swimming with sharks over the Great Barrier Reef, or did skydiving over the beautiful mountains in New Zealand. I don't plan vacations so I can visit one church or museum after another. Getting outdoors helps us understand the natural world better and should be taught to upcoming generations.



In 2016, I decided I wanted to learn more about birds of North America (as I know about the Australia and New Zealand birds), so Tim and I attended the BBAS meeting. Everyone there was so friendly and we enjoyed attending several of the bird walks and hearing speakers, so we decided to join BBAS. To this day, attending BBAS meetings is my highlight of each month.

In my free time I like to do arts and crafts projects, travel the world, and volunteer in Story County - I help with special projects at Reiman Gardens and the RSVP senior citizens program.

Icon of the wetlands, Iowa's trumpeter swan population continues to grow

Submitted by Hank Zaletel

Iowa's trumpeter swans attempted a modern-day record 158 nests in 2025, which is an increase of 17 percent over 2022. The nesting data is from the most recent statewide observation survey completed in December.

"It's a neat story about the restoration. We spent a lot of time and effort to get the population established and its really taking off right now," said Orrin Jones, state waterfowl biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Recovery has taken time, but is a true modern-day conservation success story, he said.

The restoration effort was supported by the Iowa DNR's Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund; a constitutionally protected fund where hunting, fishing and trapping license fees are deposited and used, in part, to protect, restore, or manage fish and wildlife.

The largest waterfowl in North America, trumpeter swans have come a long way since the 1930s, when conservation efforts began in order to protect small populations in Montana and Alaska.

Native to Iowa, trumpeter swans were once as widely distributed as Canada geese, but had been extirpated by the early 1880s. Early and aggressive reintroduction efforts in the Midwest by Minnesota and Wisconsin, followed a few years later by Michigan, and then Iowa, sought to return these iconic waterfowl to their traditional place on the prairie wetlands.

Iowa began with a restoration plan in 1993, followed by the first release of four swans in 1994. The plan included monitoring the swans to evaluate reintroduction success. The DNR released a total of 1,218 swans, ending in 2022.

Iowa's first trumpeter swan nest in the modern era was in 1998, in Dubuque County, followed two years later by one in Winnebago County. Nesting attempts increased slowly following the growing number of released swans. After averaging in the mid-50s for nearly a decade, nest attempts jumped to more than 120 in 2020, followed by nearly 140 in 2022.

"Reintroduction has been successful and we continue to monitor the population as time goes on," said Taylor Ballard, wildlife research technician with the Iowa DNR's Clear Lake office. "We ask our staff to record any observations of swans – active nests, swans with a brood – let us know if they see a successful nest and the number of cygnets that nest has, which gives us our number of cygnets of per successful nest."

Ballard said the active nests average 4.4 cygnets, or young swans, which is helping grow the local population. Of the 158 active nests, Ballard said 98 were known to be successful in hatching.

Population surveys begin in mid- to late-April, with peak surveys from May to September. Iowa DNR staff, along with staff from local county conservation boards, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and private citizens check areas with preferred habitat or where nests have previously occurred.

The data is passed along to the Mississippi Flyway Council, who coordinates management with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The birds are doing best on the large semi-permanent wetlands in the prairie pothole region and their trend is continuing to expand in abundance, like we thought it would," said Jones. "It takes time for swans to reach maturity but once they begin nesting they are productive and we have vacant habitat available for them."

The Iowa DNR has captured and collared cygnets as part of a survival study. Swans live as a family unit with parents providing protection and teaching the young skills needed to survive. More than 70 percent of cygnets that fledge in September will survive to March.

"Trumpeter swans are emblematic of healthy wetland systems, clean water – and are a way to tie a species to the habitat," Jones said. "It's a neat story about the swan restoration – and we're seeing a similar response with the sandhill cranes – they're expanding, too – and likely will increase until population reaches the carrying capacity of the habitat."

Iowa swans, along with swans from Minnesota and Wisconsin, are part of the interior population of trumpeter swans. Some of these birds follow traditional winter migration to Missouri and Arkansas, while others will remain in Iowa, to be joined by swans from up north. The 2025 midwinter waterfowl survey recorded more than 4,700 swans in Iowa.

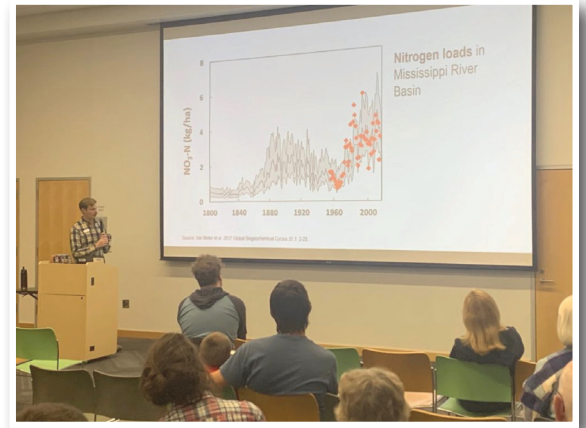
While the population has been increasing, threats do remain. Collisions with powerlines is a major problem, as is ingesting lead. In the last few years, avian influenza has claimed some swans, as well.

**Media Contact: Orrin Jones, State Waterfowl Biologist, Iowa
Department of Natural Resources, 641-357-3517 or
orrin.jones@dnr.iowa.gov ; or Taylor Ballard, Wildlife Research
Technician, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 641-357-3517
or taylor.ballard@dnr.iowa.gov .**

Adam Janke, with board members Janet Gebler, Tyler Morrison, Tim Garner, and Heather Sanders

March 19 meeting
Submitted by Tim Garner

Iowa State University professor Adam Janke spoke to the Big Bluestem Audubon Society on March 19. His topic covered wetlands habitats, and their impacts on wildlife, in particular birdlife. There were 36 people who attended this excellent presentation.



Better Birding Book Club

Submitted by Judy Levings

We know you all like birds, but if you also like reading you may want to participate in the Dogged-Ear Book Store's Better Birding Book Club starting this Tuesday at 5:30 PM, March 24.

The first selection is:

What an Owl Knows by Jennifer Ackerman.

It's a great book-you will love all the owly-detail.

The club will meet on Tuesdays at 5:30 pm for 4 months at the bookstore.

The other dates and selections are:

April 28 -Bird City by Ryan Goldberg

May 26 -Bird Cottage by Era Meyer

June 23 -Kingbird Highway by Ken Kaufman

More details can be found here:

<https://dogearedbooksames.com/book-clubs/better-birding-book-club>

In Memoriam

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society acknowledges the death of Ann Johnson, our website designer, who passed away on March 23. We send our condolences to her family.



International Festival of Owls in Houston, Minnesota

Submitted by Heather Sanders and Tim Garner

On Friday March 6, Heather Sanders and her mom Mary Lou drove four hours northward to southeastern Minnesota where the International Festival of Owls was going to occur. For those of you that have never been to any kind of avian festival, they are super fun and very educational. This 2-day festival involved a lot of different activities and presentations involving owls. On Saturday, they started off by listening to presenters from the Illinois Raptor Center in Decatur talk about the owls that have been rehabilitated, from any type of accident from cars, to falling out of a nest when only a few days old. The morning presentation was excellent, as they showed off the Snowy, Barred, and Barn Owls.



In the afternoon, they met up with Tim Garner who was not expecting to see them at this festival. Although they knew he was going to be there, he did not know they were going to be there until he went in to sit down for the afternoon presentation.

When he turned around, they got one surprised look from him.



Later that afternoon the Raptor Center featured the Great Horned Owl, along with the Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, and three colors of Eastern Screech Owls.



Tim Garner, Heather Sanders, and Mary Lou Sanders enjoyed the festival with the owl Hooston.

Throughout the day, some of the other activities for the public to do included seeing several vendors' owl-themed crafts, making an owl nesting box with Boy Scouts, dissecting owl pellets, or visiting the International Owl Center in town. There were also crafts for kids to participate in.

Late that afternoon we attended the World Owl Hall of Fame Award Presentation, where a few scientists and owl advocates received an award for the work that they do with owl research. Two of these award recipients were Jacqueline Emery and David Lei who worked close-up with Flaco, the beloved owl that made headlines in 2023 when it was released into the wild in New York. Flaco was a Eurasian Owl who was living at the Central Park, New York Zoo from 2010-2023 when it was released by a vandal. While the entire city was searching for him, Jacqueline and David found him and were monitoring his well-being. Their attachment to this bird along with all the residents of Manhattan led to a year-long love affair with Flaco, a Eurasian Owl with a 6-foot wingspan. The zoo and residents were worried that Flaco would not have the skills to be able to survive in the wild because he had not developed hunting or flight abilities so did everything possible to catch him.

Jacqueline and David kept track of his whereabouts daily, hoping to return him to the zoo, but they wanted to make sure he was surviving on his own. Flaco was determined to not be caught and to live in the wild on his own, and ironically he was fairly successful at it. Then one day he was found dead 12 months later. Although evidence showed that Flaco had hit a building which killed him on the spot, a necropsy was performed and indicated that he had high levels of rat poisoning and pigeon herpesvirus - likely caused from eating poisoned rats and feral pigeons. Avian viruses can lead to inflammation of internal organs, weakening birds and making them more susceptible to building collisions. The virus was severe enough to be fatal even without a collision. To learn more about the detailed life of Flaco, you can read about his legacy at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flaco_\(owl\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flaco_(owl)) Jacqueline and David were the keynote speakers after their award was given, sharing their detailed accounts of Flaco's amazing encounters. They wrote a coffee table book entitled *Finding Flaco*, which chronicled the life of Flaco, and it features color photographs and stories that delighted New Yorkers. We had the honor of talking to these authors and purchasing a signed copy of their book.

Tim and Heather would recommend any interested birder to attend the International Festival of Owls in Houston, Minnesota, which is about a 3 1/2 hour drive from Ames, and which takes place the first full weekend in March every year. The owl-themed event brings in speakers from around the nation and around the world, and offers interesting lectures and presentations featuring live owls. It was a weekend well spent, and the cost of attending the festival and lodging will not break one's budget.



NEW MEMBERS

OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



Who's New?

Big Bluestem Audubon Society would like to welcome these new members:

Desiree Gunning - Joined Dec 8, **Rachel Larabee** - Joined Dec 18

Kathleen Mullin - Joined Dec 22, **Patricia Diersen** - Joined Dec 27

Kirk Moloney - Joined Jan 7, **David Hoffman** - Joined Jan 14

Amanda Thomas - Joined Jan 20, **Kenneth Huffaker** - Joined Feb 3

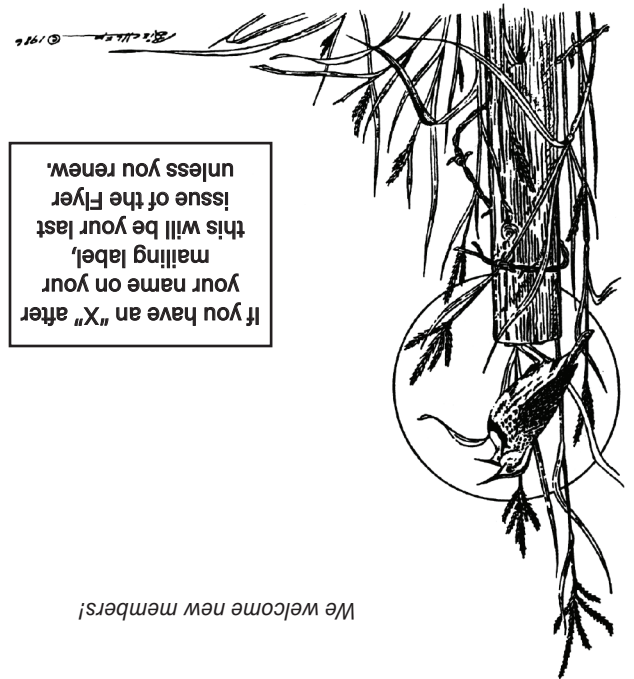
Jordan Williams - Joined Feb 12

We are so glad you are a part of our organization!

New members, you will receive the first two editions of the Big Bluestem newsletter via US mail. After your second edition, if you would like to continue receiving the paper version, email Heather Sanders (hsanders0519@aol.com) and request to be put on our mailing list. Otherwise, the newsletter can be found on our web site: <https://bigbluestemaudubon.org/BBAS/Newsletters.aspx>

The mission of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society is to enjoy the observation and study of birds and natural ecosystems, contribute to their conservation and restoration, engage in educational activities to benefit humanity, and gain a broader understanding and deeper appreciation of the world in which we live.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

We welcome new members!

Big Bluestem Flyer
Tim Garner, president
Big Bluestem Audubon Society
PO Box 543
Ames, IA 50010-0543