

BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER Volume 59 | Number 1 | Sept./Oct./Nov./Dec. 2023
<http://bigbluestemaudubon.org/>



Yellow-throated Vireo
Photo by Doug Harr



Atlantic Puffin, Maine
Photo by Doug Harr

2023 Big Bluestem Audubon Society Programs

All programs are held at the
Ames Public Library (515 Douglas Ave.)
except the December Christmas party.

Business Meetings: 6:30pm

Programs: 7:00pm (except the December party)

Sept. 21st:

Todd Burras and Ty Harms.
Topic: Chimney Swifts in Ames

Oct. 19th:

Tim Gedler. Topic: Purple Martins in Iowa

Nov. 16th:

Diane Birt, Topic: Outdoor Alliance of Story County

Dec. 14th:

Christmas Party at McFarland Park.
Meeting begins at 6 p.m.

Jan. 18th:

Jim Pease. Retired ISU Extension Instructor
Topic: Paddling for Critters

Feb. 15th:

Nick Baumgarten, Iowa DNR
Topic: The Private Lands Program

Mar. 21st:

Jonathan Harris, Postdoctoral Student at ISU
Topic: Iowa's Bird Diversity Through Time

Apr. 18th:

Ty Smedes. Topic: TBA

May. 16th:

Topic: TBA

Twenty Years Ago in BBAS

September/October 2003 | Hank Zaletel

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 we live in.

In a letter to the membership, President John Pohlman thanked the following people who served and retired from the board the previous year: Donna Flanagan, Treasurer and Karl Jungbluth, Board Member. Incoming officers were: John Pohlman, president; Linda Thomas, vice president; Bruce Ehresman, secretary; and Ed Carbrej, treasurer. Board members included: Breanne Marpe, Jeff Nichols, Maridel Jackson, Wolfgang Oesterreich and Matt Wetrich.

The spring birdathon raised \$4376. The winning team of Jeff Nichols, Mary Dodd, Wolfgang Oesterreich and Matt Wetrich won the event spotting 137 species.

The September program featured Marlene Ehresman speaking on "Protecting the Land for Neotropical Migrants." In October, Thomas Benson spoke on "Bird Responses to Habitat Restoration in the Iowa River Corridor."

Field trips in September went to the Pelican Fest at Jester Park, Snake Creek Marsh, Lakin Slough and Bays Branch. The October trip ventured to Diversity Farms (Home of SOAR) near Dedham in Carroll County.

Notice to New Members of Big Bluestem Audubon Society Only:

We are sending you this printed version of our BBAS newsletter for the first two issues after you have joined the National Audubon Society or become a local member. We have now converted to a mostly electronically-delivered newsletter to save costs and be more green. If you want to receive a printed version, please notify me. Otherwise, you will receive the online version. If you supplied your email address upon joining, we will send you a notice and link for the newsletter each time a new version is available.

Thanks,
Tim Garner
timgarner@mediacombb.net



BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY
OF CENTRAL IOWA

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Common Yellowthroat
Photo by Doug Harr



Great Egret
Photo by Doug Harr

NOTICE
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Vacancy-Help Wanted!

The office of President of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society is vacant. If anyone is interested in assuming this office, please contact Tim Garner at 515-451-0960 or via e-mail at timgarner@mediacombb.net, or Doug Harr, Vice President of Big Bluestem Audubon Society via email at dnharr@gmail.com. No experience in holding an executive position is necessary, nor is it necessary to be an expert birder.

Membership Application Form

☐

New member of the National Audubon Society. You will receive the *Audubon* magazine, the *Big Bluestem Flyer*, membership card. - \$20

Please make your check payable to *National Audubon Society* and include "Chapter Code H-57" on the check

☐

Subscribe to the *Big Bluestem Flyer* for one year and participate in some Big Bluestem Society Activities - \$10
Restrictions are that you will not be a National Audubon Society Member or have voting privileges, and you cannot be an officer or committee chair.
Please make your check payable to *Big Bluestem Audubon Society*.

Send your check and this coupon to:
Big Bluestem Audubon Society
P.O. Box 543, Ames IA 50010

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

*Please do not use this form for renewals
to the National Audubon Society.*

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THE EDITOR'S COLUMN August, 2023

May and early June are my favorite time of the year. It is a time of beginnings, of new life, and new starts in life. I am a high school social studies teacher, and with the end of the school year approaching, I have the privilege of attending graduation parties, in which I can meet parents and talk with the graduates about their post high school plans, and take in all of their accomplishments and interests, as evidenced by the awards, certificates, honor cords, photos, varsity letters, and other memorabilia on display. I love attending commencement as well, for it is one of the relatively few times in one's life when an individual knows at the time of the event that his or her life will be different going forward. A wonderful rite of passage, and it is deeply satisfying for me to be a part of that ceremony as a faculty marshal.

But nature also gives me (all of us really) so much to relish. On Father's Day I took a bike ride around my Ames home. I spotted a buck white tail deer, so oblivious to humans that I was able to watch it munch on clover less than 25 feet away. I had never gotten such a good look at the stage of development when the antlers were covered in velvet. I also spied a doe with her fawn, both of which were much warier of me, with the fawn, still in spots, bounding away, with the white tail flashing up and down, the doe following behind.

Earlier in the week I went looking for monarch butterfly larvae. The numbers of these magnificent insects have declined significantly the last 25 years, so I felt especially fortunate to have found 7 larvae, which, if all goes well, I will be able to raise from larval stage to pupation, and then see them emerge as monarch butterflies. The process has fascinated me since I was a boy, and always holds me in awe as I witness what for me is the miracle of life.

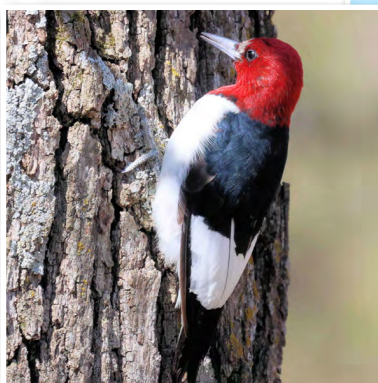
And the birding piece de resistance also occurred on Father's Day, about dusk. As I was returning home from the bike ride, I noticed 2 large birds winging their way to a dead tree. My first impulse was to think that they were hawks, but I quickly realized they were barred owls, one adult and one juvenile, this year's hatch, not too long past the fledgling stage. The adult flew on to another tree, but the juvenile, seemingly intrigued or perhaps annoyed at my presence, stayed put. It repeated a shrill call, stared straight at me, and bobbed and weaved its head in a circular manner repeatedly, as if to say "Who are you? And why are you staring at me?" I was mesmerized. This went on for several minutes until the fledgling had enough, and flew away, but not before making a pass at a cottontail rabbit. A practice run for the day when this raptor would use its hunting skills to procure a meal.

I share these things with you as a humble attempt to remind all of us about the beauty of nature, the rhythm of the seasons, and the stages of life which are all around us. By the time you read this column, in August or September, the high school students will have entered the next stage of their lives, embarking on a new job, a stint in the military, or furthering their education. The monarch butterflies, at least 2 or 3 generations removed from the ones that emerged from the chrysalis in June, will be starting their journey to Mexico. The fledgling barred owl will likely be on its own, catching its own prey and fending for itself. And those song birds, whose pleasant melodies charmed us earlier in the summer, will be starting their migration as well.

Embrace these seasons of life. They ebb and flow like an ocean tide. And in so doing, they give us all a sense of cadence, balance, and happiness.

Yours truly,

Tim Garner
newsletter editor



Indigo Bunting
Photo by Doug Harr

Red-headed Woodpecker
Photo by Doug Harr

Story County Conservation Increases Hunting Opportunities

WHAT - SCC will offer a reservable archery (bow or crossbow) blind for hunting whitetail deer at Sleepy Hollow this upcoming fall. A new, ADA accessible blind will be available on this site. The blind will hold one hunt per day by a registered individual only. Registration info will be found on our website later this summer. The site will not be open to general public hunting.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE - Disabled or youth + mentor archery hunters only. To participate, the youth must be accompanied by an adult age 18 or older. Mentored opportunities with SCC staff will be available.

WHEN -

- Youth Archery: 09/16/23 - 10/01/23
- Archery, Early Split: 10/01/23 - 12/01/23
- Archery, Late Split: 12/18/23 - 01/10/24

HOW - This opportunity was brought forward through generous donations from the following supporters:

- Izaak Walton League of Ames
- Story County Pheasants Forever
- Big Bluestem Audubon Society
- Outdoor Alliance of Story County
- ITC Midwest



Please watch for updates closer to season opening on SCC's social media and at www.storycountyconservation.org.



Eastern Phoebe
Photo by Doug Harr



Swainson's Hawk
Photo by Doug Harr

PHOTOS AND CONTENT FOR NEWSLETTER BY TIM GARNER

Please submit any photos of birds, wildlife, habitat, or events that you would like to be included in the flyer newsletter to Tim Garner (timgarner@mediacombb.net). We are also looking for short content items and announcements.

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society promotes fostering an inclusive, equitable, and diverse climate and culture, where all members of our organization can thrive. We welcome people of all backgrounds and seek to create a membership that is inclusive of diverse cultures, backgrounds, and life experiences while enhancing a culture of respect and civil discourse. We aspire to attract and retain a diverse membership.

Native Plant "Plugs" - They Work!

By Karl Jungbluth

After emerald ash borer and the derecho of 2020 cleared trees from our yard bordering Ledges State Park, we suddenly have space to grow sun-loving native plants where previously it was mostly shady. Even though I've been landscaping for the birds for 29 years, I still feel like a novice and like I'm just getting starting learning to grow native. Many Big Bluestem members have vast experience growing native plants, but I hope that some of you find this account enjoyable.

Our yard and the adjoining 2 acres have a long history of grazing and weedy exuberance. My goal is to have some nice-looking areas where we could see and enjoy the native plants, invite in the birds and insects, but still maintain some sense of order. Easier said than done, especially since I've used very few chemicals to control anything over the past three decades.

I clearly wasn't up to speed on significant trends in landscaping with native plants, so I needed to study up. I was quickly connected to Doug Tallamy and "Bringing Nature Home". Tallamy advocates feeding the whole food web with native plants, the plants feed the caterpillars and the caterpillars feed the chickadees and baby birds. It makes sense to me. The chain is broken when we plant shrubs and flowers from other continents around our house, or spray our lawn till it's nothing but bluegrass.

I decided to go all in and steal about 3000 square feet from the lawnmower and go with native plants in parts of the front and back yards. If you aren't interested in buying a bunch of books, this website will provide you with hours or days of learning, enjoyment and encouragement. <https://www.homegrownnationalpark.org/>

Enter plant plugs

My choice was to use native plant plugs, rather than seeding. I'm ensured a wide diversity of species and a relatively quick start to the new beds. It worked! The plugs are 1-2 inches across and 3-4 inches deep, sometimes sloping to an open bottom. The plugs were planted in May, and most have grown to unbelievable size and some are flowering and attracting bees and butterflies and hummingbirds.

To me, the relatively-local availability of plugs is a real game changer. Now, anyone can grow natives without breaking the bank, from a few potted plants on the deck, to a nice garden bed in the yard. Each variety can be chosen and placed where you want. If the neighbors are worried about a messy look, the plugs can be planted like a traditional flower bed with mulch in between. The plants will grow quickly and fill in the spaces. If you prefer a more natural habitat function, more species can be planted closer together with more competition. I keep a clean edge to the beds, which makes it look like you know what you're doing even if you don't!

My plugs came from four different sources: 1) I ordered and picked up plants in person from Blooming Prairie Nursery near Carlisle and from Allendan Seed near Winterset. I highly recommend both nurseries and 95% of the plants are growing extremely well. 2) We visited family in Kansas City and purchased plugs with them at a huge native plant sale. It was a happening! And heartwarming to see native plants taking off in public demand. Great plants too. If you see a native plant sale, give it a try. 3) I ordered Prairie Dropseed grass and sedges in bulk from online seller Izel Native Plants. These arrived heavily rooted and in good shape after shipping. Beware: Three years ago I ordered a couple of flats of plugs and they were destroyed in shipping. Best to buy "local" and pick them up yourself. 4) I seeded some plugs myself late in the winter, and nursed them to planting size, with mixed success. Some species, like sedges and Prairie Smoke, never sprouted despite following cold "stratification" guidelines. Others, like Little Bluestem and milkweeds are doing well. Still, it's a long process over many months, so there is a reason why good quality plugs cost about \$4 each! Plants in the sunflower family seem easy to start. Add in some transplants from generous friends, and the native garden is growing!



Native Plant "Plugs" - They Work! - cont.

Prepping the soil for planting is a big decision and one I didn't take lightly. The lawn needs to be killed to eliminate competition with the new native plants. The lawn can be smothered, or one could dig out the grass and till the soil repeatedly to exhaust some of the weed seed bank. Both methods can take a year or two, leaving a big bare spot in the yard. A sod cutter can be used, taking out the grass, weeds and most of the seeds near the surface. Some soil is lost, but most native prairie type plants don't need the rich loamy humus like traditional perennial flowers do.

The fourth method is the one I chose, to spray out the lawn and weeds with glyphosate vegetation killer. This isn't for everyone, and after trying it, I would try the sod cutter next time. Glyphosate breaks down quickly in the soil, but it is still a chemical. I chose the method because my "lawn" contains a lot of smooth brome grass, which spreads by rhizomes below sod cutter level, plus noxious weeds that never quit like Creeping Charlie. Good news, the sprayed-out lawn left behind a rich soil with decaying plant matter that the new plants are loving. Bad news, the Creeping Charlie and clover keep coming back. And despite ground cover from the dead old lawn, a lot of new weeds and crabgrass keep coming, so I've been weeding to keep it from going to seed.

Rather than trying to mulch between all of the new plants (spaced roughly 2 feet apart), I've been following the advice of another great author Benjamin Vogt (Prairie Up). He recommends covering the soil with "green mulch"- lower growing native plants that shade out the weeds or less desirable native plants. In the sunnier spots with good soil, I can already see this concept working. I've let the native violets grow, and scratched in seeds of Side Oats Grama between the plug locations in late May. The grama grass sprouted well and is filling in, and some is already flowering! I quickly learned that a bunch of rabbit fence was needed. When started in potting soil or good compost, a native plant tastes like candy to a baby bunny. In a year or two I'll take down the fence, but early on I didn't want the plants stunted.

Being that we live in an historically edge-of-woodland/savanna habitat, I have replanted trees with several species of oaks. Doug Talamy says "let it be an oak" because they support hundreds of species of caterpillars and insects that feed the wood warblers. I've also interspersed native shrubs like hazelnut, ninebark and dogwood, along with understory trees like ironwood and choke cherry. These will eventually fill in and shade out the prairie plants- but it's a transition I'll enjoy watching. Thanks for reading, and if you aren't ahead of me in growing native plants from plugs, give it a try!

Karl Jungbluth

Ledges State Park Happenings

By Karl Jungbluth

Ledges State Park celebrates its 100 th Anniversary in 2024 with events to be announced in 2024. Plenty of good things will be happening yet this year at the Park.

- On September 14 th a Forestry Field Day will be hosted by the Iowa Woodland Owners Association and ISU Extension. Learn new things about Ledges State Park and woodland management techniques from the experts. Advance registration is required. • <https://naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/iowa-woodland-owners-association-fall-forestry-field-day-2>
- An ambitious invasive shrub removal project is underway for the benefit of native habitats in the park. The Friends of the Ledges group has secured a number of grants from local foundations, INCLUDING a generous donation from Big Bluestem Audubon Society, to have work crews remove invasive shrubs. Large infestations of autumn olive, honeysuckle, barberry, multiflora rose and buckthorn will be removed in the late fall of this year and early spring of 2024. Thank you BBAS!
 - Volunteers have also begun to clear and maintain other areas in the park. A volunteer work day is planned for September 23rd, where loppers will be used to cut invasive shrubs and dabbers will be used to treat the stumps to prevent regrowth. A grant from the Iowa Ornithologists Union was used to purchase hand tools. Thank you IOU!
 - Contact Karl Jungbluth if you're interested in working on September 23rd or on other days, or look for the event sign up at <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Places-to-Go/State-Parks/iowa-State-Parks/Ledges-State-Park>
- Ledges Through the Lense amateur photography contest (for all age categories) continues through October 31st. Contact Ledges@dnr.iowa.gov for more information, contest rules and sign-up.





The same pair of Kestrels that nested in our neighborhood last year again had nesting success. The young fledged 2 days ago. Last year they fledged 5 young Kestrels, 3 males and 2 females. That seemed like quite a feat. However they did out do last year's success having 6 young fledge this year, all males. The adult male delivered prey to the young at the nest box last year. This year the young birds have preferred to stay at the nearby woodland edge. The male delivers the food to that location and the young bring it down to the nest box to feast. I have watched several Kestrel nests for hours over the last few years. Prey has always been small rodents, snakes and insects in the order. This year a young bird was brought in. It looks like a young Red-winged Blackbird. Photos have been fun, but not as easy as last year. I attached some photos from today. Kind of neat to see 6 young male Kestrels all lined up!

Larry Dau
Boone Co.
Spark's Cemetery Area



BBAS Businesses

Please know that if you make a purchase at either Wild Birds Unlimited or Brekke's Town and Country Store, Inc. that these businesses will make a donation to Big Bluestem Audubon Society. Be sure to present the coupon when making the purchase. We thank these fine businesses for their generous support.

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.

Valid through 12-31-2023

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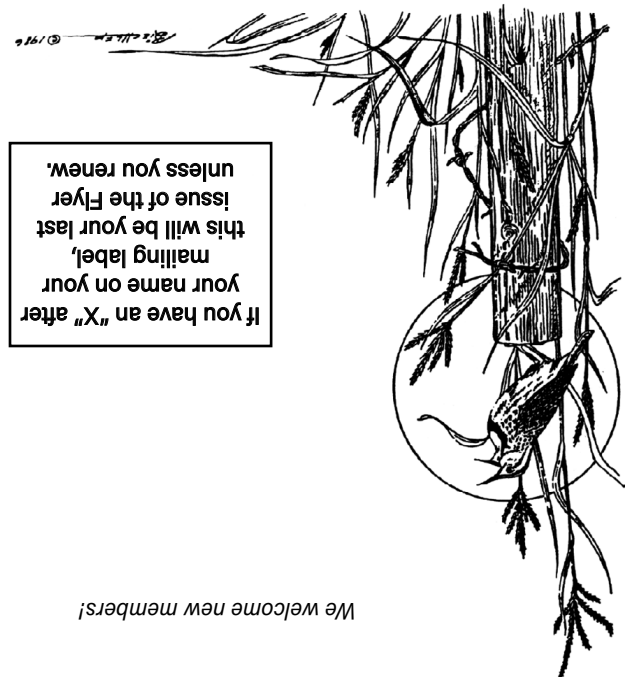
Brekke's offers Big Bluestem Audubon Society a donation when bird seed or other bird products are purchased.

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

Offer good until 12-31-2023

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

We welcome new members!



If you have an "X" after
your name on your
mailing label,
this will be your last
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