



## PROGRAMS

### Jan 17, 2019 | Ty Smedes | Climate for Change

Along with covering Iowa's natural history, outdoor writer/photographer Ty Smedes will help us discover many spectacular species of wildlife and explore some of our planet's most wild places. He will discuss challenges faced by many of these creatures, highlight several local and global success stories, and consider the need for environmental sustainability during the 21st century.

### February 21, 2019 | Harlan Ratcliff | Butterflies of Iowa

Harlan is an environmental specialist for the Iowa Army National Guard. He has been a serious amateur nature photographer for several decades, specializing in nature on the small scale. View his work at [www.poweshiekskipper.org](http://www.poweshiekskipper.org) or [therousedbear.wordpress.com](http://therousedbear.wordpress.com). February's presentation will focus on butterflies with an emphasis on entertainment instead of science, conservation or taxonomy.

### March 21, 2019 | Larry Dau | Birding Northwest Wisconsin

Larry holds a degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology from Iowa State University and is an accomplished bird and nature photographer. This program will concentrate on the bird diversity and unique history of three natural areas in the NW Wisconsin region: The Namekagon Barrens, Crex Meadows Wildlife Area and Wisconsin Point.

### April 18, 2019 | Larry Stone | Portrait of the Land

With degrees in biology and journalism, Larry Stone understands the natural world and how to communicate the wonders of the outdoors. His work has appeared in several Iowa and outdoor magazines, and he has received many awards from environmental and writers' organizations. Larry's presentation is based on his award-winning book, *Portrait of the Land*.

Program meetings take place in the Ames Public Library (515 Douglas Ave.). Meetings begin at 6:30 PM; programs begin at 7:00 PM.

Directions available at [bigbluestemaudubon.org](http://bigbluestemaudubon.org).

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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.

## FIELD TRIPS

### January 19, 2019 | Ada Hayden Heritage Park

Meet at the Calhoun Park parking area - the SE corner of Ada Hayden on Dawes Dr - by **9:00 AM**. Wolf Oesterreich will help us bird the trails until around noon. Please dress appropriately for the weather since we will be outside for the entire time.

### February 23, 2019 | Saylorville Reservoir

Meet at the Saylorville Visitor Center by **3:00 PM**. Waterfowl will be our main target; we will bird the Saylorville area until sunset and then head to Red Feather Prairie to see American Woodcocks.

### March 9, 2019 | Colo Bogs, Hendrickson Marsh WMA, Hickory Grove Park

Meet at the Casey's in Colo, IA by **8:00 AM**. We will bird the wild places of Eastern Story County and return to Colo around noon.

### April 6, 2019 | Dunbar Slough WMA, Greene County

Meet at the Casey's in Ralston, IA by **8:00 AM**. We will be lead on a birding tour of Dunbar Slough by Matt Wetrich.

### May 25, 2019 | Ledges State Park | Birder's Brunch

Meet at the Oak Woods Shelter at Ledges Park by **8:00 AM**. We will bird the park and then break for a potluck brunch. Please bring a food item to share, a beverage, and plates and utensils.

**Note:** Field trip destination and target birds will be determined by the group that assembles at that time and will usually be confined to Story, Boone, Polk, or Hamilton Counties.

Monthly field trips are free and open to the public.

We will no longer be carpooling to the field trip. Those interested in attending a field trip should meet the group at the field trip destination at 8:00 AM, unless stated otherwise.

The field trip will usually last until around noon.

If you need a ride to the location, contact Eric Ollie at [uphawkeye@gmail.com](mailto:uphawkeye@gmail.com) to see if a ride can be arranged.

The destination and target birds will be determined by the group that assembles at that time and will usually be confined to Story, Boone, Polk, or Hamilton counties.

### 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,  
Larry Dau  
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**BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY  
OF CENTRAL IOWA**

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**PRESIDENT'S CORNER WITH ERIC OLLIE**

**2018 Story County Big Year**

Some birders like to keep records of their bird sightings and organize them into lists. Others like to just simply experience and enjoy the bird currently before them, feeling no compunction to record and compile. Of course, most birders fall somewhere in between the extremes of this continuum.

Most certainly, I like to enjoy the bird before me and savor the moment, but I am also an incurable and unabashed lister. I love lists. I keep a life list, a state of Iowa list, a yard list, a work list, and a few county lists. Every time I go out birding for the day, keeping a bird list definitely adds to the experience for me.

The ultimate list in the birding world may be the list a few birders keep while they are doing a "big year." This is when a birder tries to find as many species in a given geographical area within a calendar year. I decided to do one in 2018.

ABA area (USA & Canada) big years are the most famous but not being independently wealthy, retired, or a few fries short of a Happy Meal, my 2018 big year was much more limited in scope. I decided to confine it to the borders of Story County.

If you haven't noticed yet, Story County is not in Florida, Texas, Arizona, or California. To be honest, it's not even really Polk County or Boone County. How many birds can one see in such an agriculturally monoculture landscape? I think you would be surprised, as I certainly was. My initial goal was to try for 200 species. I think I may have achieved that on May 13th. 220? Got it on June 30th.

| Continued on page 3

**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  
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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER CONTINUED BY ERIC OLLIE

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To cut the suspense, and a long story short, I got my 236th species in Story County on December 15th, a Long-eared Owl on the Ames CBC. Some highlights of my big year are Evening Grosbeak, Glossy Ibis, Northern Goshawk, Snowy Owl, Swainson's Hawk, Smith's Longspur, White-winged Dove, Cattle Egret, Snowy Egret, Least Bittern, White-eyed Vireo, Blue Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Red-necked Phalarope, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Long-tailed Duck.

If that list raises your eyebrows a bit, you're not the only one. I had a LOT of luck! If I didn't drive every mile of country road in the county, I came pretty close. The act of confining myself to a relatively small geographic area allowed me to discover a lot of new and interesting places and much more good habitat than I previously thought there was in the county I have lived in for the past 17 years. Although, I will definitely be doing more of my wandering a bit farther out in 2019, I will also be returning to many of the wonderful places in my home county which I feel I have really started to get to know and cherish.

## 30 YEARS AGO IN BBAS BY HANK ZALETEL

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The February program entitled "Prairie Restoration" was presented by Dorothy Baringer. Jim Peased followed in March with "Mammals: Discouraging Pests." I gave the April program on shorebirds. This meeting was held at the State Forest Nursery because ISU's Design Center was not available.

Owls were the target for the February field trip to Ledges State Park and Saylorville. Seventeen participants saw Saw-whet, Barred, and Long and Short-eared Owls. The March trip was scheduled for Bay's Branch in Guthrie County but was changed to Saylorville because of cold weather and ice.

Forty Bald Eagles were seen. Hendrickson Marsh was the April destination for shorebirds. Because of lack of suitable habitat, few were seen.

The Ames and Saylorville Christmas Counts were compiled by Steve Dinsmore and Boone by Mark Widrlechner. Fifty-one species were seen in Ames, second highest, Saylorville tabulated a record 82 species and Boone followed with 53 which included 154 Turkeys.

Cindy Hildebrand was honored for her outstanding service to the Audubon cause by receiving the National Audubon Society's William Dutcher Award; William Dutcher was the first president of the NAS, 1901-1920.

## THANK YOU BY AMY YOAKUM AT STORY COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

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I just wanted to let you know how much we appreciate the BBAS donation of \$1,000. Your entire donation was spent at Robison Wildlife Acres on continued savanna restoration. I am so pleased with the abundance of red-headed woodpeckers since we opened the canopy!

We were able to combine your donation with some other funds to hire CCI for four days working at Robison's. SCC staff and the CCI crew removed honeysuckle and thinned ironwood trees for oak regeneration. Our long-term restoration project would not be possible without the support of BBAS. Thanks again so much!

## PHOTOS AND CONTENT FOR NEWSLETTER BY LARRY DAU

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Please send any photos you have of events, birds, wildlife, habitat or BBAS members in the field that you would like to see in the newsletter. We are also looking for short content items and announcements to include. Stefany Hulsebus edits all content and creates the layout of the BBAS Newsletter. We appreciate her expertise and help.



White-fronted Goose in flight at Bjorkboda Marsh in Hamilton County  
Photo by Larry Dau



Gray Partridge in rural Story County  
Photo by Eric Ollie



Lesser Scaup Duck at Swan Lake in Carroll County | Photo by Larry Dau



Northern Harrier near Iowa Arboretum in Boone County | Photo by Larry Dau

**2018 AUDUBON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT BY STEVE LEKWA, FORMER DIRECTOR OF SCC**

The weather on Saturday, Dec. 15 was pleasant to say the least. Winds were calm. The sky was clear. There was no fog. Temperatures climbed steadily throughout the day from a crisp mid-20s start to an afternoon high of near 50 degrees. What's not to like about that on a mid-December day? It was also the day for the Ames Area Christmas Bird Count. All those good things made finding birds a bit more difficult, but I'm not complaining.

Mild, snowless conditions meant that birds were not stressed. Natural foods in the form of waste grain, weed seeds, dried berries and hidden insects were still easy for them to find in many places. Most streams and the larger lakes still offered open water. Harsher winter conditions actually make finding birds easier. They seek shelter in patches of dense cover. They have to feed more heavily to keep their internal fires burning, even as natural food sources become more difficult to find. That tends to concentrate winter birds around well-stocked feeders, open water (including heated bird baths), and wildlife food plots.

Birds were widely dispersed and enjoying the weather, but they were still found thanks to diligent searchers. Seventy-two species were logged in the Ames count area – about average for the past several years. Total numbers of some of the more common winter birds were less than usual, though. I wish I could say that was true for European starlings. They far outnumbered other songbirds in the Nevada count area, though they probably didn't outnumber Canada geese. The Nevada count area covers the far eastern edge of the Ames count circle. We hiked through several areas that have been productive birding sites in the past. Big oaks, pines, cedars and Douglas firs at the Nevada cemetery harbored day-roosting owls, hawks, and a variety of winter songbirds in the past, but the best we could find there on count day was a few house finches basking in the early morning sunshine, a single white-breasted nuthatch and sadly, more starlings. A nearby site was entirely quiet and without birds, though it has produced at least one owl every year for years. We've logged all three species of nesting owls at one time or another at that site in past years (screech, barred and great-horned). The Nevada Country Club had more golfers than birds when we hiked through that lovely area after lunch. The Jennet Wildlife Area south of Nevada has always been a good spot for wintering native sparrows, along with an occasional pheasant or wild turkey. I finally saw one distant male cardinal there after hiking a half-mile through great winter bird habitat.

I was pleased to encounter a flock of cedar waxwings feeding on honeysuckle berries near the old Nevada dump, and my wife, Sue, added a lovely male bluebird that stopped by our yard for a few minutes to visit his home from last summer. We were pleased to report a little red-breasted nuthatch, a northern bird that seems to be around in higher-than-usual numbers this winter. It's always sad when we find old bird feeders standing empty and unused at sites that used to host lots of birds. I know there are still folks who enjoy feeding birds, but several of the feeder sites we've visited for years are gone. Even though birds were harder to find on count day, it was still a very enjoyable day of looking for birds with other folks who enjoy birds and being outdoors as much as I do.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Hendrickson Marsh in Story County  
Photo by Eric Ollie

Buying from the businesses listed on this page not only benefits the birds but also helps our local economy and provides funding for BBAS. Donations fund our various habitat restoration and educational projects. Present the coupons at the time of your purchase and a donation will be given to BBAS.

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## AMES CBC BY SHANE PATTERSON

Galvanized by blue skies, mild temperatures, and a refreshing absence of harsh winter winds, 32 Ames CBC field participants and 9 feeder-watchers pooled their efforts and found exactly 29,000 birds spread across 72 species on count day. While an outcome like this would've been exceptional during the 20th century – wherein species totals around 55 were the norm – it's slightly below the consecutive all-time highs we set in previous years (76 in 2015, 78 in 2016, and 79 in 2017). And like those years, our 2018 list was augmented by a nice mix of waterfowl and terrestrial birds. Some examples that stood out among the conversations at our post-CBC potluck were Ross's Goose, Gray Partridge, Long-eared Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Merlin (two subspecies), Northern Shrike, Lapland Longspur, and Rusty Blackbird. Likewise, it was fun to see lingering individuals of short-distance migrants like Great Blue Heron, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrow, Harris's Sparrow, and White-crowned Sparrow. Finally, perhaps to add some extra flair to the festivities, a Prairie Falcon zoomed onto the list as a count-week species less than 72 hours after CBC day itself.

Whether you were wandering through fields and forests or watching your feeders at home, I extend another sincere thank you to everyone who assisted with this year's edition of the Ames CBC, and I look forward to seeing you all again in 2019!

Greater White-fronted Goose	28	Red-headed Woodpecker	1	American Tree Sparrow	359
Snow Goose	cw	Red-bellied Woodpecker	148	Fox Sparrow	2
Ross's Goose	1	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	Song Sparrow	42
Cackling Goose	151	Downy Woodpecker	185	Swamp Sparrow	5
Canada Goose	12135	Hairy Woodpecker	57	White-throated Sparrow	117
Trumpeter Swan	69	Northern Flicker	6	Harris's Sparrow	3
Gadwall	2	Pileated Woodpecker	1	White-crowned Sparrow	3
Mallard	784	American Kestrel	9	Dark-eyed Junco	766
Lesser Scaup	1	Merlin	2	Northern Cardinal	272
Common Goldeneye	2	Prairie Falcon	cw	Red-winged Blackbird	319
Gray Partridge	3	Falcon species	1	Western Meadowlark	4
Ring-necked Pheasant	110	Northern Shrike	1	Meadowlark species	6
Wild Turkey	15	Blue Jay	206	Rusty Blackbird	31
Great Blue Heron	4	American Crow	7100	Common Grackle	6
Bald Eagle	24	Horned Lark	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Northern Harrier	5	Black-capped Chickadee	278	Purple Finch	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	Red-breasted Nuthatch	19	House Finch	164
Cooper's Hawk	11	White-breasted Nuthatch	197	Pine Siskin	28
Accipiter species	1	Brown Creeper	20	American Goldfinch	129
Red-tailed Hawk	99	Carolina Wren	5	House Sparrow	779
Rough-legged Hawk	1	Winter Wren	2		
Rock Pigeon	388	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	<b>72</b> bird species identified on count day	
Eurasian Collared-Dove	13	Eastern Bluebird	75	3 additional bird taxa identified to genus on count day	
Mourning Dove	111	Hermit Thrush	1	<b>3</b> additional bird species found during count week	
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	American Robin	23	<b>29000</b> total individual birds found on count day	
Great Horned Owl	9	Gray Catbird	cw		
Barred Owl	14	European Starling	3462		
Long-eared Owl	7	Cedar Waxwing	127		
Belted Kingfisher	4	Lapland Longspur	35		

## BOONE CBC BY ALEX KRETZINGER

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The Boone County Christmas Bird Count enjoyed another successful year-end count. Though the temperature didn't reach 20 degrees (16 degrees was the reported high), the 24 field counters braved the chilly winds to check in on our feathered friends. At the end of the day, the teams reported 59 different species of bird around the county. This was slightly down from 2017's count but was slightly above the historical average. Notably, the number of Dark Eyed Juncos was up from 831 to 1,405 birds this year – quite a jump! There were two Tundra Swans reported with a flock of Trumpeter Swans, which is an exciting and uncommon addition to the count. There were 31 Bald Eagles reported, down slightly from 2017's total of 42. The owls were very active, as Eastern Screech, Great Horned and Barred Owls all joined in. Excitingly, there were 13 Great Horned and 14 Barred Owls reported, which is 6 times and 3 times the numbers seen last year respectively. A huge thank you to our team of volunteers, which included 8 feeder watchers who kept their eyes on their yard for the day and kept us up to date on what they were seeing. Next year's count will be December 28th. We hope to see you there!

Canada Goose	422	Blue Jay	240	Pine Siskin	29
Tundra Swan	2	American Crow	98	American Goldfinch	93
Trumpeter Swan	29	Horned Lark	81	House Sparrow	823
Mallard	63	Black-capped Chickadee	229		
Ring-necked Pheasant	67	Tufted Titmouse	25	<b>Number of birds</b>	<b>5977</b>
Wild Turkey	59	Red-breasted Nuthatch	8	<b>Number of species (count day)</b>	<b>59</b>
Great Blue Heron	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	127	<b>Number of species (count week)</b>	<b>60</b>
Bald Eagle	31	Brown Creeper	1		
Northern Harrier	11	Carolina Wren	1		
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	4		
Cooper's Hawk	9	Eastern Bluebird	3		
Red-tailed Hawk	64	American Robin	1		
Rough-legged Hawk	10	European Starling	542		
Buteo species	2	Cedar Waxwing	32		
Golden Eagle	1	American Tree Sparrow	355		
American Kestrel	3	Fox Sparrow	1		
Hawk species	2	Song Sparrow	11		
Rock Pigeon	134	Swamp Sparrow	3		
Eurasian Collared-Dove	48	White-throated Sparrow	23		
Mourning Dove	30	Harris's Sparrow	2		
Eastern Screech-Owl	3	Dark-eyed Junco	1405		
Great Horned Owl	13	Oregon Junco	9		
Barred Owl	14	Lapland Longspur	6		
Belted Kingfisher	1	Northern Cardinal	246		
Red-headed Woodpecker	33	Red-winged Blackbird	23		
Red-bellied Woodpecker	135	Rusty Blackbird	24		
Downy Woodpecker	187	Common Grackle	4		
Hairy Woodpecker	71	Brown-headed Cowbird	3		
Northern Flicker	12	Purple Finch	28		
Pileated Woodpecker	5	House Finch	33		

## SAYLORVILLE CBC BY STEPHEN DINSMORE

The annual Saylorville Reservoir CBC was held on Sunday, December 16th in perfect weather and tallied a slightly-above-average 86 species. The most noteworthy highlight was that we tallied THREE warbler species, surely a first for an Iowa CBC – single Orange-crowned Warbler and Common Yellowthroat in addition to the more expected Yellow-rumped Warbler. Other highlights were 18 waterfowl species (Tundra Swan was notable), Am. White Pelican, Red-shouldered Hawk, Sandhill Crane, all 7 regular woodpecker species, Merlin, Northern Shrike, Carolina and Winter wrens, and Snow Bunting. Many thanks to all those who helped this year! Twenty-six people participated in the count.

Snow Goose	1	Herring Gull	6	Lapland Longspur	21
Greater White-fronted Goose	1	Rock Pigeon	510	Snow Bunting	1
Cackling Goose	35	Eurasian Collared-Dove	115	Orange-crowned Warbler	1
Canada Goose	10121	Mourning Dove	115	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
Trumpeter Swan	85	Eastern Screech-Owl	7	Common Yellowthroat	1
Tundra Swan	3	Great Horned Owl	35	American Tree Sparrow	408
Gadwall	4	Barred Owl	14	Song Sparrow	42
American Black Duck	4	Belted Kingfisher	3	Swamp Sparrow	8
Mallard	2759	Red-headed Woodpecker	6	White-throated Sparrow	89
Northern Pintail	2	Red-bellied Woodpecker	113	Harris' Sparrow	1
Green-winged Teal	2	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1	White-crowned Sparrow	1
Canvasback	1	Downy Woodpecker	107	Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco	749
Ring-necked Duck	14	Hairy Woodpecker	34	Northern Cardinal	292
Lesser Scaup	5	Northern Flicker	24	Red-winged Blackbird	156
Common Goldeneye	227	Pileated Woodpecker	1	Western Meadowlark	3
Hooded Merganser	5	American Kestrel	10	meadowlark sp.	7
Common Merganser	577	Merlin	4	Common Grackle	13
Red-breasted Merganser	2	Northern Shrike	2	Brown-headed Cowbird	2
Ring-necked Pheasant	10	Blue Jay	237	Purple Finch	12
Wild Turkey	1	American Crow	137	House Finch	40
American White Pelican	52	Horned Lark	21	Pine Siskin	2
Great Blue Heron	1	Black-capped Chickadee	299	American Goldfinch	71
Bald Eagle: Adult	18	Tufted Titmouse	10	House Sparrow	309
Bald Eagle: Immature	14	Red-breasted Nuthatch	4		
Bald Eagle: Unknown	13	White-breasted Nuthatch	153	<b>Species</b>	<b>86</b>
Northern Harrier	8	Brown Creeper	17	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>19988</b>
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	Carolina Wren	2		
Cooper's Hawk	8	Winter Wren	3		
Red-shouldered Hawk	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1		
Red-tailed Hawk	70	Eastern Bluebird	76		
Rough-legged Hawk	3	American Robin	49		
Sandhill Crane	3	European Starling	1283		
Ring-billed Gull	5	Cedar Waxwing	298		

# NEW MEMBERS OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Karl Grotheer  
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## Jefferson

Louise Harris

## Paton

Richard Burnett

## Webster City

Susan Hanken



Osprey in flight at Soper's Mill in Story County  
Photo by Eric Ollie

**NEWSLETTER** Volume 54 | Number 3 | January/February/March 2019

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