

# BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER Volume 58 | Number 1 | Jan./Feb./Mar. 2023  
<http://bigbluestemaudubon.org/>

## 2023 Big Bluestem Audubon Society Programs

**Business meetings begin at 6:30 p.m.**

**Programs begin at 7:00 p.m.**

- FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC -

All programs are held in the auditorium of the Ames public library unless otherwise noted

### January 19th:

Tim Gedler, retired Iowa Department of Natural Resources employee.

Topic: Purple Martins in Iowa

### February 16th:

Jim Pease, ISU Extension Wildlife Biologist.

Topic: Birds of East Africa and South Africa

### March 16th:

Mark Edwards, retired Iowa Department of Natural Resources employee.

Topic: Rewilding Iowa

### April 20th:

Brandon Bergquist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Enforcement Officer.

Topic: Enforcement of Iowa Wildlife Laws and the Turn in Poachers Program: A Conversation with a Game Warden.

### May 18th:

Stephanie Shepherd, Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Topic: Tax Preparation and License Plates: How Do These Help Wildlife in Iowa?

### Sept. 21st:

Todd Burras and Ty Harms.

Topic: Chimney Swifts in Ames



*White-breasted Nuthatch |  
Photo by Doug Harr*



*Red-breasted Nuthatch |  
Photo by Doug Harr*

## Thirty Years Ago in BBAS (Dec. 1991/Feb. 1992)

by Hank Zaletel

The Ames Christmas Bird Count tallied 51 species with 35 field observers and 8 feeder watchers. The total of 51 was on somewhat shaky ground given that 13 species had just one sighting. Best bird was a Gyrfalcon founded by Barney Cook.

The Boone CBC was hampered by Des Moines River flood destruction of habitat. Twenty five counters tallied only 40 species. Ring-billed Gulls, House Finches, and a Common Redpoll visited the count area for the first time ever. Other highlights included two Saw-Whet Owls, Red-headed Woodpecker and a Shrike.

Officers for the 1991/1992 year were, President – Sherry Dragula; Vice-President – Tom Rosburg; Secretary – Nancy Dionigi; Treasurer – Mark Widrlechner; Board Members – Jon Bahrenfus, Mark Dobbe, Maridel Jackson, Kay Niyo and Paul Ovrum

Programs included Carl Kurtz – “Iowa’s Natural Beauty” and “Story County’s Integrated Roadside Management Program – Where are We Now? By Story County’s Roadside biologist David Webber.

Included in the December newsletter was a copy of the 1992 Winter Bird Feeder Survey sponsored by the Iowa Ornithologists’ Union.

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation had acquired an option to buy Ann Munn Heritage Woods. Donations were solicited. The property would be available for passive recreation only, leaving the woodland in an undisturbed state.

### 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](mailto:timgarner@mediacombb.net)



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## **PRESIDENT'S CORNER** with Tim Garner

I was recently watching a documentary about the Iran Hostage Crisis on PBS. The film recounted the harrowing tale of the Americans who worked at the U.S. embassy in Tehran, and who were held against their will by Iranian revolutionaries for 444 days. After a failed rescue attempt by the U.S. military, in which 8 servicemen were killed, the Iranians dispersed the American hostages to jails throughout Iran. One of the hostages, Barry Rosen, recounted that what helped him survive these dark days was a bird which landed on the barbed wire near his cell on a daily basis. The bird sang and flitted about, and provided inspiration and a sense of hope for Mr. Rosen and the other Americans who were jailed in that squalid prison. They waited with anticipation for a visit from their feathered friend, and its presence was a most welcome respite from their gloomy surroundings.

The story reminds me of how much birds do for us. Their songs lift our spirits. Their colorful plumage reminds us of nature's beauty. Their migrations cue us to the changing of the seasons. Humans have found birds to be so wondrous that they are mentioned in the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, to name but a few. In the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, the dove is a symbol of peace and God's spirit and love. Birds are cited as messengers in the Quran. In cultures in the Far East, cranes are a symbols of longevity. The ancient Egyptians held the ibis to be sacred. The examples speak volumes about how men and women have long connected birds with the spiritual and the divine.

I wish you all a very happy holiday season, and that 2023 is a good year for you in every way that it can be good. And my hope for all of you, as we begin another new year, is that you resolve to take time to appreciate all that birds do for us, and just to let yourself be filled with the wonder that these beautiful creates in inspire in us. Your life will be the richer for it.

Yours,  
Tim Garner

### 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:

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to the National Audubon Society.*

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Red-tailed Hawk |  
Photo by Doug Harr

Northern Cardinal |  
Photo by Doug Harr



Lapland Longspur |  
Photo by Doug Harr

## Book Reviews Rick Hollis – Iowa City Bird Club

**A Warbler's Journey** by Scott Weidensaul (author) and Nancy Lane (illustrator). The Gryphon Press, 2022. 32 pages. Weidensaul is a well-known birder and author. His book *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds* is marvelous. This is his first venture into children's books. It follows a Yellow Warbler on spring migration from Nicaragua to Canada. It has lovely text and beautiful illustrations. Amazon has a number of preview pages online. I think this is great book for children of 5 - 8 years.

**The Natural History of the Snakes and Lizards of Iowa** by Terry VanDeWalle. University of Iowa Press, 2022. 384 pages. The author is a principal biologist with a consulting service and an adjunct instructor at Hawkeye Community College. This is much more than a field guide. Most of the book is devoted to species accounts. These accounts typically include Iowa Status, Historical Summary, Description, Size, Similar Species, Distribution (including a map by counties), Habitat, Behavior (including a bar chart of monthly sightings), Threats, Food and Feeding, and Reproduction. Most chapters include several photographs. This is great book. It reads easily and is filled with odd little facts. For example, Jim Christiansen removed 34 Western Fox Snakes and 47 Eastern Yellow-bellied Racers from a single well and well house; and Northern Watersnakes are viviparous and have given birth to 6-99 young.

**A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird** by Rosemary Mosco. Workman Publishing Company, 2021. 240 pages. Rosemary Mosco is the artist who does the Bird and Moon nature cartoons – a delightful set of comics that are well worth the effort to read. This is a fun little book that is full of interesting facts about pigeons. Most chapters have interesting box inserts, which unfortunately are poorly designed – tiny white print on almost pastel backgrounds. In fact, I am not real fond of the main font used in the book either – too small and faint. Despite these shortcomings, this book is worth checking out at a library.

**Bitch: On the Female of the Species** by Lucy Cooke. Basic Books, 2022. 400 pages. This is a rather densely-written book, but it's full of fascinating work about how the sexes differ and how we have learned that. The chapter titles are clever and invite the reader to read them. Here are a few: "The Anarchy of Sex," "Fifty Ways to Eat Your Lover," "Bitch Eat Bitch," "Beyond the Binary"

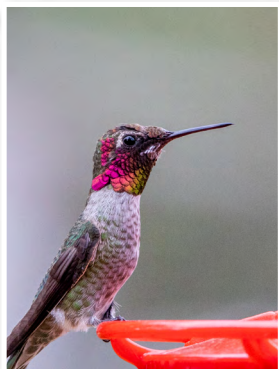
**Travels with Trilobites: Adventures in the Paleozoic** by Andy Secher. Columbia University Press, 2022. This large book is filled with glorious photos of many of the trilobites that have graced the earth. Secher is a field associate in paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History, and coeditor of the museum's trilobite website. His private collection comprises more than 4,000 trilobite fossils. The photos surprised me as I thought all trilobites were little dark structured creatures.

**Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs: Identification and Natural History of the Fireflies of the Eastern and Central United States and Canada** by Lynn Frierson Faust. University of Georgia Press, 2017. 376 pages. What a wonderful book. It takes you through all stages of the lightning bug's life cycle. Along the way are tables and figures to help with identification, including a chart of the most common firefly genera in the US and Canada: *Photuris* (flash), *Pyroactomena* (flash), *Photinus pyralis* (large flash), *Photinus florida* (small flash), *Pyrolygia* (dark), *Phaenocarpa* (glow), *Lucidaria* (dark), and *Ellychnia* (dark). She has a long chapter on frequently asked questions, and a section on other luminescent organisms. The largest section of the book is a basic field guide with images and diagrams of flash patterns (single flash, flash and longer glow, very long glow, etc.). These diagrams are useful in helping to identify species by their flashes. This field guide section includes short topics on Quick ID, Appearance, Flash Behavior, Time of Year/Time of Day, Habitat, Range, Similar Species, Research, and Nature Notes. Additionally, the inside front cover of the book contains a very useful large fold-out chart depicting species flash patterns and flash color.

**Hummingbirds: A Celebration of Nature's Jewels** by Glenn Bartley and Andy Swash. Princeton University Press, 2022. 288 pages. Glenn Bartley is a Canadian nature photographer whose work I have followed for years. This is a glorious large-format coffee table book that is far more than a coffee table book. Many of the pages have beautiful hummingbird photos by the authors and others. In fact, the book's 500+ photos cover all 101 hummingbird genera and over two-thirds of the world's 369 species. The species accounts have status, distribution, and other bits of information for each species listed.



## 2022 BBAS Southeast Arizona Birding Adventure



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From Saturday, August 13th through Sunday, August 21st the 2022 BBAS Southeast Arizona Birding Adventure took place. Sixteen participants and four guides spent seven very successful and fun-filled days exploring the magnificent "sky islands" of the far southeast corner of the state of Arizona. The area south and east of Tucson in and around the Catalina, Santa Rita, Huachuca, and Chiricahua Mountains is universally held to be one of the very top birding hotspots in the United States. It is the only place in the US where many bird species can be found reliably, or at all. The official bird list for the trip topped out at 168 bird species, including 16 species of hummingbirds. Among the many incredible birds found few of the highlights included Lesser Nighthawk, Common Poorwill, Rivoli's Hummingbird, Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Lucifer Hummingbird, White-eared Hummingbird, Violet-crowned Hummingbird, Berylline Hummingbird, Gray Hawk, Zone-tailed Hawk, Barn Owl, Elf Owl, Elegant Trogon, Arizona Woodpecker, Gilded Flicker, Rose-throated Becard, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, Thick-billed Kingbird, Bridled Titmouse, Juniper Titmouse, Phainopepla, Rufous-winged Sparrow, Botteri's Sparrow, Cassin's Sparrow, Five-striped Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow, Yellow-eyed Junco, Scott's Oriole, Grace's Warbler, Red-faced Warbler, Painted Redstart, Hepatic Tanager, Pyrrhuloxia, and Varied Bunting. Also found were many amazing plants, mammals, herps, insects, and arachnids including White-nosed Coati, Javelina, Desert Blonde Tarantula, Western Diamondback Rattlesnake, and Pronghorn. The mountains and desert of Southeast Arizona are absolutely gorgeous and they are filled with a plethora of fascinating life. Yes, Arizona in August does get warm, but between the high elevations and the monsoon rains, the conditions were quite tolerable and a great time was had by all.

### 2022 CyHawk Big Day Challenge

Over Labor Day weekend (September 3-5, 2022) BBAS and Iowa City Bird Club (ICBC) renewed our friendly rivalry by competing in the CyHawk Big Day Challenge. This is an annual competition between the Ames (ISU) and Iowa City (Iowa) birding organizations to see who can find the most species of birds over the weekend. BBAS had a valiant effort, finding 137 species, but unfortunately fell short and was defeated by ICBC's 150 species. A lack of productive wetland habitat in BBAS's territory was the main cause of our downfall being outnumbered in shorebirds by a margin of 16-8 and in waterfowl by a margin of 11-7. The move to making the competition a three-day event over the Labor Day weekend was very popular. This change has been made permanent. New for next year, the 24-hour competition period has been removed, so starting next year all birds can compile a single list that can span the entire 72-hour competition period.

Eric

### 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.*

## Boone County Today - Larry Dau

Went back to the plowed corn field again today near Harrier Marsh. Changed completely. Now 2,500 Blackbirds with more than 80% Red-winged. Longspurs and Pipits gone. Some new birds, though. Brewer's Blackbirds, Common Grackle and Cowbirds were now present.



Redwing | Photo by Larry Dau



Red Wing | Photo by Larry Dau



Black Bird | Photo by Larry Dau



Cow Bird | Photo by Larry Dau



Rusty | Photo by Larry Dau

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## Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds - by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

*In 2019, scientists documented North America's staggering loss of nearly 3 billion breeding birds since 1970. Helping birds can be as simple as making changes to everyday habits. Here's our quick list of 7 Simple Actions you can take to help birds.*

### 1. Make Windows Safer, Day and Night

**The challenge:** Up to 1 billion birds are estimated to die each year after hitting windows in the United States and Canada.

**The cause:** By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly into. By night, migratory birds drawn in by city lights are at high risk of colliding with buildings.

**These simple steps save birds:** On the outside of the window, install screens or break up reflections—using film, paint, or Acopian BirdSavers or other string spaced no more than two inches high or four inches wide.

### 2. Keep Cats Indoors

**The challenge:** Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada. This is the #1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss.

**The cause:** Cats can make great pets, but more than 110 million feral and pet cats now roam in the United States and Canada. These nonnative predators instinctively hunt and kill birds even when well fed.

**A solution that's good for cats and birds:** Save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping cats indoors or creating an outdoor "catio." You can also train your cat to walk on a leash.

**Take it further:** Speak out about the impacts of feral cat colonies in your neighborhood and on public lands. Unowned cats' lives may be as short as two years because of disease and hardship, and they are responsible for more than two-thirds of birds killed by cats in the United States.

### 3. Reduce Lawn, Plant Natives

**The challenge:** Birds have fewer places to safely rest during migration and to raise their young: More than 10 million acres of land in the United States were converted to developed land from 1982 to 1997.



# Crane Migration at Grantsburg, Wisconsin

Photos by Larry Dau



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## Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds - *continued*

**The cause:** Lawns and pavement don't offer enough food or shelter for many birds and other wildlife. With more than 40 million acres of lawn in the U.S. alone, there's huge potential to support wildlife by replacing lawns with native plantings.

**Add native plants, watch birds come in:** Native plants add interest and beauty to your yard and neighborhood, and provide shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will sustain birds and diverse wildlife.

### 4. Avoid Pesticides

**The challenge:** More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied in the United States each year (9). The continent's most widely used insecticides, called neonicotinoids or "neonics," are lethal to birds and to the insects that birds consume. Common weed killers used around homes, such as 2, 4-D and glyphosate (used in Roundup), can be toxic to wildlife, and glyphosate has been declared a probable human carcinogen.

**The cause:** Pesticides that are toxic to birds can harm them directly through contact, or if they eat contaminated seeds or prey. Pesticides can also harm birds indirectly by reducing the number of available insects, which birds need to survive.

**A healthy choice for you, your family, and birds:** Consider purchasing organic food. Nearly 70% of produce sold in the U.S. contains pesticide. Reduce pesticides around your home and garden.

### 5. Drink Coffee That's Good for Birds

**The challenge:** Three-quarters of the world's coffee farms grow their plants in the sun, destroying forests that birds and other wildlife need for food and shelter. Sun-grown coffee also often requires using environmentally harmful pesticides and fertilizers. On the other hand, shade-grown coffee preserves a forest canopy that helps migratory birds survive the winter.

**The cause:** Too few consumers are aware of the problems of sun coffee. Those who are aware may be reluctant to pay more for environmentally sustainable coffee.

**Enjoy shade-grown coffee:** It's a win-win-win: it's delicious, economically beneficial to coffee farmers, and helps more than 42 species of North American migratory songbirds that winter in coffee plantations, including orioles, warblers, and thrushes.

### 6. Protect Our Planet from Plastic

**The challenge:** It's estimated that 4,900 million metric tons of plastic have accumulated in landfills and in our environment worldwide, polluting our oceans and harming wildlife such as seabirds, whales, and turtles that mistakenly eat plastic, or become entangled in it.

## Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds - *continued*

**The cause:** Plastic takes more than 400 years to degrade, and 91% of plastics created are not recycled. Studies show that at least 80 seabird species ingest plastic, mistaking it for food. Cigarette lighters, toothbrushes, and other trash have been found in the stomachs of dead albatrosses.

**Reduce your plastics:** Avoid single-use plastics including bags, bottles, wraps, and disposable utensils. It's far better to choose reusable items, but if you do have disposable plastic, be sure to recycle it.

### 7. Watch Birds, Share What You See

**The challenge:** The world's most abundant bird, the Passenger Pigeon, went extinct, and people didn't realize how quickly it was vanishing until it was too late. Monitoring birds is essential to help protect them, but tracking the health of the world's 10,000 bird species is an immense challenge.

**The cause:** To understand how birds are faring, scientists need hundreds of thousands of people to report what they're seeing in backyards, neighborhoods, and wild places around the world. Without this information, scientists will not have enough timely data to show where and when birds are declining around the world.

**Enjoy birds while helping science and conservation:** Join a project such as eBird, Project FeederWatch, Christmas Bird Count, Breeding Bird Survey, or the International Shorebird Survey to record your bird observations. Your contributions will provide valuable information to show where birds are thriving—and where they need our help.

### Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology

#### In Memoriam

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society gratefully acknowledges the financial gifts that were made in memory of Katie Pattee from Ames Questers and from Joan Peterson. We are honored to be a recipient of those gifts and we will endeavor to put those monies to use in promoting and protecting birds and other wildlife.

The Big Bluestem Audubon Society would also like to acknowledge the death of Lotus Miller. Lotus was an Ames resident and a past president of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society. She was also active in other conservation endeavors in Ames. We mourn her passing and extend our condolences to her friends and family.

#### 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.  
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**Valid through 4-30-2023**

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

***Offer good until 4-30-2023***

NEW MEMBERS  
OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

We are pleased to announce that the following people have joined the Big Bluestem Audubon Society.

Welcome!

And thank you for joining our ranks.

- Joan Van Gorp
- Kenneth Hampson
- Julie Curry
- Kristi Hawkins
- Charli Hanway

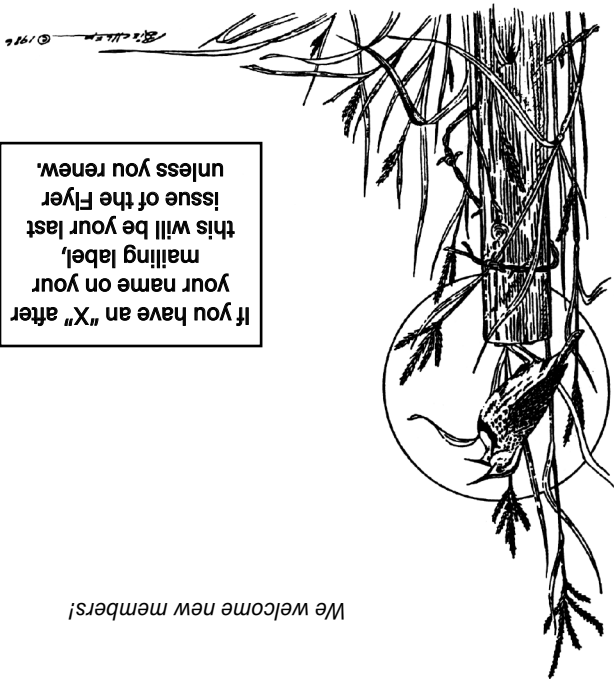
The mission of the Big Bluestem Audubon Society is to enjoy the observation and study of birds and natural ecosystems, contribute to their conservation and restoration, engage in educational activities to benefit humanity, and gain a broader understanding and deeper appreciation of the world in which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

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Attached a photo of my first Red Phase Screech Owl here. He has been around for a couple of months, but can't decide on a home. He has shown up in 3-4 different neighborhood Wood Duck houses, moving constantly. Very skiddish and not usually in a viewable place.

Larry Dau  
Boone Co



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

We welcome new members!

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