

# BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER Volume 60 | Number 2 | Jan/Feb/Mar 2025  
<http://bigbluestemaudubon.org/>

## BOOK NOTE: IT'S FINCH TIME!

If you ever wanted a way to unravel the complexities of identifying and understanding better the world of North American finches – grosbeaks, rosy-finches, crossbills, goldfinches, and the other myriad finches – you now have a book that should seriously help you in your quest. It's *The Stokes Guide to Finches of the United States and Canada* (Little, Brown and Company, 2024) by Lillian Q. Stokes and Matthew A. Young. The birds in the guide are smartly arranged into three groups: 18 main breeding finches, 9 vagrant finches, and the 17 endemic finches (honeycreepers) of Hawaii. But the book contains much more than the ID specifics – with revealing color photos for each species (including plumages, subspecies, and voice). The book also has excellent range maps, wonderful and brief information on the usual life-history for each species, summaries on up-to-date research, extensive details to help understand finch irruptions, conservation, research, attracting finches, and more. The formatting of the book is both creative and user-friendly. Yes, the book presents just about everything you wanted to know about finches, including things you might not even have considered! Some of our favorite – and sometimes surprising – sections are the readable and often entertaining “Quick Takes,” that introduce each species (some highlights: Pine Grosbeak, the rosy-finches, House Finch, Common/Hoary redpoll, and the Red Crossbill complex). These sections are different, readable, and entertaining to read. Particularly noteworthy is the portion of the book on the unique Hawaiian honeycreepers. And do not miss the brief and creative section at the end of the book on Conservation and Research, replete with ongoing topics of interest with questions yet to be answered in the finch-world, and the challenges presented in a section on “How you can help.” The timing of this book by Stokes and Young is perfect, ideal to guide us through the finches we encounter, pursue, and even attract this fall and winter. It's also sure to become an essential resource to take us into the field and into the future.  
From: *Birding Community E-bulletin*, October 2024



### 2024 Big Bluestem Audubon Society Programs

All programs are held at the  
Ames Public Library (515 Douglas Ave.)

Business Meetings: 6:30pm • Programs: 7:00pm

#### 2024 - 2025 programs

- Dec. 19th:** Christmas Party  
**Jan. 16th:** Carl Kurtz  
Topic: Prairie Birds  
**Feb. 20th:** Tyler Kelly  
Topic: Story County Conservation's American Kestrel  
**Mar. 20th:** Rich Leopold  
Topic: Brenton Slough  
**Apr. 17th:** LoraKim Joyner  
Topic: Transformative Parrot Conservation:  
Parrot Conservation in the Americas  
**May 15th:** Karen Hinkle and Hank Zalatel  
Topic: Birding in Belize

Going forward, BBAS will have its December meetings at the same time (6:30 p.m. business meeting, 7:00 p.m. for the program) as we do for the other meetings. We are also switching our venue of the December meeting to the Ames Public Library. We will no longer have our December meeting at McFarland Park, beginning in December of 2024. December meetings will now be the 3rd Thursday of the month, the same as the other monthly meetings are scheduled. The change allows for consistency and avoids any confusion that may arise from having a December meeting that occurs at a different time, date, and location from the other BBAS meetings.

## CALLING ALL BIRDERS!...

...and calling all friends of Big Bluestem Audubon Society! Just a note to let you know that the Big Bluestem Audubon Society will have its annual bird-a-thon on May 10th, 2025. It is our only fundraiser. You can form a team and get sponsors, or you can donate to a team of your choice, or directly to BBAS. Any amount is always appreciated.

Details will follow in our April newsletter. If you already have a team, please e-mail Tim Garner at [timgarner@mediacombb.net](mailto:timgarner@mediacombb.net)

#### 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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**Board News**

- The BBAS board met on December 5 & here are some of the things that were discussed:

1. Motion to enlist Tim Garner as recurring president & Kristi Harkins as a new board member. Welcome both of them to the board.
2. \$5,000 will be invested into a CD to earn more interest for the club to support more conservation projects.
3. The Christmas Bird Count is on Saturday, December 14. We hope a lot of new & returning members can get out to help with counting bird populations.
4. Eli has local bird walking trips planned for the winter. See his details in this newsletter.
5. Heather discussed a birding tour to Peru. Read her article.
6. An IOU meeting is planned for May 16-18 involving Iowa, Nebraska, & South Dakota.
7. Birdathon is planned for May 10. Start getting your teams organized.
8. Heather is planning a fun-filled Trivia Night for sometime this winter as a fundraiser to earn more money for our club. This will also bring out the community to learn about our club & have fun together. Please consider forming a team with friends & family. If you haven't been to one before, you will have a blast & be addicted to them after this event.
9. Charli suggested having a June meeting this year that would involve a picnic lunch. This will help determine whether it is a popularly-attended month for future summer meetings where we can invite speakers.
10. The club purchased childrens' books for \$236.25 for the Raising Readers Workshop on March 20. 15 of each book - "Nature Baby Birds" board books & "Feathers for Lunch" picture books. Each child will pick one of the books to take home. Charli Hanway will participate in this activity at North Grand Mall.
11. Christmas party is on December 19. Please bring any wildlife photos you'd like to share with the group & a snack to share.
12. Next board meeting is April 3 at 6:30.

Minutes taken by Charli Hanway, Submitted to newsletter by Heather Sanders

**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

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

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# Big Bluestem Audubon Society Column December, 2024

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead, This quote by perhaps the most famous anthropologist who ever lived is one of my favorites. And its message could not be more timely.

As even the most casual observer has surely noted, our bird population is in decline- by several billion since 1970, as noted in numerous media account, including the New York Times. It is a staggering number, and one could be forgiven for being overcome with a sense of despair, that we are on an irreversible trajectory, brought about by habitat destruction, pollution, and climate change. Yet to give in to such pessimism is in itself a form of denial, a fatalism that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Looking for pieces of good news, which fosters a sense of optimism and even hope can be a challenge, yet they are there.

I saw a photograph in the most recent edition of Audubon magazine of whooping cranes which reminded me of the veracity of Margaret Mead's quote. By 1941, only 15 of these magnificent birds were left in the wild. They seemed doomed for extinction. But the National Audubon Society refused to throw in the towel. It assigned a man named Robert Porter Allen, a scientist who had a flair for publicity, to work with Life magazine photographer Andreas Feininger to document the dire straits that these remarkable birds were in. Life magazine had large national subscriber base, and the photos and stories in that magazine helped to launch a campaign to save the whoopers. And while the whooping crane is still rare, (the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that there are about 500 in the wild today), it is also true that these incredible cranes have been brought back from the brink of extinction.

There have been more recent victories as well. In April of 2024, President Joe Biden signed into law the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act. In a time of deep partisan divisions, this law was enacted with support in Congress from Democrats and Republicans. In Florida, the National Audubon Society has almost completed a 3-year effort to rid the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary of invasive plants, a win for numerous avian species, including the wood stork.

And there are things that the Big Bluestem Audubon Society is doing on a local level that are making a difference. Last March our chapter funded an effort to rid a portion of Ledges State Park of invasive species. We have contributed money to the Story County Conservation Commission so that it may install kestrel nesting boxes in rural Story County, which we hope will stem the decline of this beautiful small falcon. The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation has also received contributions from the Big Bluestem Audubon Society to purchase land that will protect habitat for birds and other wildlife. Your organization thinks globally, too, having donated to the American Bird Conservancy and the Institute for Bird Populations, so that birds may be protected outside of our locale.

Because of your membership, you have made a positive difference, both locally and nationally ,to conserve and protect the birds that we all love. Big Bluestem Audubon Society is a relatively small organization, but it punches above its weight. And its members-all of you-give proof to the validity of Margaret Mead's insightful observation. Be proud of that fact. You have every right to be.

Tim Garner, *newsletter editor*



*Screech Owls has returned to our front yard Wood Duck house  
Photo by Larry Dau*

## **ELI'S BIRDING TRIPS - 8am.**

Jan 11 - Ada Hayden Park

Feb 8 - East River Valley Park.

Mar 8 - McFarland Park

## Late August Tennessee Warbler in what is likely called Scarlet sage, *Salvia coccinea*.

With BirdCast and radar showing a big migration to our north overnight, I spent a couple of hours at Ledges State Park this morning. First on the south side of Oak Woods and then at Lost Lake.

There were a couple of nice groups of birds, mostly Red-eyed Vireos and various pewees and flycatchers. Best birds included a Black-billed Cuckoo, Philadelphia Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo and a Canada Warbler. Other warblers were slim, with a couple of Black and Whites, a Magnolia, an American Redstart and a Common Yellowthroat female.

In the backyard, we still have a lot of hummingbird chasing going on and several Baltimore Orioles. We have been seeing at least two Tennessee Warblers every day for over a week. They are attracted to the base of the flowers of an annual red sage and might be getting nectar. The sage came from a cheapo "wildflower seed mix" and have reseeded for decades. They might be Scarlet sage, *Salvia coccinea*, but don't quote me on that. Hummingbirds love the sage in the morning.



Karl Jungbluth, 2 miles south of the Boone Speedway, where we'll be listening to the roar of the IMCA Supernationals for the next 7 afternoons and nights in a row.

### **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.*

### **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.



### **Monarch Magic BBAS Table**

Janet Gebler and Charli Hanway greeting visitors to our BBAS table at the Prairie Rivers of Iowa Monarch Magic event on 9/7/24 at Ada Hayden Heritage Park. Families learned about birds through fun activities such as playing with toy birds and listening to their calls.

One young visitor playing with a Northern Flicker bird toy



## Forty Years Ago in BBAS by Hank Zaletel

The annual Christmas party (12-15-1984) was held at the State Forest Nursery. Hank Zaletel was the compiler for the Christmas Bird Count. Dave and Jeanne Edwards hosted the tally at their residence. Twenty-six participated on a "pretty miserable day" of cold, fog, drizzle or hard rain. Forty-five species were observed. Two new species, Lesser Scaup and Common Goldeneye were seen at Hallet's Quarry (Ada Hayden). At the tally, Mark Widrlechner proposed starting a new count for Boone County in 1986.

The January program "Amphibians and Reptiles" was presented by Dr. Jim Christiansen of Drake University in the Jury Room of the Design Center. February feature Dr. Thomas Squires of Ames Lab on "The Politics and Science of Acid Rain." Tom Davis of the Dept. of Zoology spoke on "Bird Eggs: They are Not Just for Breakfast Anymore" in March.

February's field trip was led by Jim Murdock and ventured to Big Creek State Park and Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines. A Saw-Whet owl was seen at Big Creek. In March, Bill Horine led an overnight trip to the Platte River in Nebraska for the Sandhill Crane migration. On November 7, 1984, Jim Murdock stated at the BBAS board meeting that he would file the papers for tax exempt status for the society. In February, it was moved to spend \$100 for five Audubon Adventures series for 4th through 6th grade classes.

BBAS members,

There is an amazing opportunity for you to see some of the most unusual, exotic birds in the world & to go to one of the top places for birding in the world - Peru. On November 30, some of the board members received an email (printed below) from an American who is living part-time in Peru. His invitation for our members to participate in a trip to Peru caught my eye, so I investigated further to make sure it was legitimate. Then I wanted to talk to him on What's App to learn more about this trip. One of the men, Stanley sat in the kitchen of one of the hotels as he answered questions, introducing me to the ladies (as they wandered by) who own the local businesses. They were so happy to see another American on his cell phone screen & he explained how hospitable these small business owners are & how affordable a trip there would be. I told him that I plan to be part of a tour group in June & I would promote this fun opportunity to South America. After reading his email below, feel free to contact him for more information. We are not making this a BBAS-sponsored trip, but if you would like to join me in June so we can make a larger group from the Central US, let me know so we can arrange dates & common flights. So far, there are several who have expressed interest in going along.

Heather Sanders (hsanders0519@aol.com)

*Here is what Stanley wrote in the email:*

*" Big Bluestem Audubon Members:*

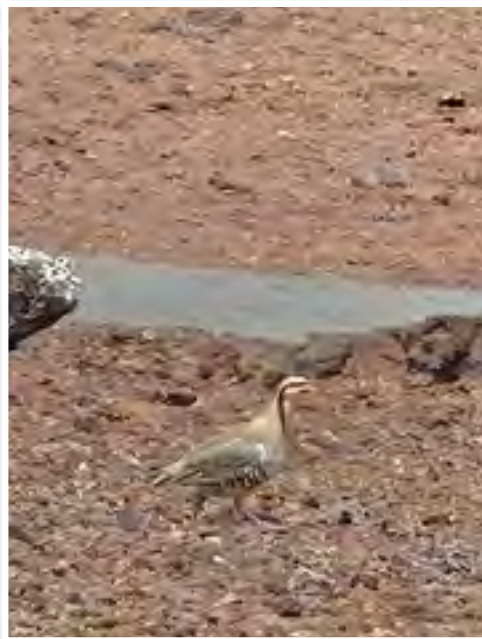
*Approximately 100 small business owners, non-profit leaders and national park directors, most of whom are women, have collaborated to make birding in Central Perú available and affordable to North Americans. They call their bootstrap group Eco-tourism Perú [www.ecotourismperu.org](http://www.ecotourismperu.org). Please come to Perú, see bird species and support local business.*

*Birding in Perú makes sense. Perú is either #1 or #2 in the world in bird species, and two Andean states, Junín and Pasco, are two of the top five birding regions in Perú. There will be four organized tours between April and October in 2025. It is possible to identify some 600 species on a 15-day trip, of which 35 species are either endemic to the region or seen only in Perú.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



*Black Crowned Night Heron in Maui, Hawaii  
Photo by Kristi Harkins*



*Chukar at the Haleakala Volcano in Hawaii  
Photo by Kristi Harkins*



Caspian Tern, Saylorville  
Photo by Doug Harr



Common Goldeneye, Duluth MN.  
Photo by Doug Harr



Merlin, Boone, Co.  
Photo by Doug Harr



Magnolia Warbler, Female, Ledges State Park  
Photo by Doug Harr

## BBAS members, continued

*Most of these Peruvian entrepreneurs believe that their country is not well organized to fight climate change. The guide, hotelier or restaurant owner would like to meet you, learn how your group is organized and share strategies to protect the environment.*

*Importantly, these businesses are local, and your money stays in the community. Even your food is grown locally, purchased in a local market and is prepared by the hostess and her staff. Your in-country transportation is overland, meaning a closer look at the countryside and a smaller carbon footprint.*

*There is also the affordable in-country cost: approximately \$100/person/day for a group of 6-8, \$1500/person for a two-week vacation. The costs are substantially less than other tours, in part because they employ NO intermediate travel company. We have found nothing comparable.*

*After reviewing several hundred websites of Audubon chapters and recognizing the strength of your leadership, we decided to reach out. Would you be kind enough to share this information with your fellow Audubon members, perhaps in the newsletter or on your website. And please send us a note if there is interest on your end. We hope to hear from you and later see you in Perú.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alejandro Tello, bi-lingual guide, author, photographer, ecologist  
Stanley Boynton, bi-lingual environmentalist, partial-year resident*

(NOTE: the article below describes a birding opportunity in Peru. Please know that this trip is not sponsored by the Big Bluestem Audubon Society. It is entirely independent of our organization, and is not sanctioned by the Big Bluestem Audubon Society.)

## Bald Eagle Nest Reporting

The DNR is always interested in receiving reports of Bald Eagle Nests in the state. We maintain a database of nests and are interested in keeping it as up to date as possible. The information we are interested in is the exact location of the nest, whether the nest is being used by eagles and if young are present how many and the date of your observation. To report a nest, please click the button below to use an interactive map to report the nest or download and use the form:

If you are interested in "adopting" and formally monitoring the nest as a volunteer for the DNR, please visit the Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program webpage for information on bird nest monitoring.

To talk to someone about reporting eagle nests in Iowa contact:

**Boone Wildlife Research Station**  
1436 255th St., Boone, IA 50036  
vwmp@dnr.iowa.gov or 515-230-6599

**Fri, Dec 20** - Winter Solstice Hike, Jester Park Nature Center, 4:30 pm  
**Sat, Dec 21** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Sat, Dec 21** - Winter Hike, Jester Park Nature Center, 10:30 am  
**Sun, Dec 22** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Mon, Dec 23** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Thurs, Dec 26** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Fri, Dec 27** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Sat, Dec 28** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Sun, Dec 29** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Mon, Dec 30** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Mon, Dec 30** - All About Eyes program (Can coyotes see color? What colors can bees see? What about birds? Who has better night vision? Learn how our wild neighbors see the world, how our own eyes work, and more with a handful of fun experiments and hands-on activities), Jester Park Nature Center, 1:00 pm



*LeConte's Sparrow at Harrier Marsh Wildlife Area  
 Photo by Doug Harr*

**Tues, Dec 31** - Holiday Horse-drawn Rides, 30 min long, \$200 up to 12 guests, 10:00-3:30  
**Tues, Dec 31** - Animal Tracks program, Jester Park Nature Center, 10:00  
**Tues, Dec 31** - Winter Hike at Fort Des Moines, Fort Des Moines Park, Shelter #3, 1:00 pm  
**Wed, Jan 1** - Beat the Blues Winter Marathon (Walk, run, ski, snowshoe, or bike 26 miles outdoors at your own pace, when it works for you and your family—between January 1 and March 1. Or play outside for 30 minutes to equal one mile. Record your mileage on the Mileage Log, available at McFarland Park or download at [www.storycountyconservation.org](http://www.storycountyconservation.org). Turn in your completed log to win a discount on Story County Conservation online registrations (including summer camp and camping) or rentals).  
**Thurs, Jan 2** - OWLS (Older Wiser Livelier Seniors) program on Traveling to 7 Continents by Phil Larson, McFarland Park, 10:30-11:30  
**Thurs, Jan 2** - Winter Walks (This event will begin at 1610 Meadowlane Ave, Ames (the site of the former Carr Pool near the intersection of Carr Drive and Meadowlane Ave), Enjoy a series of five winter walks as we explore our local public parks. These walks are free and do not require registration. All walks begin at 1:30 from our meeting area and wrap up by 3:30. We end our walks sharing a light snack brought by the hikers. The winter walks are led by Outdoor Alliance of Story County volunteers and are cosponsored by Story County Conservation. Contact [info@oasco.org](mailto:info@oasco.org) for more information), 1610 Meadowland Ave, 1:30-3:30  
**Sat, Jan 4** - Winter Survival (We will spend the afternoon building shelters and fires. After we get a fire going, we will warm up by a campfire and enjoy some s'mores and hot cocoa), McFarland Park, \$7 / group, 1:00-2:30  
**Thurs, Jan 9** - Winter Walks (Enjoy a series of five winter walks as we explore our local public parks. Contact [info@oasco.org](mailto:info@oasco.org) for more information), McFarland Park, 1:30-3:30  
**Sat, Jan 11** - Pine Needles Weaving (Curious as to how to turn festive pine needles into a beautiful little basket?), McFarland Park, registration required, \$25, 9:00-12:00  
**Sat, Jan 11** - Pine Needles Weaving (Curious as to how to turn festive pine needles into a beautiful little basket?), McFarland Park, registration required, \$25, 12:30-3:30  
**Thurs, Jan 16** - Winter Walks (Enjoy a series of five winter walks as we explore our local public parks. Contact [info@oasco.org](mailto:info@oasco.org) for more information), Ronald &quot;Dick&quot; Jordan Family Wildlife Area (Jordan Acres, 56091 265th St, Ames, IA 50010, 1:30-3:30)

No activities were listed online for January for Polk County Conservation.  
 For information on programs or to register, call the Polk County or Story County Conservations directly.

**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 12-31-2025**

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](http://www.ames.wbu.com)

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**Expires 12-31-2025**

*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.*

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

*We welcome new members!*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



If you have an "X" after  
your name on your  
mailing label,  
this will be your last  
issue of the Flyer  
unless you renew.

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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